

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

Held on Monday, 8 September 2025

At 6.00 pm in the Gallery Room, The Corn Exchange, Witney

Present:

Councillor R Crouch (Chair)

Councillors:	J Robertshaw	G Doughty
	R Smith	D Temple
	O Collins	J Treloar
Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Mark Lewis	Head of Estates & Operations
	Nigel Warner	Responsible Financial Officer
	Angus Whitburn	Operations Manager
Others:	None	

H492 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor A Bailey.

H493 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers.

H494 MINUTES

The minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 7 July 2025 were received.

H401 – Members were updated that the no cycling signage at St Mary’s Church had been cleaned by the Town Council and Officers had forwarded a request to Oxfordshire County Council for review.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 7 July 2025 be approved as a correct record of the meetings and be signed by the Chair.

H495 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

H496 LAKESIDE ALLOTMENTS FLOODING UPDATE

With the permission of the Chair, this item was moved up the agenda so the members of public could hear the discussion and outcome.

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations Manager who also provided a verbal update.

Members were pleased to hear that following confirmation the owners of the ditch were the Town Council, that work had been carried out to clear it of vegetation and a plan had been put in place for its regular future maintenance.

Officers reported that details of the mapping of the area from Thames Water had yet to be received and were hopeful that an upcoming meeting with the Environment Agency would provide further information on their activity in the area around the allotments.

The Committee heard that the requested historical topographical survey had now been received, and they discussed the allocation of £2,500 to instruct a hydrologist to complete a flood survey. A Member raised that Oxfordshire County Council could potentially be approached to provide grant funding to cover the cost of the survey or potential works.

Members were unanimous in agreement that the survey proceed without delay in order to explore options at pace.

Recommended:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, Officers instruct a hydrologist survey to be carried out up to a cost of £2,500 from the Allotments General Reserve.

The two members of the public left the meeting at 6:10pm

H497 NEW ASHES SECTION AT WINDRUSH CEMETERY

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations Manager which was also raised up the agenda. The officer provided a detailed explanation of the options under consideration.

Members heard of the obstacles faced by both the operations team and visitors to the cemetery and how these would be addressed with the proposed new interment plots and installation of the pathway.

The Committee heard that although Options two and three required a larger outlay, these costs would be recouped by the sale of the Exclusive Rights of Burial to families in the future.

Members asked that the Friends of the Cemeteries be consulted and that a fully costed proposal be prepared by Officers for presentation at the meeting of the Committee on 10 November 2025 but that funds be provisionally included during the budget-setting discussions.

Recommended:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, Friends of the Cemeteries be consulted on the options in the report and their thoughts gathered and,
3. That, a report be prepared by Officers with full financial costings and proposed charges outlined for consideration and,
4. That, £15,660 be allocated in the 2026/27 budget calculations in anticipation of the installation of 20 pre-installed ashes vaults (Option3).

The Operation Manager left the meeting at 6:30pm

H498 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.

Members welcomed that the net expenditure for budget cost centres under the Committees remit stood at 18.4% for the 1st Quarter.

The RFO welcomed and answered questions that had been forwarded ahead of the meeting relating to the public halls' income and profit margins. Members heard that the Corn Exchange prioritised the use of local suppliers over those that provided the largest possible profit margin, it also worked with private hirers ahead of their events in order to promote the Corn Exchange services and enhance sales, however should the Council wish Officers to work to set margins then this could be considered and built into the ongoing Public Halls Business Plan.

A Member had also raised a question relating to the Councils registration for Value Added Tax (VAT), to which the RFO confirmed that the Council had been correctly registered since 1974.

In relation to the RFO's request for budget considerations it was felt by Members that focus should turn to the Burwell Hall which in their view lacked in facilities and overall presentation, it was considered that with some improvements it could be made more attractive for use by the football clubs at weekends as well as other potential private hirers. It was suggested that Officers survey users on their current needs and identify gaps in the Council current provision.

Later in the meeting two additional budget proposals arose, £15,660 for the new ashes section at Windrush Cemetery and £2,000 towards improvements to the hearing loop system in Corn Exchange.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted along with the responses to Members questions and,
2. That, the management accounts of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee for the period 1 April to 30 June 2025 be approved.
3. That, consideration also be given to the inclusion in the budget for the improvements to the Corn Exchange hearing loop (£2,000) and for the new ashes section (£15,660).

The RFO left the meeting at 7:06pm

H499 **PUBLIC HALLS REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Venue & Events Officers along with a verbal update from the Head of Estates & Operations.

Members discussed the options available to relaunch the seat sponsorship and were eager to proceed without delay, feeling that the launch ahead of Christmas would provide an opportunity to install the first plaques and therefore self-advertise the scheme to regular users.

Members raised questions regarding how the scheme would be run and asked that a full proposal be drafted by Officers for presentation at the next meeting of the Committee on 10 November 2025.

The Committee welcomed the idea of investigation to install a hearing loop in the Corn Exchange, though it was explained it was not a legal requirement it was strongly felt by Members that the Council provide this facility here and all other Halls.

Recommended:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, a report be prepared for the installation of a hearing loop for the next meeting of the committee and,
3. That, the sum of £2,000 be added to the budget requirements for 2026/27 to finance the installation of a hearing loop in the Corn Exchange.

H500 **CORN EXCHANGE BUSINESS REPORT**

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

Members were pleased to see the attendances and received a summary of the diverse range of events that had either taken place or were planned for the coming months, along with customer feedback from the 1863 Café.

They welcomed the new ideas of the Venue & Events team that continue to expand and promote the use of the Corn Exchange.

Resolved.

That, the report be noted.

The meeting closed at: 7.17 pm

Chair