

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

Held on Monday, 17 March 2025

At 6.02 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor R Crouch (Chair)

Councillors:	D Enright	R Smith
	D Edwards-Hughes	O Collins
	J Robertshaw	
Officers:	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Zoe Henstridge	Administrative Support - Halls & Green Spaces
	Mark Lewis	Head of Estates & Operations
	Angus Whitburn	Operations Manager
Others:	Four members of the public.	

H143 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor J Aitman.

H144 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers.

H145 MINUTES

The minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 21 January 2025 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 21 January 2025 be approved as a correct record of the meetings and be signed by the Chair.

H146 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Committee adjourned for this item.

The committee received representations from four members of the Witney Allotment Association who thanked the Council for their assistance with their recent Annual General Meeting.

The Committee reconvened.

All Members of the public left the meeting at 6:05pm.

H147 FINANCE REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) detailing income and expenditure for budgets which were the responsibility of the committee.

The RFO provided clarification to questions submitted before the meeting by a Member which related to cemetery income, target setting, and the application of staff costs. The Member thanked the RFO for the comprehensive responses.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the management accounts of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee for the period up to 31 January 2025 be approved.

H148 PUBLIC HALLS REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Venue & Events Officer.

Members were supportive of a Thames Valley Air Ambulance clothing bank being placed adjacent to Burwell Hall due to the mitigations in place by the charity. As the clothes were to be sold on, it was requested communications be conveyed that only clothing with future use should be deposited.

The Committee also welcomed updates on a local film screening, Gallery Room conferencing equipment, installation of an internal notice board, and flag poles. With the latter, a question was raised by a Member to see if they could fly twinned town flags during the anniversary weekend in May.

Finally, a Member asked if seat sponsorship in the Corn Exchange Main Hall could be re-tasked to officers per a previous resolution on the project.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, permission be granted to Thames Valley Air Ambulance Charity to locate a clothing bank adjacent to Burwell Hall.
3. That, seat sponsorship in the Main Hall of the Corn Exchange be re-explored by officers.

H149 CORN EXCHANGE BUSINESS REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Venue & Events Officer which outlined the recent events and hirings at the Corn Exchange.

Members were pleased to see a wider variety of successful events and associated ticket sales, including a decade's disco but asked if the hall capacity could be added to future reports for reference.

The Committee also considered the request to permit essential companion tickets and agreed a policy would bring the Corn Exchange in line with similar venues. The policy would be for town council run events and could provide a certain number, for example four or five. It would be difficult to insist hirers of the hall must do the same, but it should be included in the terms and conditions that Witney Town Council operates this policy and encourages event promoters to offer the same.

In addition, the report advised smoke/haze effected were being explored and a Member requested whether the Council could offer an O.A.P discount as well as the companion tickets, although understood this may result in the viability of events.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, maximum capacity is included with target attendance in future reports and,
3. That, an essential companion tickets policy be approved for town council run events in the Corn Exchange and;
4. That, an amendment be added to the terms and conditions for third party event hire in the Corn Exchange encouraging promoters to also offer essential companion tickets.

Cllr Edwards-Hughes left the meeting briefly during the following item between 6:40 and 6:42pm

H150 PUBLIC HALLS BUSINESS PLAN REVIEW

The Committee received and considered the updated Business Plan action plan provided by the Venue & Events Officer.

Members welcomed the updates to the action plan for the year which helped track progress and demonstrate this to others. They noted it was a live document and provided a moment in time for public hall improvements.

Resolved:

That, the updated action plan be noted.

H151 CEMETERY & BURIAL REGULATIONS REVIEW

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations Manager, with accompanying review of cemetery and burial regulations.

Members welcomed the review which would ensure compliance with legislation and offer clear guidance for residents and funeral directors on what was permissible. Key changes were highlighted by officers in the report and once agreed by the Council, they would be communicated to customers.

The Committee also noted officers had consulted the Friends of the Cemeteries forum on their thoughts which had been favourable to the changes.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,

2. That, the reviewed cemetery regulations be recommended for approval and;
3. That, delegation be provided to officers to complete any formatting changes before being published.

Cllr O Collins left the meeting briefly between 6:51 and 6:53pm

H152 CLOSED CHURCHYARDS UPDATE

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations Manager.

Members discussed the re-wilding areas at both Holy Trinity and St Mary's churchyards, noting the success of the former. With St. Mary's there was acknowledgement that this wildflower area had not been as successful; this was alongside a key right of Way and entrance to Witney Town centre and it would be more welcoming if the area was better kempt.

It was agreed officers should meet with the Churches eco group to discuss future options and a costed strategy based on the requirements to be an eco-churchyard while considering the cost to the Council for continuing maintenance.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, officers meet with the churches eco group to discuss re-wilding options for St Mary's churchyard.

H153 FRIENDS OF THE CEMETERIES

The Committee received the notes of the Friends of the Cemeteries meeting held on 5 March 2025.

Members welcomed the notes which showed a positive and productive meeting regarding a range of issues and projects in the cemeteries. They were particularly pleased to see funeral directors would be invited to future meetings.

Resolved:

That, the minutes be noted.

H154 ALLOTMENT SITE PROVISION

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk concerning the provision of allotment sites.

Members were informed that this item had been included following a request from a member of the public to assess whether the Council's allotment provision was sufficient. The waiting list for allotments in Witney was notably high, and while there was no legislation specifying the required number of allotment plots an authority must provide, it was noted that there were varying figures, including best practice to mark them against. Based on the figures provided, the Council's current provision exceeded them in some areas but fell short in others, especially when calculated as full plot equivalents.

The Committee determined that its current strategy of waiting for land to be allocated or requested from large developments was appropriate, given the limited availability of affordable land within the parish and its surrounding areas. However, it acknowledged the need to adopt a more proactive approach in ensuring that the Witney Allotment Association (WAA) was effectively managing the existing plots and to stay vigilant for any new land opportunities which may arise.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the current Council strategy of obtaining allotment land from larger developments be continued and;
3. That, the Council should be vigilant to any suitable and affordable land opportunities and;
4. That, the town council requests the Witney Allotment Association updates their waiting list and takes action to free up unkempt or unused allotment sites. Following this it would be able to assess provision with more accurate figures.

H155 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND 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.

H156 WITNEY ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION

The Committee received a verbal update from the Chair and Leader of the Council following the Witney Allotment Association (WAA) Annual General Meeting held on 16 March 2025.

Members were advised the WAA had agreed to retain an over-arching Committee with a joint treasurer and waiting list co-ordinator with two separate sub-committees. These would be named North and South; South would contain Lakeside and North would contain the current remaining allotment sites with each of these having their own Chair and Secretary. The main Committee would meet twice a year.

The Committee were hopeful this would resolve any administrative issues within the organisation and thanked Councillors and officers for their input. The WAA resolution re-affirmed the decision of the Council taken on 25 November 2024.

Recommended:

1. That, the verbal update be noted
2. That, the recommendations of the Witney Allotment Association, as set out by this committee on 25 November 2024 be re-affirmed, thereby creating North and South sub-committees.

The meeting closed at: 7.35 pm

Chair