

HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE

Date: Monday 20 May 2024
Title: Public Halls Business Report
Contact Officer: Deputy Venue & Events Officer

Background

Witney Town Council has an obligation and objectives to provide an affordable, sustainable, inclusive and community arts facility that is valued and supported by the people of Witney and West Oxfordshire.

This includes providing availability to and encourage involvement from the entire community through offering a diverse range of music, arts and cultural events in the Corn Exchange.

The Council will provide a professional, well-maintained and run hireable space for private events including parties, weddings and conferences.

Current Situation

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

Please see below a table summary of WTC ticketed events since the last report.

Date	Event	Tickets Sold	Ticket revenue	Bar Revenue	Event Cost excluding labour and overheads	Comments
12/04/2024	West End Magic	125	1,771.00	333.40	1,306.98	The show was extremely well received on the night by a vast demographic of audience members, and we look forward to booking them again next year for matinee and evening show to maximise ticket sales and income.
11/05/2024	Comedy Club	31	446.00	N/A	N/A	Decision made to cancel due to poor tickets sales due to market saturation of comedy events in Witney.

West End Magic

The Venue & Event Officers were delighted to host a sold out audience on 12th April for a live theatrical magic show. We received 30% of the NET ticket revenue after VAT which equated to £531.50.

The show was extremely well received on the night by a vast demographic of audience members, and we are looking forward to booking them in for next year for a matinee and evening show to maximise ticket sales and income.

The Deputy Venue & Events Officer looked after sound and lighting ques, which can open the door to more touring companies who require an in-house tech. For live music, which is a more advanced job when it comes to sound engineering, we hire in a sound engineer for our own shows, however we can save on this cost for less demanding theatre shows that the Deputy Venue & Events Officer can manage sound and lights for.

Comedy

Our planned Comedy nights did not receive the interest and ticket sales which we had anticipated, and for that reason we decided to cancel the one on Saturday 11th May, to prevent a loss of earnings by running the show with little ticket sales. The Venue & Events officers made the informed decision to cancel the show on 30th April, based on the unlikelihood of enough tickets being sold in the following 2 weeks to break even on the event.

Having evaluated this unsuccessful event, we believe that the lack of demand is largely due to market saturation of comedy events in Witney. Fat Lils host a monthly comedy club and Green Rooms Studios have started hosting their own as well, both of which are at a cheaper price point (£7.50 at Fat Lils and £15 at Green Rooms), as the comedians are less well known than the acts booked for the Corn Exchange. Kingsley café on the A40 at Eynsham have also started their own comedy nights which adds to the saturation. The problem that arose from taking on these comedians with a greater following, is that these shows were not being promoted by them to their audience. This effectively meant that the extra money we were due to pay for comedians with a large following, was pointless as their followers were not being informed about our show. Officers addressed this with the booking agent, however the issue was not resolved which led to the decision to cancel the show. The Deputy Venue & Events Officer has also researched current ticket purchasing trends. According to research carried out by Tixel and Bolster, 25% of live event attendees are purchasing tickets later than previous years. The Deputy Venue & Events Officer is continuing research into how to adjust our offering to account for this shift in behaviour.

The council were not liable for any cancellation fees to the booking agent or comedians, meaning that this decision has prevented us from losing potentially up to £1,000 had we still ran the event. We have made the decision to park comedy nights for the foreseeable future, and instead focus on more live music and theatre based shows that have been more popular.

Over the Hill Festival

In the last report, the promoter had requested a ticket split agreement of 70/30, however it was not clear at the time that this intended as a split of the event profit and not ticket revenue. Officers

therefore informed them that we could not agree to that proposal, the promoter was happy to pay the Group 4 hall hiring fees instead.

The Deputy Venue & Events officer has recently met organisers of the event to explain in further detail the excellent sound and lighting equipment available at The Corn Exchange. We are looking forward to what should be a fantastic event in August.

Civic Reception & Citizen of The Year Award

As many members will be aware, The Corn Exchange hosted the Civic Reception and Citizen of The Year Award in March this year. This year's event was another fantastic celebration of some amazing people and organisations within our town. The event ran smoothly thanks to an effort from the wider team of WTC staff. This year, we teamed up with Bride & Beautiful Events to provide venue décor for the event. Officers are currently in discussions with this local company on developing The Corn Exchange wedding offering (more detail of this can be found later in this report).

Going Forward:

University of Gloucestershire Student Project

The Deputy Venue & Events Officer was approached by a course leader at The University of Gloucestershire, from which he graduated in 2022, asking if we would be interested in being involved in a spring term student project. The project involves a group of students acting as consultants for a "problem or area of improvement" we have identified in our work. Officers saw this as a great opportunity to have some insight from a group of students studying within the live music and entertainment industry, to provide us with some research and resources that we can use to help develop our programming and marketing strategy.

To summarise; The Deputy Venue & Events Officer has provided two groups of students with two-part brief for their project. This brief has asked them to draw up a marketing strategy accompanied with visual assets for the Classic Film Club, and to propose a 2-month event program with a variety of audience demographics to ensure we have something for everyone in our community. The Deputy Venue & Event Officer has so far had two 30-minute meetings with each group for updates on their work which is coming along very promisingly.

We have permission but no obligation to use any work that they come up with.

Weddings

Officers have been in discussion with Bride & Beautiful Events to help develop our wedding offering. We have discussed potential tiered packages and the opportunity for Bride & Beautiful to offer wedding co-ordination, as other wedding planners will be entitled to that will limit Officers participation and time. Having an individual who knows the venue will be very helpful and will free up a lot of time for Officers who currently deal with couples and wedding co-ordinators who do not know the venue. The packages and options are still to be finalised in the coming weeks.

We have also teamed up with Bride & Beautiful Events to run our own Wedding Fayre at The Corn Exchange on Saturday 31st August. Press for this event will be going out imminently once the final few details are agreed. We hope to welcome up to 30 stall holders, as well as having the opportunity to promote the Corn Exchange as a wedding venue.

Live Music Outdoors

Officers are working on a live music program for 1863 Café & Bar outdoor seating area this summer. We have allocated a budget of £150 for a musician to perform for 2 hours on a Friday evening from 20:00-22:00 and provide their own PA system. A range of musicians are being contacted for consideration with a potential for performances to be run weekly. The success and income generated from these events will be monitored and reported.

Officers have ensured that we have the relevant licensing for this to happen, see below from Gov.uk:

Whether a licence is needed for music entertainment will depend on the circumstances. A licence is not required to stage a performance of live music, or the playing of recorded music if:

- *it takes place between 8AM and 11PM; and*
- *it takes place at an alcohol on-licensed premises; and*
- *the audience is no more than 500 people*

Officers are also researching local mobile caterers who may be available to provide a food option to help entice people into the bar. Previous events have used a mobile pizza or burger van which has been popular.

The obvious risk with this is that we are not blessed with the most consistent summer weather in England. Therefore, measures will be in place to ensure that the music can take place inside the bar if the weather is not on our side.

This will be finalised within the next couple of weeks, looking to start the music by 14th June.

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. The council will encourage people to walk or cycle to these events and noise levels will be kept to a level where not to cause annoyance to neighbouring businesses and residential.

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. Noise disturbance will be managed, alternative indoor arrangement for poor weather conditions.

Financial implications

The Corn Exchange is operating to budget with no forecasted risk of annual overspend. All events will be monitored to ensure any risks associated with financial loss are immediately identified to enable to action to be taken.

Recommendations

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

1. Members are invited to note the report.