

## HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE

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**Date:** Monday, 13 March 2023

**Title:** Corn Exchange - Seating Sponsorship

**Contact Officer:** Project Officer - Nicky Cayley

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### Background

Before the retractable seating was installed in the Corn Exchange, the idea of sponsoring seats was partially discussed by the Corn Exchange Working Party. Members asked for a report to be brought to the Halls, Cemeteries and Allotments Committee for further consideration.

### Current Situation

The Project Officer has researched seat sponsorship in other venues.

The table below gives ideas and comparisons.

VENUE	COST	TERM/BENEFITS	NUMBER OF CHARACTERS
Corn Exchange Newbury	£300	5 years	Not specified
Oxford Playhouse	£500 £5,000	5 years Life of the seats	50
Everyman Cheltenham	£500	At least 10 years	40
Watershed, Bristol	£300 £1,000	5 years Life of the seats	Not specified
Joseph Rowntree, York	£200	5 years	Not specified
King's Theatre, Southsea	£250	Not specified	Not specified
Regent's Park Open Air Theatre	£500	5 years Certificate 2 glasses of champagne on next visit	Not specified
Bloomsbury Theatre, UCL, London	£500	Minimum 5 years Certificate Warm glow of generosity	Not specified
Birmingham Rep Theatre	£250	10 years	Not specified

The Project Officer contacted Hussey Seatway Ltd who manufactured and installed the retractable seating and they could offer 10 plaques at £100 excl. VAT (aluminium 80mm x 25 mm). At the time of writing the Project officer is awaiting confirmation as to if the Council could order single plaques as needed. It's expected that this information will be available at the time of the committee meeting. The cost to purchase a plaque elsewhere varies from £15.45 incl. VAT (aluminium 80mm x 20mm) to £25.00 incl. VAT (brass 100mm x 50mm).

Fixing could either be done with screws (see attached pictures for examples) or by strong double-sided tape. Hussey Seatway Ltd has advised screwing the plaques onto the seats. They could be positioned either on the backs of the chairs, or underneath the seats.

Most theatres have a small set of terms and conditions associated with their sponsor a seat schemes. The Oxford Playhouse has the following: -

- *Naming a seat does not guarantee you'll be able to purchase a ticket for that seat for a specific performance.*
- *If choosing the 5-year option (£500), we'll offer you first refusal to extend sponsorship of your chosen seat at the end of the initial 60-month period.*
- *If choosing the lifetime option (£5,000), naming rights last for the duration of the seat's useful life. We can't specify how long this will be but as we've only recently refurbished our auditorium, we don't anticipate needing to replace the seating any time soon!*

Hillingdon's Compass Theatre has the following: Ts and Cs which may be particularly relevant as it is overseen by Hillingdon Borough Council-

- *Only seats not already sponsored by another donor may be sponsored, and the Council reserves the right to make an offer of alternative seats should your first preference seats not be available.*
- *Sponsored seats shall be allocated on a first come first served basis, according to availability.*
- *Sponsoring a particular seat does not affect the way that seat is normally sold to the public for performances, and sponsorship does not entitle the sponsor to entry to any events.*
- *The Council reserves the right to ask you to re-word your dedication if it is too long.*
- *Dedication messages may not be used to promote or advertise businesses or religious activities in a way which contravenes the Council's statutory obligations, nor carry messages that might be judged offensive, or tend to lower the reputation of the Council, and the Council retains sole discretion on such matters.*
- *Once a dedication message is agreed, the donation becomes non-refundable.*
- *Donations from this scheme will be used to improve Ickenham Hall and Compass Theatre.*

The Project Officer would recommend that the Council adopts similar Terms and Conditions if it wishes to proceed with the scheme.

A tag line such as “Take Your Seat” or “Please Be Seated” could be used to attract interest.

### **Environmental impact**

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 – with this in mind Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates. There is no environmental impact associated with this project.

### **Risk**

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

The fixing methods could do limited damage to the seating upholstery – there is no real mitigation for this. It would be hoped that people choosing to have a plaque would choose a longer-term option.

### **Financial implications**

The Committee is asked to consider a price point for the plaques if in favour of the scheme. The maximum cost at the current time per plaque would be £25.00 for brass. The Corn Exchange in Newbury is the closest in terms of type to the Corn Exchange in Witney so it may be worth considering its charge. A certificate and 2 glasses for prosecco on the customer’s next visit would be a nice touch with fairly minimal admin.

Most of the other theatre’s researched are reliant partly on patronage to keep going. Bearing in mind that the Corn Exchange is partly funded by the taxpayer, it is suggested that it is made clear that any money raised would go into a renewals fund for future renovation of the auditorium to ensure that the arts have a strong and healthy future in Witney for generations to come.

### **Recommendations**

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. Whether to proceed with the sponsor a seat scheme and if so:-
2. Which type of plaques to order (aluminium, brass etc);
3. Fixing method (screws recommended by the seating manufacturer or strong tape);
4. Price point for selling the plaques and a term for the plaques to be in situ;
5. Whether to offer any added benefits such as a certificate and free prosecco on the patron’s next visit;
6. Terms and Conditions for the scheme.