

HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE



Agenda Item: Corn Exchange Business Report

Meeting Date: Monday, 8 September 2025

Contact Officer: 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. The report also provides an update on the recent business of 1863 Café & Bar.

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 provides a professional, well-maintained, and run hireable space for private events including parties, weddings and conferences.

Current Situation

To maintain the services of the Venue and Events team has been a challenge during this period while we have been recruiting the vacant Venue and Events Co-ordinator role. The team has pulled together to deliver all events and fulfil our commitments with the Caretakers stepping up to support.

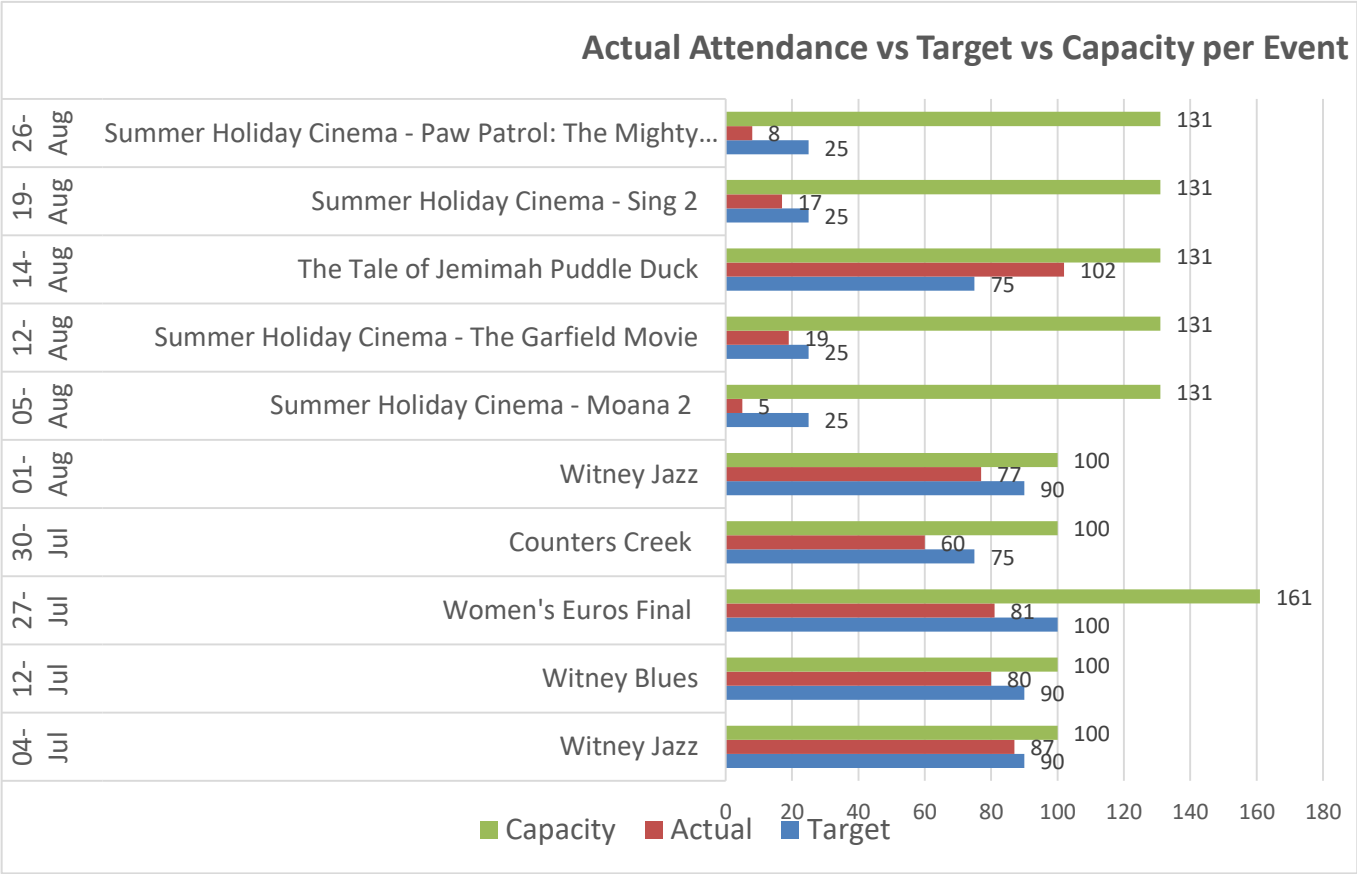
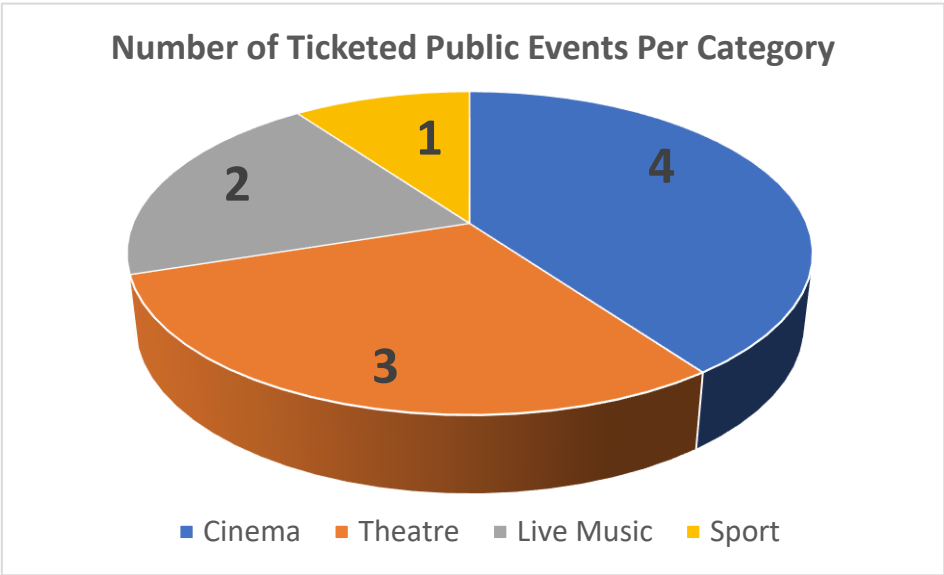
The newly appointed Venue & Events Co-ordinator commenced their role in early August. Following induction, their initial focus has been on enhancing events marketing and programming. They have also made improvements to the organisation of venue equipment and contributed fresh ideas aimed at enhancing the overall quality of our venue and events services.

