

HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 11 March 2024
Title: Public Halls Business Report
Contact Officer: Venue & Events Officer

Background

The Venue and Events Officer and the Venue and Events Assistant work to put on events which are run by Witney Town Council. Third party events are also put on and supported and facilitated by Witney Town Council Staff, these will contribute to approximately 60% of events with the Council run events making up the other 40%.

Current Situation

The Venue & Event staff are continuing to expand on the event program of the venue for 2024/25.

The past couple of months have seen a variety of popular in house and third-party events including:

- **Live Music** – Monthly Jazz Club continues to be a popular show, selling out every month. Soundbite UK have also continued to provide well attended music tributes and comedy shows for The Corn Exchange and have already hosted a successful Elton John tribute show in February this year. Soundbite UK unfortunately had to cancel another show at late notice in February due to illness in the band they had booked. This is an unfortunate part of the live performance industry and was an unavoidable situation. However, it has raised concern and the venue and event staff will be looking into updating our cancellation policy to better protect our loss of earnings from late cancellations.

Our first in-house promotion of 2024 was hosted on 23 February with live music from UK touring band Thrill Collins, supported by local artist, Torrin. The event was a success financially and performatively, with great verbal feedback from attendees on the night. This event followed the trend of previous live music standing events by seeing a good return on bar sales as shown in the table below.

Event & Date	Tickets Sold	Ticket Revenue	Event Cost	Bar Revenue
Thrill Collins 23/02/24	116	£1,624	£1472 (tbc)	£1209.50

- **Comedy** – Following the success of live comedy shows hosted by Soundbite UK in 2023, the market for live comedy in Witney had become more saturated with other venues picking this up and putting on similar calibre comedians. After discussion with the promoter, we have decided to take over the relationship with the booking agent, to provide a higher standard of comedians for the venue, to attempt to set ourselves apart from the other comedy nights happening locally. The first night is on Saturday 9 March featuring Live at The Apollo act Paul McCaffery as headline. Sales for this show got off to a fast start but have slowed down a little more than anticipated, which we expect to be due to unfortunate circumstances leading to the staff member responsible for marking events absent during an important phase of

marketing this event. We have a second comedy night lined up for May and will be focusing our attention on making this one as close to a sell out as possible and will evaluate the success from there.

- **Over the Hill Festival 26th August (Bank Holiday):** An external promoter has been organising a dual-venue event (Corn Exchange and Fat Lils) showcasing top quality roots and americana music. The previous event, held at Cogges Farm, saw a great turnout of people from all over the UK. The promoter has requested that we run this event as a 70/30 ticket revenue split (Town Council receiving 30%) rather than a straight hiring fee and the venue & events officer would recommend that the Council support this proposal.
- **Private Functions & Weddings** – The Corn Exchange has recently hosted some private functions and Weddings (ceremonies and evening receptions). The venue team work hard to present the venue for a variety of occasions and have had great feedback from hirers. The Venue & Events staff have drafted a collection of wedding packages to modernise and develop what we can offer, in the aim of increasing the number of weddings hosted at the venue. These packages will be finalised and submitted at the next HC&A committee meeting on 28 May.

Going forward:

Since returning from the festive break, the Venue & Event staff have continued to work on expanding the events program of The Corn Exchange for 2024.

- **Marketing:** The venue and event staff will be developing a stronger marketing strategy as a priority for events and the venue as a whole. This will aim to boost hall usage, café custom and event attendances.
- **Programming:** The venue and event staff will be continuing to focus on the development of the events program and have noted previous suggestions of Folk music and events suited for under 18s and will build those into the offering. We are in communication with the management of Fat Lils, Langdale Hall and The Green Rooms Studio 7 to ensure a wide range of programming and no date clashes to help promote the success of all venues in the town

The Venue & Event staff are aiming to provide a wide variety of events at The Corn Exchange, to take it advantage of the venue's multi-purpose nature. Events will include tiered seating, table seating and standing settings.

Environmental impact

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 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 implication

The Corn Exchange Events are operating to budget with no forecasted risk of annual overspend.

Recommendations

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

1. Members are invited to note the report and consider the external promoter request for a ticket share for the Over the Hill event over the August Bank Holiday.