

# HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE



**Agenda Item:** Corn Exchange Business Report

**Meeting Date:** 11 November 2024

**Contact Officer:** Deputy Venue & Events Officer

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The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the events that have taken place since the last committee meeting and report on forthcoming events in the diary.

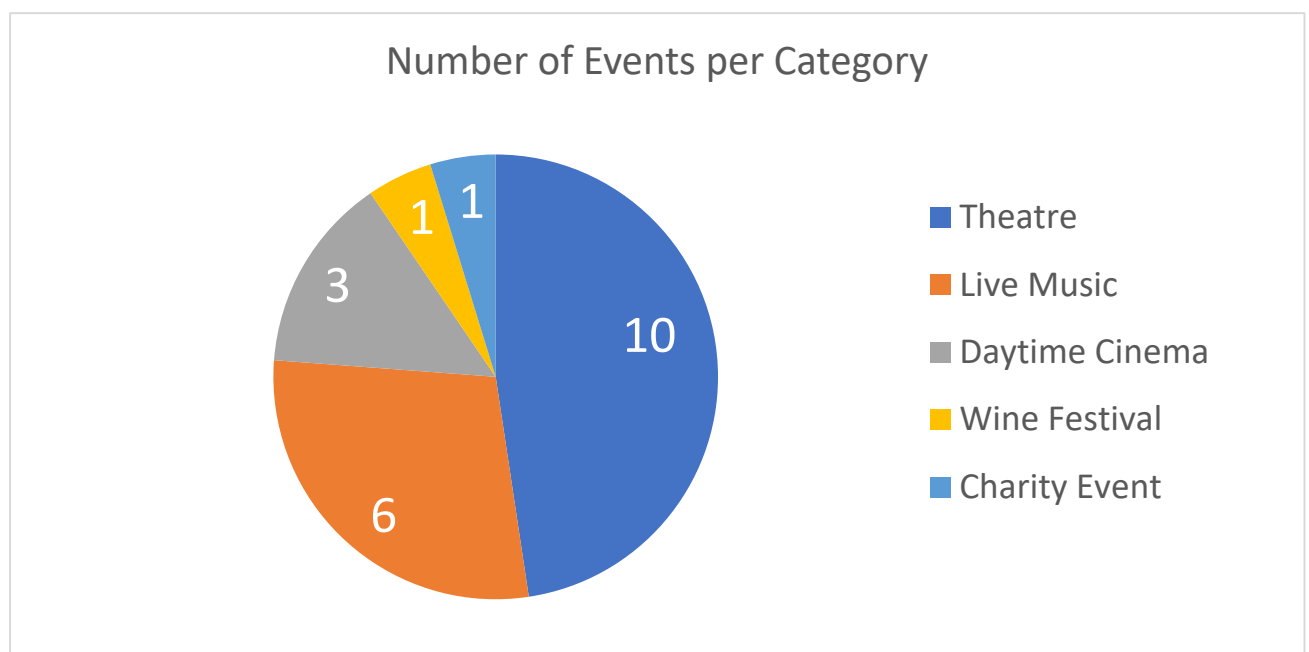
## Background

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.