Looking ahead, the Co-ordinator will work closely with both existing and new hirers to maintain a high standard of service for room bookings and events, whilst also supporting the delivery of WTC-led events at The Corn Exchange.

This will enable the Venue & Events Officer to concentrate on reviewing current procedures and developing new processes and policies, ensuring our venues and events continue to

operate efficiently, meet compliance standards, and deliver a high-quality experience for users.

The graphs below show the number of ticketed events hosted by category, since the last report in July 2025, and 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. Each event capacity has also been included, upon request from members.



Recent events

Witney Jazz

The Witney Jazz events continue to be a popular addition to our events program, with very good levels of consistent attendance. These events utilise the flexibility of the venue by combining a partial amount of tiered seating, with cabaret tables for an intimate jazz club atmosphere.

Witney Blues

Officers are delighted that Little Live Music company, who promote the regular Witney Jazz shows, have continued to host additional shows under a new brand **“Witney Blues”**. This move adds to the diversity of our events program and continues to build on an already positive relationship with these event organisers. These shows have continued to prove popular with high attendances recorded in May and July.

Tunes on the Square

This has been a standout series of events for The Corn Exchange throughout the summer months. Each evening has been well attended with constant positive feedback from customers on the music, bar staff and atmosphere of the event. Officers have ensured that the musicians are briefed on maintaining a reasonable volume level which has been respected, and we have received no complaints from residents or nearby businesses.

These events have made great use of our pavement license on Market Square and has driven extra income through bar sales at 1863.

Jemima Puddle Duck

Officers organised and delivered a touring production of Jemima Puddle Duck, targeted at families during the summer holidays. The show was well attended, with 102 tickets sold on a 70/30 ticket split agreement. This meant that WTC received a share that is higher than a Group 4 show venue booking fee, making this event a financial success. Attendees were left impressed with the show, and officers are looking to invite the same company back for a different show in the Easter Holidays of 2026.

Women’s Euro’s Final

The Corn Exchange screened the final of the Women’s Euro 2025 tournament, where the England Lionesses came out winners. This was another successful use of the Corn Exchange cinema screening equipment, allowing us to connect with local sports clubs to provide a community space to watch the national team. The screening had 81 people in attendance, many of them families from local football clubs.

Summer Holidays Cinema

Attendances for the Summer Holidays Cinema have been disappointing this year, despite promotional effort from officers. A national cinema chain with a Witney branch released screenings with tickets for just £1 for kids and adults meant our pricing was uncompetitive. Officers will review the feasibility of hosting family orientated screenings over the Christmas holidays, based on the plans of the other local Cinema to avoid wasting time and resources on hosting these screenings.

Other Events:

As well as the above events, The Corn Exchange has also hosted several non-ticketed public events including, community events, presentations, exhibitions and markets etc. from local and national organisations including:

- WODC Local Plan Drop-In Event
- Aspire Oxford Art Exhibition
- Specsavers Coffee Morning
- Mynt Image Market
- Weekly Tea Dance

The Corn Exchange and Burwell Hall have also hosted several private events including regular group meetings, awards ceremonies, dance/drama showcase, a private party and wedding reception.

