

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

Held on Monday, 11 September 2023

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

Present:

Councillor R Crouch (Chair)

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| Councillors: | D Enright J Aitman D Edwards-Hughes | D Newcombe R Smith |
| Officers: | Adam Clapton Sharon Groth Mark Lewis Derek Mackenzie | Deputy Town Clerk Town Clerk Head of Estates & Operations Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk |
| Others: | No members of the public. | |

H466 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor O Collins.

H467 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from members or officers.

H468 MINUTES

The minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 10 July 2023 were received.

Members received an update on the progress on the following:

H283 – A list of tasks had been provided to the Probation Service relating to support they can provide the Council to maintain the lake and Snipe meadow.

H383 – Councillor R Crouch advised the Witney Allotment Association no longer required the gate replacement at Lakeside Allotments.

H275 – The Operations Manager would investigate installing surplus cycle racks at St Mary's Churchyard.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 10 July 2023 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

H469 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

H470 **FINANCE REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO).

A Member raised a question regarding the low level of income from burials and was advised it was affected by the number of ashes interments rather than a coffin burials and the relatively low number of burials since April.

A Member also was concerned that the Food & Drink Gross Margin was close to zero and with the neighbouring shop to open as a café what further effect that would have. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that the Venue & Events Officer was preparing a business plan for the next meeting of the committee on 13 November 2023.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

H471 **PUBLIC HALLS REPORT**

The Committee received the report of the Venue & Events Officer with an update on the activity of the Public Halls.

Members were pleased to see that the decorating had commenced in the Café and looked forward to the Gallery Room and stairway being completed. An update was also provided on new blinds and other improvements at Burwell Hall which Officers would communicate via social media.

Members were also appreciative for the efforts around promoting Childrens film events and the Women's World Cup, these events were gratefully received by many children and their families and were a great example of how the Corn Exchange was a community Venue. Members considered other events, including sporting ones, that could be shown and delegated to officers to consider each on its merits against the need for security and availability around other existing bookings.

The Committee was surprised that only one cafe voucher had been issued to vulnerable families over the summer as part of a Witney Community Church initiative. Members discussed the potential for a "pay it forward" scheme to be run from the 1863 café, Councillor Aitman would look into how these schemes run for other establishments and report back.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,

2. That, Officers review potential sporting events that could be shown in the Corn Exchange.
3. That, the comparable booking activity figures for the public halls be noted.

Councillor D Enright joined the meeting at 18:12pm

H472 PUBLIC HALL EVENTS REPORT

The Committee received the report of the Venue & Events Officer as well as a verbal update from the Head of Estates and Operations (HEO) regarding the review of events held in the Corn Exchange.

Members had several questions and therefore more it was requested that information be included in the breakdown. The HEO assured members that future reports would contain more details such as the costs incurred by the council, net profits and grouping by activity.

The Committee considered the proposal of amending a range of Group 4 charges for performances and technical rehearsals. The Deputy Town Clerk reminded members of the Council's vision statement to 'run and maintain a small community arts facility', and although the charges may seem higher, the Venue and Events Officer had included a bar charge in the proposed fees and that in some cases they would work out more cost effective than the current charges for local performing groups.

Members were pleased to hear that Witney Dramatic Society would soon be returning to the Corn Exchange to preform having held their performances elsewhere in recent years.

Recommended:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, future reports contain more information on the financial breakdown of events held at the Corn Exchange and,
3. That, the simplified Group 4 charges, as presented, be implemented by the Council.

H473 CEMETERY FEEDBACK

The Committee received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk along with a verbal update on Cemetery matters.

Members received the minutes of the Friends of the Cemeteries meeting held on 29 August 2023.

They also received the results of the council's entry of Windrush Cemetery into the Cemetery of the Year award. Members noted the comments on judging and benchmarking and that officers would implement changes where they could. There were, however, some suggestions which weren't in line with the Council's policies so the Committee asked that improvements and suggestions be passed to the Friends of the Cemeteries group to discuss.

Resolved:

1. That, the report and verbal report be noted and,
2. That, Officers liaise with Friends of the Cemeteries to improve the Cemetery proposition where possible.

H474 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS & 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.

H475 **PROPERTY & LEGAL MATTERS**

The Committee received a confidential verbal update from the Town Clerk.

Members received and considered correspondence from Witney Allotment Association (WAA) regarding the services and administration they provide.

Members welcomed the close working relationship with the Association, assisted via the regular contact with both the Operations Manager and the Town Council's nominated representative, Councillor Crouch on their Committee.

There was agreement that the current arrangement for administration of allotments should continue.

The Chair advised there was a need for a storage shed and lawn mower at Lakeside Allotments, members discussed the request and recommended these be funded from the Council's earmarked Allotments reserve. All members agreed.

Members went on to discuss matters arising from two of the buildings in the Council's portfolio. This included the need for replacement glazing in Langdale Hall to ensure the property was maintained correctly and to help improve the council's carbon footprint.

They also heard the lease at Madley Park Hall was due for renegotiation.

Recommended:

1. That, the verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the Witney Allotment Association are contacted to advise the current arrangement for administration of allotments should continue and,
3. That, a storage shed and lawnmower to the cost of £2,900 and £300 respectively be funded from the allotments earmarked reserve and,
4. That, the Town Clerk explore options for replacement glazing for Langdale Hall, and into funding in consultation with the tenants.
5. That, the Town Clerk explores options regarding the lease at Madley Park Hall

The meeting closed at: 7.18 pm

Chair