

HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE



Agenda Item: Corn Exchange Business Report

Meeting Date: 20th January 2025

Contact Officer: Deputy Venue & Events Officer

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

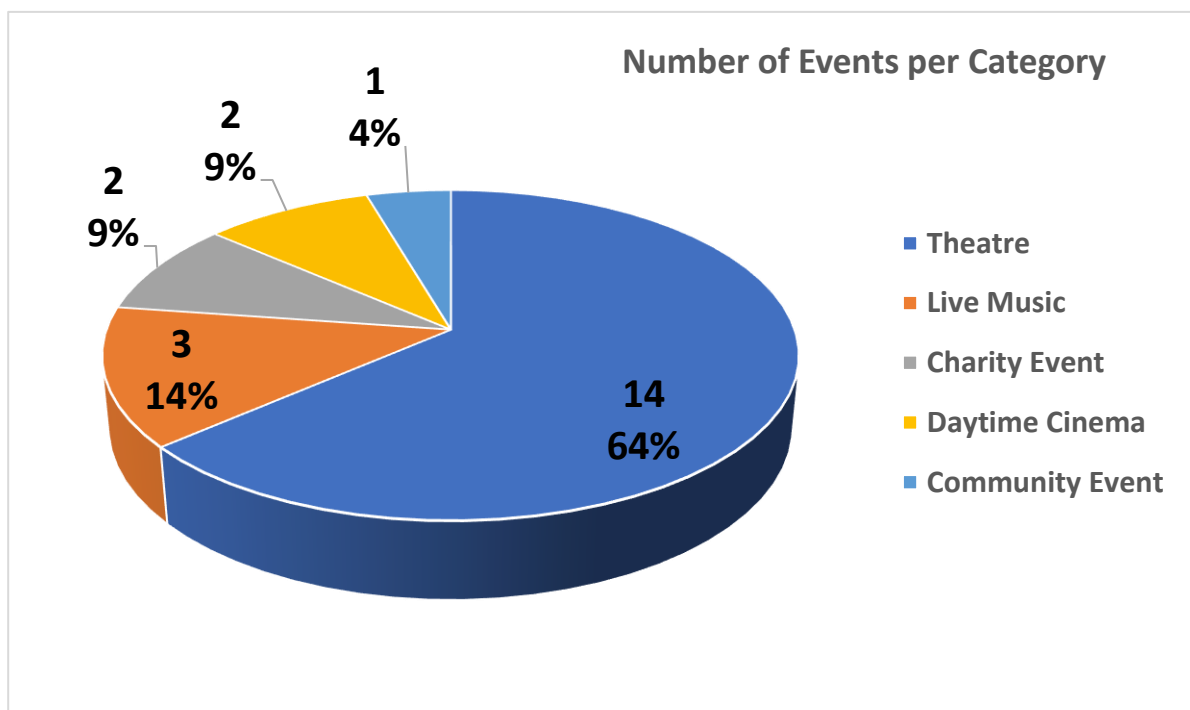
Witney Town Council has an obligation and objectives to provide an affordable, sustainable, inclusive and community arts facility that is valued and supported by the people of Witney and West Oxfordshire.

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.

