

HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE



Agenda Item: Corn Exchange Business Report

Meeting Date: Monday 10 November 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 will provide a professional, well-maintained, and run hireable space for private events including parties, weddings and conferences.

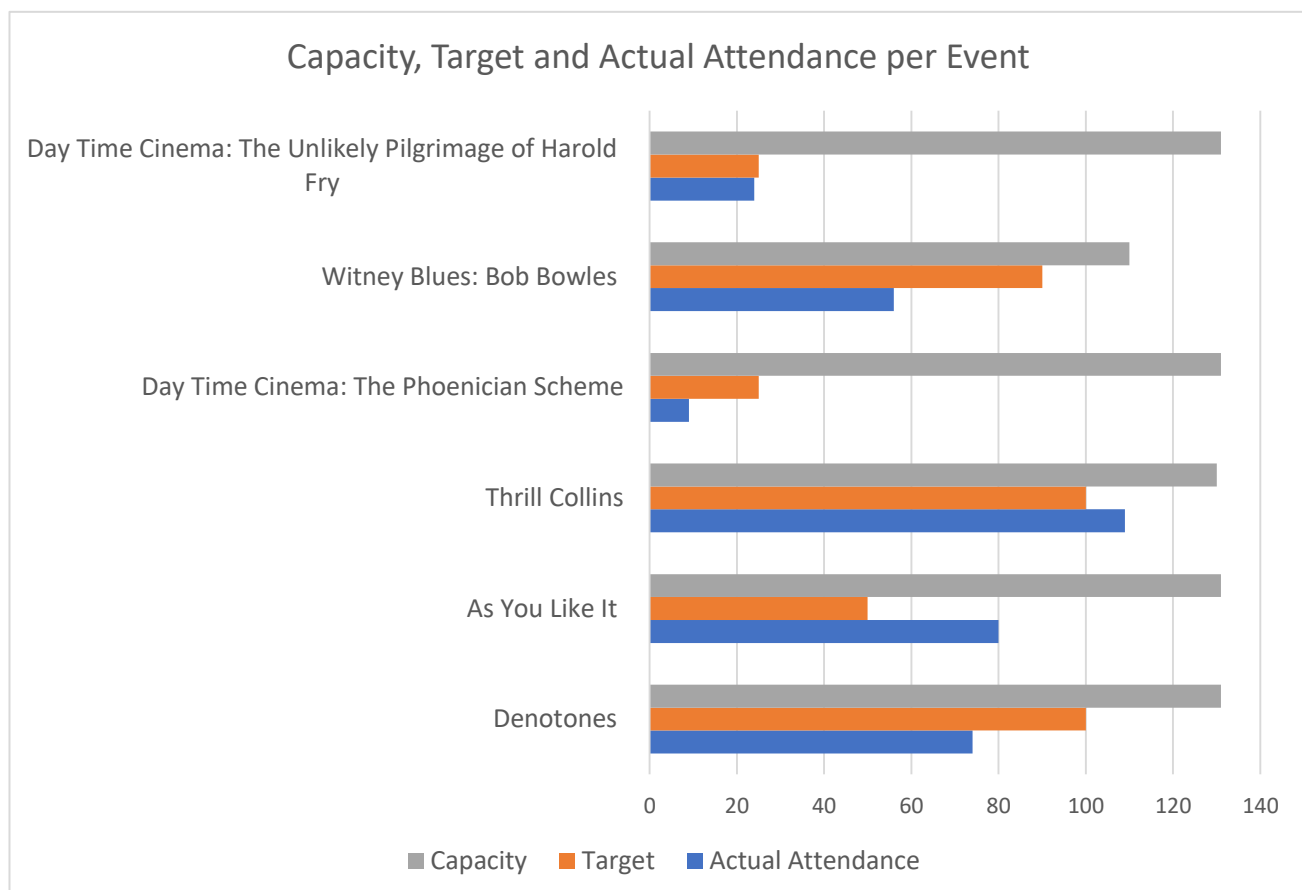
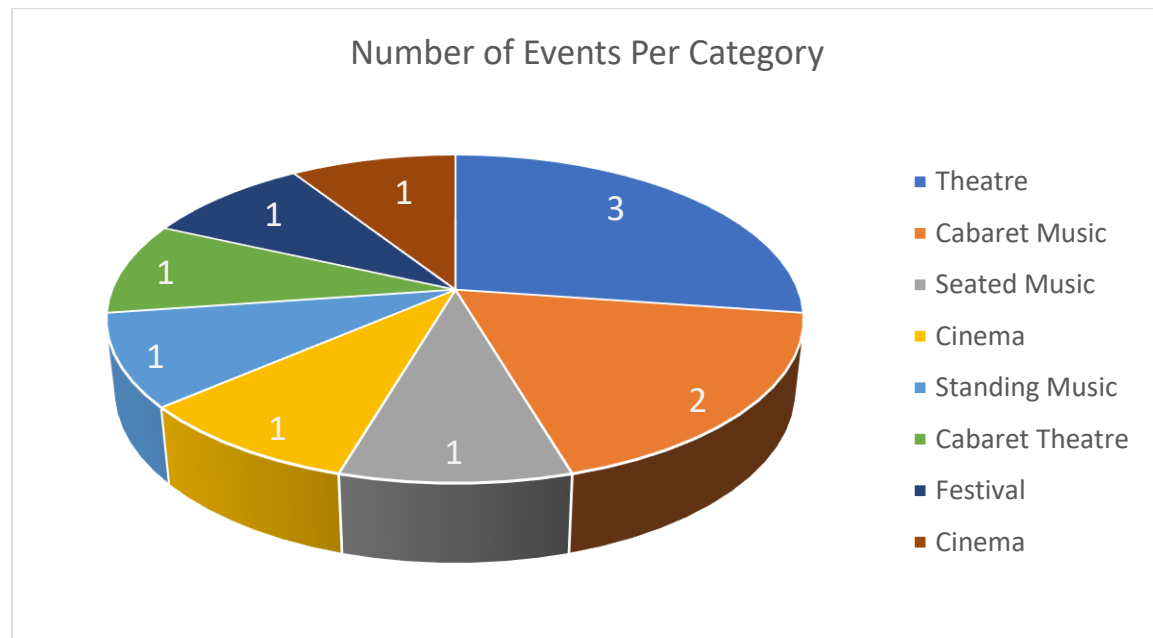
Current Situation