Upcoming Events

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

- Witney Jazz – First Friday Every Month
- Tea Dance – Every Wednesday
- Daytime Cinema – Every other Tuesday (returning 30th September)
- 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

Upcoming Public Ticketed Events

11th – 13th - Buttercross Theatre: Vintage Hitchcock

19th September - Witney Blues

20th September - Denotones 60's Experience

27th September - WhatYouWill Presents As You Like It

3rd October - Witney Jazz

4th October - Thrill Collins

18th October Witney Wine Festival

30th October – 1st November WDS Bleak Expectations

7th November – Witney Jazz

8th November – Break The Rules (Status Quo Tribute with John Coghlan) Charity Gig

21st November – Witney Blues

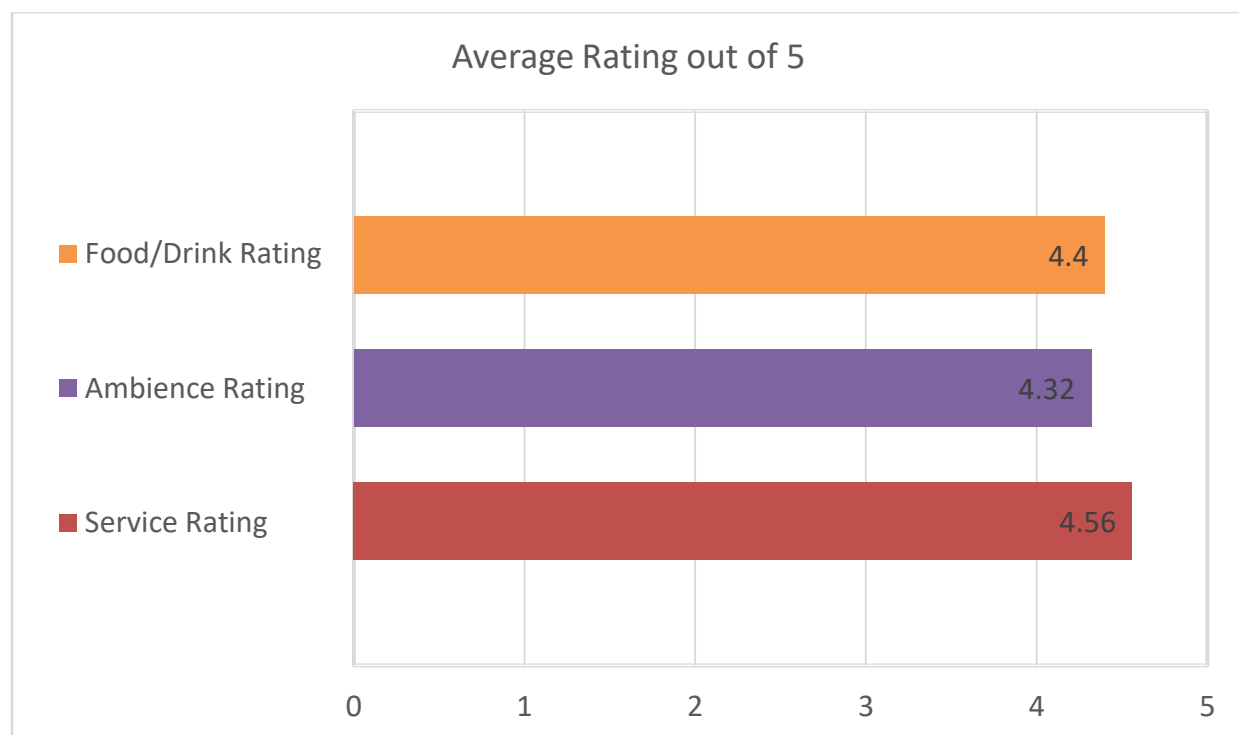
1863 Café & Bar

The 1863 Café & Bar has increased in popularity over the last 12 months and has seen a record high footfall throughout this summer. Since 1st April, overall takings from the Café and Bar are up 20% on the same period in 2024. This figure can be attributed to several factors. Consistent good weather has allowed the café to make the most of the pavement license on the Markert Square, creating much more available table coverage. This has also allowed our Tunes on the

Square event series to take place outside every Friday, increasing footfall and bar income as a result.

The Cafe & Bar Manager and Operatives have worked hard throughout this period to provide consistently high standards of customer service and have built a positive rapport with our regular customers, keeping them returning to the café.

The 1863 Café has received lots of positive feedback from customers via a designated feedback survey with some points to consider improvement on as well. The overall scoring has been summarised in the table below.



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.

- 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.
- Biodiversity – Officers focus on the broader context of their actions when organising event to maintain the Council's environmental and conservation efforts.
- 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 Showcase – Provides a supportive environment and unique opportunity for beginner local musicians perform on a stage 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.
- 1863 Café provides affordable hot drinks and has enabled social connection for lots of elderly people. Sharing tables is encouraged which allows us to serve more customers and creates a warm and friendly atmosphere.

Financial implications

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

Recommendations

Member are invited to note the report.