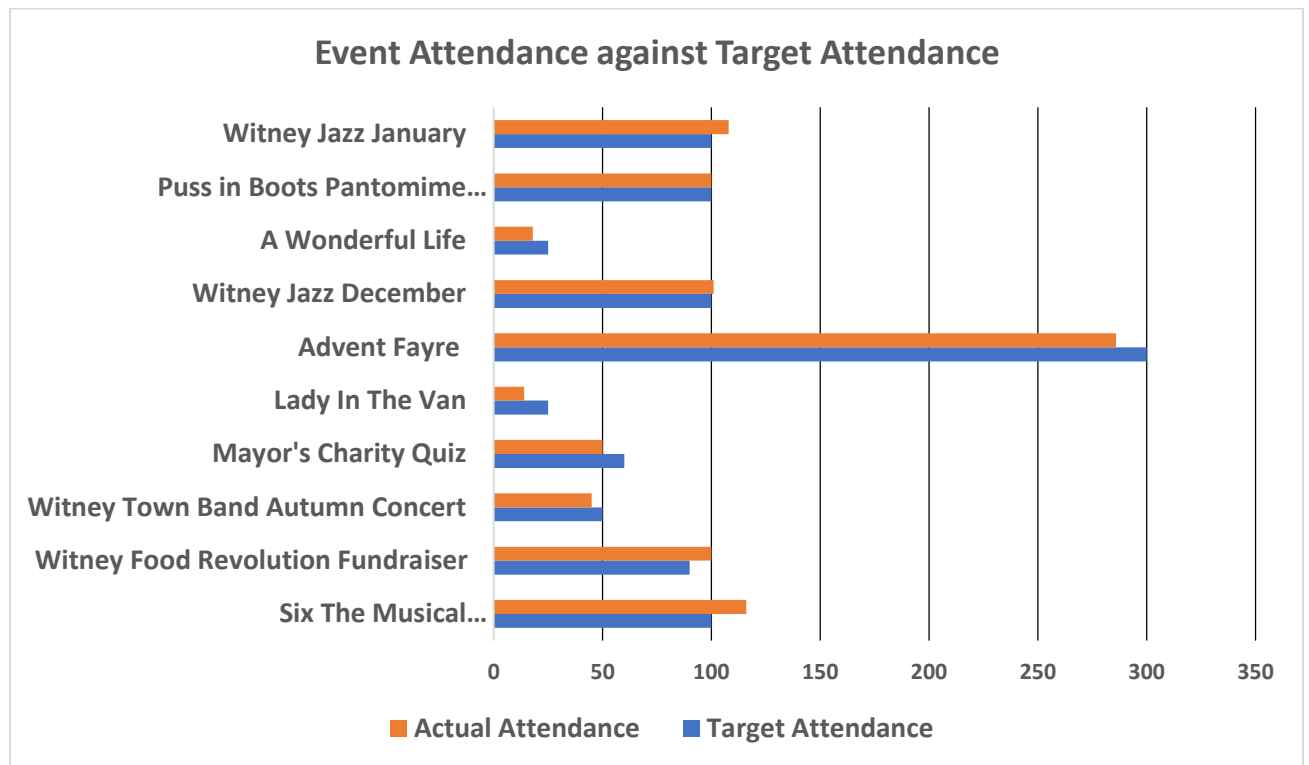
The Council will provide a professional, well-maintained, and run hireable space for private events including parties, weddings and conferences.

Current Situation

The graph below shows the number of events hosted by category, since the last report in November 2024.



The table below shows attendance figures for each event at The Corn Exchange since the last report, alongside a target attendance to show how each event is performing in line with officers' goals and expectations.



The figure shows that the events in November and December 2024 have been well attended, in relation to their target attendances. It shows that, some work needs to be done to increase the daytime cinema attendances slightly, to reach the target of 30 attendees per screening by the end of January.

Recent events

Wedding

At the end of November 2024, The Corn Exchange hosted a Wedding Ceremony and Reception, totalling over 100 guests. The Wedding was hugely successful, with much appreciation from the couple. Lots of work went into the planning and delivery of this event, specifically to ensure the bar requirements were met. Due to the nature of the event and number of guests in attendance, this was one of our most lucrative bar takings of the year.

Puss In Boots Pantomime – Buttercross Theatre Productions

The Corn Exchange ended 2024 with a run of “Puss in Boots” Pantomime shows by Buttercross Theatre Productions. We’ve seen heaps of praise on social media regarding this show and greatly appreciate the efforts put in by Buttercross Theatre to put on multiple successful show at The Corn Exchange throughout the year.

Six Teen Addition – Buttercross Theatre Productions

Buttercross Theatre also hosted a Teen Addition of “Six” in early November. These shows had a great turnout, and officers are glad that the venue can provide a space for young people to get into performing arts.