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 September 2025, and attendance figures (where available) 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

The popular Tunes on The Square event series drew to a close on 5th September. Officers collected some feedback from attendees present on that date, which was largely positive with some suggestions for next year.

Witney Wine Festival

The 3rd annual wine festival hosted by Eynsham Cellars at The Corn Exchange took place on 18th October 2025. The organisers hire both the Main Hall and Gallery Room and 1863 is open for the event.

The festival showcases a diverse selection of wines from independent vineyards and merchants, offering guests the opportunity to taste, learn, and purchase in a relaxed and social setting. By providing a central, atmospheric venue in the heart of Witney, the Corn Exchange enhances the festival experience, supporting local businesses, encouraging tourism, and strengthening the town’s reputation as a destination for high-quality food and drink events.

Daytime Cinema

The Venue & Events Co-Ordinator has been tasked with restarting the Daytime Cinema, focusing on target marketing to increase attendances. The attendances will be tracked and monitored internally, with a decision on whether to continue in the new year. The event presents

Thrill Collins

The Corn Exchange Witney successfully hosted Thrill Collins, a popular live music act known for their high-energy performances. The event demonstrated the venue’s growing reputation as a high-quality live music destination and its ability to attract well-known regional acts with broad audience appeal. Attendance numbers were strong, with significant bar revenue generated on the night, reinforcing the commercial potential of similar standing music events. The performance also drew a diverse crowd, including both local residents and visitors from outside Witney, highlighting the Corn Exchange’s role in supporting the town’s evening economy and contributing to its cultural vibrancy

WhatYouWill Theatre – As You Like It

The Corn Exchange hosted the showcase performance of an Oxfordshire based theatre group, WhatYouWill Theatre, culminating their local tour of Shakespeare's As You Like It. This was the first time WhatYouWill Theatre performed at The Corn Exchange, adding another local arts group to the venue's connections.

The Corn Exchange and Burwell Hall have also hosted several private events including regular group meetings, private parties, presentations etc.

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
- Specsavers Coffee Morning – 1st Thursday of the month
- 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

6th November – Florence Nightingale: Lady With The Hammer

7th November – Witney Jazz

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

20th November – Open Mic Showcase

21st November – Witney Blues

30th November – Advent Fayre

6th December – Witney Jazz

12th December – Big Quiz

13th December – WOPA

19th December – 31st December – BTP Panto

1863 Café & Bar

The 1863 Café & Bar has increased in popularity year-on-year. 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 throughout the summer 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 to provide consistently high standards of customer service and have built a positive rapport with our regular customers, keeping them returning to the café. This hard work has been recognised by 1863 Café winning “Best Café” in the Oxfordshire category at the England Business Awards South-East final! Officers were delighted that the Café staff have been recognised for their hard and meaningful work in making the 1863 Café a real community hub.

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 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