

HALLS, CEMETERIES AND ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE



Agenda Item: Public Halls Report

Meeting Date: Monday 10th November

Contact Officer: Venue & Events Officer

The purpose of this report is to provide updates and seek direction on the management of the Town Council's two public halls. These important community venues must be well maintained and effectively operated to meet local needs and support the Council's strategic objectives.

Background

Witney Town Council is committed to vibrant, inclusive and accessible public spaces that adhere to council policies. The Council has established guidelines for management, bookings, maintenance, to uphold high standards of safety, customer service and community engagement. By providing regular updates the Council can review performance and compliance and agree changes for continuous improvement.

Current Situation

A Venue and Events Co-ordinator has been recruited and started working at the beginning of August. This role will be integral to the day-to-day operation of the public halls, events planning and marketing. The Venue & Events Officer has been focussing on maintaining the operational services expected across Public Halls and Events and has been onboarding the Venue & Events Co-ordinator, who has started to take the day-day operation responsibility on board. This report outlines some updates on projects and proposals from the last meeting.

Seat Sponsorship

Following a request from members, the Venue & Events Officer has researched into industry examples of seat sponsorship to guide a proposal for this at the Corn Exchange.

As a reminder to what was in the last report, the table on the following page was put together to outline examples of seat sponsorship packages available at other small theatres around the country and reported to members in September 2025. The findings show a wide variety of cost and term length and some extra benefits with the package.

Theatre/venue	# of seats	Cost of Sponsorship	Duration	Position on seat	Image of Plaque	Further Notes
Barn Theatre, Cirencester	200	One off £200 donation	1 year	Information not available	Image not available	Donators also get: - Regular e-news with Barn events and insight - The opportunity to book a backstage tour (2 invites) - Public thank-you on our dedicated supporter web page - Invitation to Barn Theatre Annual Event. Subject to various restrictions that may or may not be in place at the time of your visit.
Oxford Play House , Oxford	350	£600 £6000	5 years Lifetime	Back of the seat		A plaque will be placed on the back of a seat of your choice (subject to availability), and we'll be in touch so you can choose your own wording (up to 50 characters).
Bear Pit Theatre Stratford upon Avon	109	£100 (one seat) £150 (two seats)	Information not available	Information not available	Image not available	Naming a seat is a perfect way to celebrate a special occasion, dedicate to a memory of someone dear to you, or add your own name or your organisation's name to the supporters of this unique 'little' theatre in the heart of Stratford-upon-Avon. Sponsorship funds will go towards paying the cost of the seats.
The Watermill, Newbury	197	£250 – Stalls £150 – Circle	5 years	Underside of the seat		
The Corn Exchange Newbury	40 (cinema room)	£300 donation (or 5 annual instalments of £65)	5 years	On the head rest	Each seat will have a headrest cover, embroidered with your chosen name or message	- Only available in the Cinema Room - You'll be invited to attend annual VIP cinema screenings to see your headrest cover in situ. - Your chosen name and/or message can be up to a maximum of 40 characters. - Corporate seats to include your business name with or without the company logo are available for £400 plus VAT. - VIP screenings take place once per year for 5 years
Hanger Farm Southampton	83 bleachers + 76 flat (chairs?) 159 total	£75 Bleachers £150 Front Row	3 years	Underside of seats	The plaques are gold in colour. The font will be Calibri. Space for 30 words, across 4 lines.	Your seat sponsorship includes: a personalised seat plaque for you or a loved one lasting three years and a certificate to recognise the name and location of your sponsored seat.

Corn Exchange Proposal

Based on the research above, this report outlines a proposed seat sponsorship initiative for The Corn Exchange, aimed at generating additional funding to support maintenance, programming, and community events. Seat sponsorships provide an opportunity for individuals, families, businesses, or organisations to support the theatre by having their name and/or message displayed on a plaque affixed to the rear of a seat.

Package	Cost	Duration	Details of Package
Individual	£100	3 years	Direct printed message onto plaque on back of seat. Voucher for 2 glasses of Prosecco Recognition on "Supporters" section of website.
Corporate	£200	3 years	Direct printed message onto plaque on back of seat. Voucher for 4 glasses of Prosecco Recognition on "Supporters" section of website, listed above individual doners.

The Plaque

Officers recommend that the plaque should be gold coloured aluminium, directly printed with the doners name and message. These would cost £4.50 each in batches of 20, or £3.95 if ordering 50+ using a local supplier. Gold coloured aluminium plaques have a lifespan of 5-10 years, more than covering the proposed term length of the sponsorship.

The plaque will be fixed to the back of the seat, allowing for more visibility than if they were on the bottom of the seat (only visible when the seat is vacant). The plaque will be 50x100mm and can print up to 50 characters.