Advent Fayre

Officers would like to firstly thank the councillors who volunteered their time to help with Advent Fayre this year. Due to a wedding taking place in the hall the night before, the set up was a much bigger job this year, so we appreciate the support received.

This year’s event ran in a very similar way to last year, with booking slots used to help control the flow of attendees. When planning this year, we reviewed last year’s event analysis and decided we should increase the number of total attendees, and decrease the number of entrance slots, thus bringing the finish time of the event forward an hour.

The tables below breakdown the structure of the booking slots, number of bookings and number of attendees from 2023 vs 2024. The total bookings increased by 81 from 317 to 398, however, total attendance only increased by 44 due to a lower percentage turnout this year. Whilst increasing the percentage turnout is a goal for next year, the data shows that this event remains popular amongst the families of Witney and can be deemed a success.

2023

Booking Slots	Booked	Attended	% Turnout
10:00 - 12:00	40/40	31	78%
10:30 - 12:30	40/40	29	73%
11:00 – 13:00	40/40	30	75%
11:30 - 13:30	40/40	30	75%
Session total	160	120	75%
Break			
14:30 -16:00	40/40	33	83%
15:00- 17:00	40/40	30	75%
15:30 - 17:30	40/40	29	73%
16:00 – 18:00	37/40	30	81%
Session total	157	122	78%
Total	317	242	76%

2024

Booking Slots	Booked	Attended	% Turnout
10:00 - 12:00	66/66	49	74%
10:30 - 12:30	66/66	48	73%
11:00 - 13:00	66/66	51	77%
Session total	199	148	74%
Break			
14:00 -16:00	66	51	77%
14:30 - 16:30	66	46	70%
15:00 - 17:00	66	41	62%
Session total	199	138	69%
Total	398	286	72%

Witney Town Band Autumn Concert

The Corn Exchange hosted Witney Town Band for an autumn concert in November, which welcomed around 50 attendees. The band were grateful for the support of Witney Town Council and were very happy with the venue, stating that they would love to stage another concert here in 2025.

Witney Food Revolution Fundraiser

Witney Food Revolution held a very successful fundraising event at The Corn Exchange in November. The event was very well attended with 100 attendees making the event a sell-out. The organisers were extremely thankful to the venue & events team for their support with this event.

Daytime Cinema

The attendance for the daytime cinema have plateaued over the last month, slightly below target. However, as this event is low cost to run, and provides community value to an audience of mainly elderly people, officers are keen to continue this event.

Upcoming Events

The Corn Exchange will continue to host the regular repeated in-house and third-party events below:

- Open Mic – First Thursday Every Month
- Witney Jazz – First Friday Every Month
- Tea Dance – Every Wednesday
- Daytime Cinema – Every other Tuesday
- Multiple Classes hosted by Buttercross Theatre – Every Week
- Witney Speakers Club – Every other Wednesday
- West Oxfordshire Art Society Lectures – Once a month
- St Mary's Art Group – Every Monday
- White Feather Spiritualist Church – Once a month

Officers have been working hard programming the first half of 2025 and look forward to the following events that are now confirmed in the diary, with many more to be finalised in the coming weeks.

- Young Elton – 21st February
- Decades Disco (50th Anniversary Event) – 22nd February
- Wedding Singer BTP – March
- Shadowing Hank – 5th April
- What you will – 19th April
- West End Magic – 26th April
- Take @ That – 31st May

Following suggested interest for Folk music in Witney, plans are developing for an indoor Folk festival featuring local and national Folk Artists. However, this is still in the early planning stages and a date is yet to be decided.

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

The Corn Exchange is registered as a warm space this winter, providing a cosy refuge from the cold, as well as a welcoming environment for socialising and engaging in conversation.

The Corn Exchange also hosts some events with a community focus.

- Open Mic – Provides a supportive environment for beginner local musicians perform and allows more established local artists a chance to share original music.
- Daytime Cinema – An affordable daytime activity, specifically an opportunity for pensioners to have a warm activity during the winter.

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.