

**HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 11 November 2024

At 6.00 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor R Crouch (Chair)

Councillors:	D Enright D Edwards-Hughes	J Robertshaw R Smith
Officers:	Adam Clapton Derek Mackenzie Sharon Groth Mark Lewis Nigel Warner	Deputy Town Clerk Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk Town Clerk Head of Estates & Operations Responsible Financial Officer
Others:	Six members of the public.	

H620 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors O Collins & J Aitman.

H621 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor D Edwards-Hughes declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in Agenda Item 13 by virtue of the CEO of the ICE centre being known to him as a fellow member of the West Oxfordshire Conservatives Association.

There were no other declarations from Members or Officers

H622 MINUTES

The minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 16 September 2024 were received.

H495 – Members were notified that the cost of the Oak Monolith had risen from £850 to £975 in order to increase the thickness from 25mm to 75mm, this would mean greater longevity and potentially allow for plaques to be placed on both sides. All Members were in agreement with the increase in cost.

Resolved:

1. That, the minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 16 September 2024 be approved as a correct record of the meetings and be signed by the Chair and,

2. That, the purchase of the Oak Monolith proceeds at a cost of £975.

H623 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The Committee adjourned for this item.

The Committee received representation from a member of the Witney Allotment Association (WAA) concerning Agenda Item 11.

Members asked the Association member questions to gain further clarification regarding the positions of the Committee that were not filled, what the WAA constitution allowed for by way of calling an Annual General Meeting or Extraordinary General Meeting, and how they would see the Association's running going forward.

The Committee reconvened.

H624 **WITNEY ALLOTMENTS ASSOCIATION**

With the permission of the Chair, this item was moved up the agenda so the members of public could hear the discussion and outcome.

The Committee considered the points raised by the members of the Witney Allotment Association (WAA) who were present along with a verbal update from Officers and the Chair, who was also the Town Council Representative for the WAA.

It was proposed by Councillor D Enright, and seconded by Councillor R Smith that a subsidised let of the Corn Exchange be agreed to allow for an AGM or EGM to be held by WAA. Members were unanimous in agreement.

Recommended:

1. That, the verbal updates be noted and,
2. That, a subsidised use of the Corn Exchange to the value of £157 be allowed for a meeting of the WAA subject to receipt of the necessary paperwork.

(All Members of the public left at 6:26pm)

H625 **FINANCE REPORT: REVISED REVENUE BUDGET 2024/25 AND DRAFT BASE REVENUE BUDGET FOR 2025/26**

The Committee received and considered the report of the RFO concerning the base revenue budget, draft estimates on budget parameters for 2024/25 and a revenue budget summary.

For the benefit of Members, the RFO outlined the contents of the report and explained that although monitoring takes place throughout the year, this was the initial report of the Committee budget setting cycle and this would be refined ahead of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee meeting later in month.

During this process, the Committee were advised the RFO scrutinises budget lines and looks at the inflationary rises. He also considered changes resulting from public sector pay increases and Employer National Insurance contributions. Due to uncertain energy prices, he suggested this budget line should be held at the same level as 2024/25.

Members received confirmation from the Head of Estates & Operations that the Corn Exchange Business Plan was working and that with the improved energy rating of the Burwell Hall following the boiler replacement, costs would continue to show saving in respect to energy unit use.

In response to a Members question, the RFO confirmed the decision to introduce Maglocks to the Corn Exchange was developing and therefore the potential £5,000 savings was not included in the budget.

The RFO tabled the Annual summary of the cost centres under the committees remit and further explained that costs relating to the activity of the works team were being directed to the individual cost centres to provide a greater understanding of their true cost.

Agreement of the draft revised base revenue budget for 2024/25 and the estimated base revenue budgets for 2025/26 was proposed by Councillor Enright, seconded by Councillor Smith and agreed by members unanimously.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the draft revised base revenue budget for 2024/25 and the estimated base revenue budgets for 2025/26, as detailed be agreed.

(Councillor D Enright left the meeting at 6:45pm)

H626 **REVENUE GROWTH ITEMS, SPECIAL REVENUE PROJECTS, AND CAPITAL PROJECTS**

The Committee received and considered the tabled report of the Responsible Financial Officer.

Members heard the majority of new Capital Items could be met from existing budgets however, there was a need to increase revenue to ensure that the maintenance of property remained at an agreeable level. Replacement lighting at the Corn Exchange was required to ensure that the Council worked towards it's Environmental & Climate Emergency aims.

The Committee were all in agreement with the reports proposals.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, that the Revenue Growth and new Capital items be agreed by the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee.

H627 **SCHEDULE OF PROPOSED FEES AND CHARGES 2025/26**

The Committee received and considered the details of the proposed increase to Halls & Cemeteries costs from April 2025.

Members heard of the general 2% increase to most of the charges along with the greater proposed increase to limited Cemetery fees, the Committee felt it was necessary to ensure that the costs incurred by the Council were reflected in the fees charged to those using the services

however, it was also potentially necessary to provide some form of subsidy as the Council did with other fees it charged, such as sports pitches.