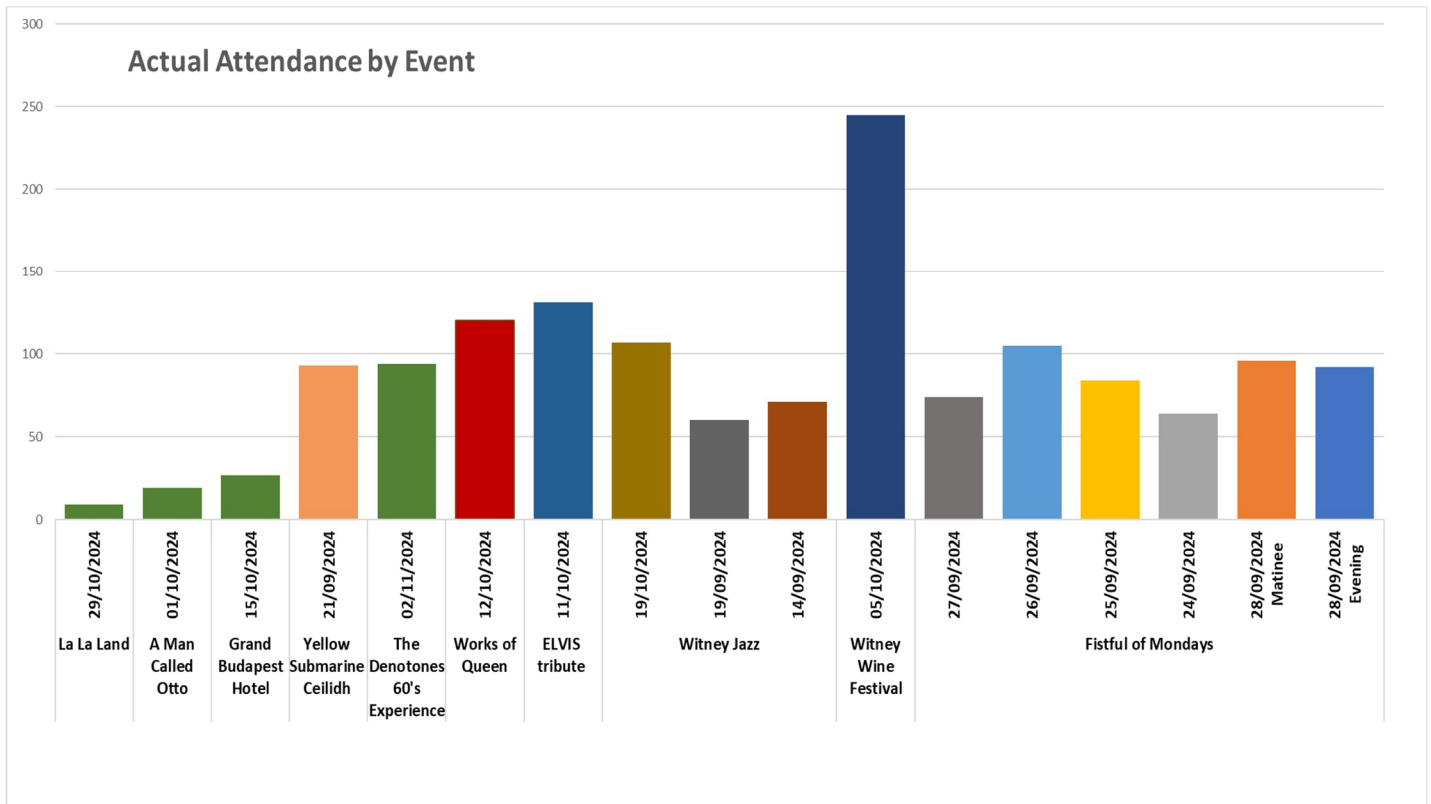
This includes providing availability to and encourage involvement from the entire community through offering a diverse range of music, arts and cultural events in the Corn Exchange. The Council will provide a professional, well-maintained and run hireable space for private events including parties, weddings and conferences.

## Current Situation

The graph below shows the number of events hosted by category, since the last report in September.



The table below shows attendance figures for each event at The Corn Exchange since the last report. This includes figures from Council run (in green) and third-party hirer events. Please note there are 4 events not included where figures have not yet been provided by the hirer.



### Recent events

The number of Events in the Corn Exchange have increased as expected after the previous period where year on year the demand for hiring of halls and indoor events falls during the school holidays.

### Disco Inferno

Regular hirers and local drama group Buttercross Theatre Productions presented “Disco Inferno”, a 70’s hit musical, as their annual September show at The Corn Exchange this year. The show featured four performances between Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> – Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> September.

### Fistful of Mondays

Balancing Act, another local theatre production company hosted a country and western themed original show, “A Fistful of Mondays”, between 24<sup>th</sup> – 28<sup>th</sup> September. The show received great feedback from attendees and staff, and we are delighted to have them back next year for the sequel. We are pleased to be able to showcase local performing artists and writer with this show.

### Eynsham Cellars - Witney Wine Festival

Returning for its second year, we were pleased to welcome back Eynsham Cellars hosting Witney Wine Festival on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> October. This unique event offered plenty of Wine tasting opportunities, live music, and pizza. We received some great feedback from the organisers of the event who were extremely happy with the venue and staff support and are looking forward to coming back next year.

### **Witney Jazz**

Usually, the first Friday of every month, Witney Jazz have had some date changes and additions over the last couple of months leading to some concern over attendance, however they still managed to attract 60-80 customers for these events. They are now booked in for their regular dates and we look forward to welcoming them every month. These events always draw a crowd and offers a unique cabaret style set up in the venue which adds to our versatile event offering.

### **Yellow Submarine Ceilidh**

Local charity (also one of the Mayor's chosen charities), Yellow Submarine, hosted a fundraising Ceilidh event on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> September. The organisers have reported that the event was well attended and offered some positive feedback towards the venue and staff.

### **Daytime Cinema**

As presented in the last report, officers have been working on a Daytime Cinema series, to replace the struggling Classic Film Club previously held on Tuesday evenings. Screenings begun in October, and we have hosted three so far with varying turnouts (19, 27 and 9). However, feedback has been largely positive, and we have set a target to reach a regular attendance figure of 30 per screening by the end of January.

To help promote these screenings, we have been collecting votes for a choice of Christmas film to be shown on 10<sup>th</sup> December. This scheme has generated some interaction in the café as well as at the screenings and we are hoping this will help increase the attendances.