Goals and Objectives

Primary Goals

- Generate funding to increase sustainability of The Corn Exchange as a community arts centre
- Increase local community engagement / investment into Corn Exchange

Secondary Goals

- Increase awareness of The Corn Exchange and consequently increase local usage, bookings and event attendances

Marketing Strategy

Target Audience

Audience Segment	Description / Examples	Motivation
Local Residents / Current Patrons	Regular theatre / show attendees, 1863 Café customers, local residents with interest in arts.	To leave a legacy and support local arts and culture To sustain an arts presence for future generations
Local / National Businesses	Local shops, restaurants, service providers / local branches of national businesses	Advertisement / Visibility, local community goodwill
Alumni / Historic Users	Past performers, historic users of the theatre (classes, audience, cinema etc.)	Nostalgia and pride

Digital Marketing

Website

- Dedicated “Supporters” page on the Corn Exchange website
- Advertise the scheme on this page with packages and images of the plaques installed

Social Media

- Engaging content to drive interest in the scheme
- Footage of plaque being printed / installed
- Advertise in local groups

Email

- Use existing mailing lists to advertise the scheme

Physical Marketing

- Dedicated posters and flyers inside and outside the venue
- Advertise on what’s on flyer / brochure
- Advertising plaques installed on the seats – “Sponsor This Seat – ask a member of staff for more info”. Directly reaching a segment of our target audience

Community Outreach

- Contact local businesses to advertise the scheme
- Possibility of hosting an annual sponsor’s event to reward current sponsors and recruit new ones, to be explored
- Press release via Witney Gazette, Oxford Mail, Windrush Radio, Radio Oxford

Current Situation / Rollout timeline

At the HCA meeting in September 2025, members requested a roll out before Christmas this year. The Venue & Events Officer aims to roll out the scheme, with packages available to purchase from **1st December 2025**. This will capitalise on the increased usage of the tiered seating during the pantomime system, to help promote the launch of this scheme. Officers will have advertising materials prepared by 30th November, to advertise to the attendees of the **Advent Fayre**, another high footfall event of residents.

Finances

- 20x Plaques to install for advertisement: £90.00
- Physical Marketing: approx. £100.00
- Single serve prosecco: £6 each (sale price)

Hearing Loop System for Corn Exchange and Burwell Hall

Background

As outlined in the last report, the old portable hearing loop at the Corn Exchange is faulty and upon research for a replacement, it has become clear that a portable hearing loop is not suitable for a room the size of the hireable rooms at The Corn Exchange and Burwell Hall and is rather designed for an over the desk conversation (such as at the café counter or in a one-one meeting).

Legal Implications

The Equality Act (2010) requires service providers (including public and community buildings) to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people, including those who are deaf or hard of hearing. A hearing loop is an example of a reasonable adjustment in rooms where speech, performance, or audio presentations take place.

Current Situation

Obtaining a quote has proven challenging due to a limited number of companies available, however a supplier has been booked in for a visit in December. Initial conversations with suppliers have highlighted the complexity of installing hearing loops and barriers in place such as metal in walls, therefore, visits from contractors are essential to ensure we are installing the correct system.

Officers will continue to approach additional contractors and further updates will be available once contractor visits have taken place and tailored quotes are received.

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 – Providing a supportive environment for people to express themselves through creativity.
- b) Biodiversity – All matters relating to Biodiversity will be considered when making decisions for both halls – The recycling of clothing provides many benefits such as conserving water resources and minimizing waste and pollution, ultimately lessening the strain on natural habitats and ecosystems
- c) Crime & Disorder – The continued use of halls as a safe space
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency – Recycling of clothing also reduces the demand for new raw materials and energy and avoids the release of methane from decomposing textiles

Risk

In decision making Councillors should consider any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

- 1. The seating sponsorship initiative: minimal risk due to limited product spend.
- 2. Installing the incorrect type of hearing loop in a room that requires confidentiality, such as the Gallery Room. The council must ensure that the correct loop system is installed to avoid this.
- 3. Should a hearing loop prove not to be a feasible option, officers will explore alternative solutions to promote accessibility in our venue for those who are hard of hearing and will provide details and costs at the next meeting. The Equality Act (2010) does not specifically require a hearing loop in public venues; however, it does require reasonable adjustment to be made.

Social Value

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

The Seat Sponsorship initiative is an opportunity for community engagement with the Corn Exchange.

Financial implications

The cost of gold-coloured aluminium plaques for the seats is £3.95 per unit, when ordering more than 50.

The cost of a hearing loop is to be determined for each room; however, suitable systems look to be around £2,000 each.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and

1. To note the additional information provided on the seat sponsorship that includes the commencement date of 01 December 2025.
2. To note the update on the hearing loop research.