

HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 16 January 2023

Title: Public Halls Report

Contact Officer: Venue & Events Officer - Tomas Smith

Background

The Running of both Halls moves into the Spring season after the traditionally quieter months of January and February.

Current Situation

The Corn Exchange has been exceptionally busy with the regular hirers, as well as having the new carpet installed in the Gallery Room, landing and Staircase. The Hall has welcomed four live music nights in the past month, three of which were sold out, two of these were events run by Witney Town Council. Running in conjunction, the bar has proved a valuable asset for events as well as daily trade increasing month by month.

Staff in both the café as well as caretakers have all worked exceptionally well in increasing the appeal of the hall, additionally the stability of staff in the café has also allowed for more training on the basics of customer service as well as allowing the Venue and Events Officer to impart his vision as to how the café should run and the type of offer we have. There is a wedding booked in for the end of March, and by the Venue and Events Officer having the time to speak to the clients, due to the café staff stability, they are now going to use the entire hall not only for the wedding but also for the breakfast and evening reception.

Screen and projector

The Screen and projector are being installed on the 6th of March and all works should be completed by Friday 10th March. Once installed this will allow the Corn Exchange to recommence the popular film nights as well as providing a valuable asset for all hiring groups.

The Venue and Events Officer would like to explore the possibility of running a Corn Exchange Film Club, this would allow for good outreach to members and could look to include priority booking, special offers as well as discussion groups where a film could be discussed before its viewing. There could be potential to have a choice of films to be selected for an initial monthly screening with the potential to expand to more viewings if the demand was there.

Café/Bar

The Café continues to be popular, with regular customers in daily, and the comments about the service are always positive. There has been feedback made to the Venue and Events Officer about the need for better quality furniture, this is something that can be looked into when the new year's budget allows. The other regularly asked for item is a 1863 Loyalty Card, this could operate along the same lines as other coffee shops in town the easiest way of running this would be to have 'buy 9 and get your 10th free'. (Regular drink size only) The Venue and Events Officer feels that this is essential to keep up with similar offers available in town, as well as rewarding the regular customers who frequent the café every day. Costings for this offer is minimal, tea bags cost 0.02p each and a regular coffee extraction is 0.04p. Coffee needs to be run through and timed on both porta filters daily, 2 x extractions, so this could account for the occasional loyalty card reward.

Anniversary Open Day

The Corn Exchange has just held its Anniversary Opening Day to great success, lots of positive feedback and a real opportunity was taken to showcase the improvements that have been made to the hall. The day was well received and proved to be a fantastic day of celebration for all those involved over the past three years and was a true reflection of all the hard work and effort that had gone into making the venue what it is today.

Line Dancing

The Venue and Events Officer has spoken to the Tea Dancers and has found out that the people involved with running the line dancing have relocated their classes to the Masonic Hall on Church Green. The price has also increased for their sessions to £10 per hour. Therefore, it is the opinion of the Venue and Events Officer that the line dancing will not be returning to the Corn Exchange in its previous format.

Halls Usage

The Corn Exchange Main Hall is operating at 41% occupancy, which is up on last year's figure of 24%, the Gallery Room is running at 25% occupancy up on last year's 12%. The Venue and Events Officer is working on an advertising campaign to target all businesses in Witney which could potentially look to use the space for training or conferences etc.

Burwell Hall is running at 47% occupancy which is slightly up on 46% for the same period last year.

Upcoming Events

The Corn Exchange has an improved series of events planned for the coming year, currently there are 11 weekend events which are making use of the new facilities, there is also the monthly regular jazz club bringing confirmed bookings which will make use of the bar to 21.

The Venue and Events Officer is also working on bringing children's theatre and activities to the hall during the Easter and Summer holidays alongside a diverse programme of events to appeal to all potential users of the hall.

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.

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.

Financial implications

Described here or as stated in the report above.

- Potential for new (indoor) furniture for the café
- Loyalty Card costs – creation of and minimal cost of discount

Recommendations

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

- Introduction of loyalty cards in the café (in line with accounting practices and financial regulations of the Council)
- Commencement of a regular film club