### **Soundbite UK - Elvis Tribute**

Soundbite UK presented Paul Thorpe's Elvis tribute for the second year running after a popular debut in 2023. This event sold out, as expected after a wealth of positive feedback from last year's show.

### **Soundbite UK- Works of Queen**

A second Soundbite UK promotion saw the debut of Works of Queen at The Corn Exchange. Another popular event that was very close to a sell-out (final figure tbc by the organisers).

Both Soundbite UK shows received some great audience feedback online and we are looking forward to booking in some 2025 dates soon.

### **Denotones 60's Experience**

Returning after a popular show last year, The Denotones put on another great show on Saturday 2nd November. This was a WTC operated show, working on a 70/30 ticket split with the artist as per previous shows. 94 tickets were sold in total, and feedback on the night was largely positive. One issue raised was that the band's opening song was very loud, this was resolved by a quick conversation with the sound engineer and the Deputy Venue & Events Officer who was in charge on the night.

To generate more bar revenue pre-show, officers advertised "Bar Open 18:30" (an hour before doors) - as a result we noticed some attendees turning up earlier to get a drink, which helped slightly increase revenue and generate a nice pre-show atmosphere in the bar. This is something we will do going forward, and we will suggest it to hirers who are hosting shows that we feel this would work for.

## Upcoming Events

### Advent Fayre - Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> December

The event will run as two sessions with a one-hour break, 10:00 – 13:00 and 14:00 – 17:00. We still only have a few Members who have volunteered assistance which is vital to ensure this popular community event is delivered successfully.

Also, the Corn Exchange continues a busy calendar of events heading into the Christmas period. A list of upcoming events for the rest of 2024 is attached below:

- Open Mic – First Thursday Every Month
- Witney Jazz – First Friday Every Month
- Daytime Cinema – Every other Tuesday
- Age UK – Older Adult Exercise Classes – Every Monday
- “Six” Teen Edition from BTP – 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> November
- Witney Food Revolution Fundraiser – 15<sup>th</sup> November
- Wellness Event – 16<sup>th</sup> November
- Witney Town Band – 17<sup>th</sup> November
- Mayor’s Charity Quiz – 24<sup>th</sup> November
- Xmas Light switch on (Join us in 1863 Bar for Live Music and Drinks after the lights) – 29<sup>th</sup> November
- Advent Fayre – 1<sup>st</sup> December
- Bee Gee’s Disco – 14<sup>th</sup> December
- BTP Pantomime, Puss in Boots – 19<sup>th</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> & 28<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> December

### A look forward to 2025:

Officers are working on expanding the number of live shows at The Corn Exchange in 2025 and have already booked in some popular shows to return next year, such as West End Magic and Shadowing Hank.

Also, the WTC Decades Disco will be held on 22 February to celebrate the Councils 50 years.

## Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council’s Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Equality - The concept of equality when reporting on events is very important to the council, as it ensures fair and impartial coverage of all events and social groups within the community to reflect fairness, representation, and inclusivity.
- b) Biodiversity – Officers focus on the broader context of their actions when organising event to maintain the Council’s environmental and conservation efforts.
- c) Crime & Disorder – Council policies and operational processes adhered to by Officers include a multi-faceted approach that integrates crowd control, prevention of criminal

activity, security planning, and compliance with relevant laws and regulations. Officers assess the risks relating to events ensuring the necessary due diligence, reviews, sign off and monitoring is completed. Post event analysis data is used to review opportunities for continuous improvement.

- d) Environment & Climate Emergency – Careful consideration is given to the environmental and climate impacts to reduce negative effects and promote sustainability. Many aspects of event planning by the Council include venue location, transportation, recycling, local produce, and energy usage. By incorporating sustainable practices into every stage of event planning, the Council aims to reduce the environmental impact, create a positive attendee experience, and help lead the way for more responsible event management in the future.

## **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.

Managing risks for Council events is a crucial aspect of event planning and requires careful thought to ensure the safety and success of all events. The Council's risk management control measures for events covers legal considerations, safety protocols, insurance, and other key factors ensure these are delivered successfully.

## **Social Value**

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

Two local organisations, the Buttercross Theatre and Balancing Act held successful events giving new and experienced actors the opportunity to demonstrate their skills and art.

The daytime cinema is beginning to attract more people providing accessibility for those on a budget and a noticeable elderly audience who may not get to experience this otherwise.

An event by the Yellow Submarine charity which supports young people and adults with learning disabilities and autism celebrated their 15th anniversary in the Corn Exchange supported by the Council's Group 1 hire charge for local groups and Charities.

## **Financial implications**

The Corn Exchange is operating and aligned with the 2024/2025 budget with no forecasted risk of annual overspend.

All events are evaluated from the planning stage to post event analysis to manage financial risk and maximise income.

## **Recommendations**

Members are invited to note the report and

1. Members are requested to confirm whether they are available to assist with Advent Fayre on Sunday 1st December at any point between 10:00 and 17:00.