Members asked that Officers benchmark interment costs against like for like Councils as well as providing a detailed breakdown of the Council's costs for providing the various types of interment that it offers.

Recommended:

That, the matter be deferred to a meeting of Policy, Governance & Finance to allow Officers to provide further information.

(The Responsible Financial Officer left at 7:05pm)

H628 **PUBLIC HALLS REPORT**

The Committee received the report and verbal update of the Venue & Events Officer providing an update and further details of proposed capital expenditure.

The Committee received specifics of the proposals having earlier in the meeting been presented with the costs when they reviewed the capital cost items for 2025/26.

Members welcomed the details provided however, asked that additional information be provided by Officers along with detailed costings in respect of the changes to the website and replacement kitchen.

Members also asked that Officers contact West Oxfordshire District Council to confirm if any form of permission was required for the hanging of the flags at the side of the Corn Exchange.

The Committee was pleased to hear of the request from Witney & Abingdon College to host a charity stall outside the Corn Exchange to support adults with learning difficulties and wholly supported the idea.

Recommended:

1. That, the report and verbal updates be noted and,
2. That, Officers explore further the cost of the change to website provider and,
3. That, Flags and flagpoles for the alleyway be procured at a cost of £504 subject to due diligence being carried out in respect to the need for planning permission and,
4. That, a replacement internal wooden framed noticeboard be purchased up to a cost of £200 and,
5. That, two new noticeboards for the front of the Corn Exchange be agreed up to a cost of £1,000 and,
6. That, Officers explore further the options for a replacement kitchen and for the costs to be added to the Business Plan along with details of potential offerings and profits and,
7. That, these recommendations, some for 2025-26 be subject to approval of the Policy Governance and Finance Committee and,
8. That, the Public Halls cancellation policy be readopted and reviewed in 12 months and,
9. That, the request received from Witney & Abingdon College to host a charity stall outside the Corn Exchange be agreed.

(Councillor D Edwards-Hughes left the meeting at 7:23pm – The meeting adjourned due to being inquorate till 7:25pm when he returned)

H629 **CORN EXCHANGE BUSINESS REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report along with a verbal update from the Deputy Venue & Events Officer (DVEO) concerning the recent and upcoming events in the public halls.

Members were reminded of the Advent Fayre which required their assistance so as to be able to run effectively. All Members acknowledged the importance of the free event to the children of Witney.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

H630 **CLOSED CHURCHYARDS & ST MARY'S CHURCH UPDATES**

The Committee received a verbal update from the Chair and Officers following their meeting with church representatives.

Holy Trinity - Woodgreen

Members heard that tree works were due to be carried out as planned. It was also noted that the church grounds were an excellent wildflower area and that there had been compliments to this effect.

St Marys – Church Green

The Committee heard the churchyard would soon be cleared and tidied by members working under the Probation Service. Also, that the Town Council had recently completed the repairs to the church walls.

Members expressed their disappointment with the repairs of the footpath/right of way which had been carried out by Oxfordshire County Council. Officers advised that they had requested an update on the works from OCC however, it had not been forthcoming, they would continue to follow this through. It was suggested that details be forwarded to Councillor Enright so that he may also follow up as a County Councillor.

Resolved:

1. That, the verbal updates be noted and,
2. That, Officers forward details to Councillor Enright so that he could follow up progress of the pathway with OCC Highways.

H631 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Resolved:

That in accordance with section (1(2) of the Public Bodies (admission to Meetings) Act 1960, and as extended by Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public, including the press,

be excluded from the meeting because of the confidential nature of the following business to be transacted.

H632 **WITNEY ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION**

Members considered further the earlier discussions regarding the issue being experienced by the Witney Allotment Association.

Following a proposal Members agreed that an AGM was necessary in order for the Association to move forward. The Council was supportive of the WAA separating into two separate associations.

Resolved:

That, the Town Clerk and Chair meet with the remaining representative of the WAA Committee to ask that the AGM to called.

H633 **PROPERTY MATTERS**

The Committee received the confidential report of the Town Clerk/CEO which concerned one of the Councils building assets.

Members also received a verbal summary of the history of the lease arrangements along with a verbal update from the Head of Estates & Operation regarding the current condition of the fabric of the building.

The Committee welcomed the report and praised the Town Clerk on the comprehensive detail provided.

Members were unanimous in agreement with the options proposed being further explored by the Town Clerk, however the need for repairs to the roof should not wait and as funds allowed, these repairs should be made.

Recommended:

1. That, the confidential report be noted and,
2. That, on receipt of updated quotes, the Council funds the repair of the roof at Langdale Hall from earmarked reserves (366) as a priority and,
3. That, future lease and building options are further explored and fully costed before being brought back to the next meeting of the Committee on 20 January 2025.

The meeting closed at: 7.58 pm

Chair