

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

Held on Monday, 10 November 2025

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

Present:

Councillor R Crouch (Chair)

Councillors:	J Robertshaw	D Temple
	R Smith	J Treloar
	O Collins	J Doughty (In place of A Bailey)
	G Doughty	
Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Thomas Davies	Deputy Venue & Events Officer
	Mark Lewis	Head of Estates & Operations
	Nigel Warner	Responsible Financial Officer
Others:	None	

H624 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor A Bailey, Councillor J Doughty attended as a substitute and Councillor O Collins had advised that he would be arriving late to the meeting.

H625 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers.

H626 MINUTES

The minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 8 September 2025 were received.

H496 – In response to Members questions the Head of Estates & Operations confirmed that two ditches between the Witney Hotel and Lakeside Allotments had been cleared by the Town Council. Members also heard that the cost of the Hydrologist report was due to the extent of the report and that this was more investigative than a flood risk assessment.

Resolved:

1. That, the verbal update be noted and,

2. That, the minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 8 September 2025 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

H627 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

Cllr O Collins joined the meeting at 6:06pm

H628 **FINANCE REPORT: REVISED REVENUE BUDGET 2025/26 AND DRAFT BASE REVENUE BUDGET FOR 2026/27**

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 additional verbal commentary to the points outlined in his report and responded to Members' questions regarding his thoughts ahead of the Chancellor's budget announcement on the changes to Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Relief Scheme.

He also advised Members that following discussions held since writing his report that the cost of insurance was likely to increase more significantly, as much as 40%, citing a number of reasons given by insurers. The Committee were reminded that the councils insurance policy was agreed on a Long-Term Agreement, details of the new premium would not be known until January 2026 at the earliest as insurers were reluctant to agree this more than three months ahead of the renewal date.

The agreement of the draft revised base revenue budget for 2025/26 and the estimated base revenue budgets for 2026/27 was proposed by Councillor D Temple and agreed by members unanimously.

Recommended:

1. That, the report and verbal updates be noted.
2. That, the draft revised base revenue budget for 2025/26 and the estimated base revenue budgets for 2026/27, as detailed be approved.

H629 **REVENUE GROWTH ITEMS, SPECIAL REVENUE PROJECTS, AND CAPITAL PROJECTS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Responsible Financial Officer.

Members were requested to provide their views on items detailed in the report for further consideration in the 2026/27 budget setting.

The Committee heard clarification that the amount required to install hearing loop technology into the Corn Exchange and Burwell Hall would be in the region of £6,000, this being £2,000 per area of the building and that the costs of the installation of a New Ashes section at Windrush as detailed in Agenda Item 11 could be covered from an existing Cemeteries earmarked reserve.

In relation to improvements to Burwell Hall a request was made by a Member for a separate budget line to be created to monitor the spending of its green initiatives; Members heard that proposals for the decarbonisation improvements would be presented by the Compliance &

Environmental Officer to the Climate Action Working Party at their next meeting with details being provided to this Committee in due course.

Following a Member's question, the Town Clerk confirmed that improvements to the Langdale Hall would be the responsibility of the tenant and that both the Project Officer and the Head of Estates and Operations were working with them to bring about the creation of a new lease to facilitate improvements.

Following a proposal from Cllr R Smith, seconded by Cllr J Doughty the Committee were unanimous in agreement with the reports proposals and the additional request for a separate budget line for Burwell Hall.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, a budget line related to Green Initiatives for Burwell Hall be created and,
3. That, that the Revenue Growth and new Capital items be agreed by the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee.

H630 SCHEDULE OF PROPOSED FEES & CHARGES 2026/27

The Committee received and considered the details of the proposed increase to Halls & Cemeteries costs from April 2026.

Members heard of the general increase of 4% to burial fess and 5% for Halls related charges which reflected the additional cost to the Council and also aligned with the Council's medium term financial strategy and that the Council would continue to charge double fees to those accessing burial services who live outside of the parish.

In response to a Member's question, the RFO responded to confirm that the costs of running the two cemeteries were not fully recovered by the burial fees charged due to the significant ground and general maintenance costs, such as the tree works required at Tower Hill. A full review of costs had been provided to the Committee as requested in January 2025.

Recommended:

That, the proposed 4% increase for burial fees and 5% for Halls charges for 2026-27, be agreed.

The RFO left the meeting at 6:24pm

H631 PUBLIC HALLS REPORT

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

Members discussed the proposal to relaunch the Corn Exchange seat sponsorship and following additional consideration of the level of rewards to be offered to donors, the Committee agreed unanimously to proceed with the launch of the scheme on 1 December 2025 as proposed. However, they asked for further clarification on the minimum ordering of plaques to ensure these were placed within a reasonable timeframe following their purchase.

The Committee welcomed the additional information provided on the introduction of hearing loops into the Main Hall, Gallery Room and Café/Bar area of the Corn Exchange. Members were unanimous in agreement with increasing the budgeted amount to £6,000 to account for these additional units.

Recommended:

1. That, the report and verbal update be noted and,
2. That, the relaunch of the seat sponsorship proceeds and,
3. That, the sum of £6,000 be added to the budget requirements for 2026/27 to finance the installation of hearing loops.

The RFO returned to the meeting at 6:37pm

H632 CORN EXCHANGE BUSINESS REPORT

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

Members were pleased to hear that the Café income had risen 20% year on year and that it had received the award of best café in Oxfordshire which they believed recognised the hard work of all the staff involved.

They welcomed the feedback of events activity and the proposed planned events that they felt continued to expand and promote the use of the Corn Exchange.

Resolved:

That, the report be noted.

H633 PUBLIC HALLS BUSINESS PLAN REVIEW

The Committee received and considered the updated Corn Exchange Business Plan prepared by the Venue & Events Officer.

Members heard of the ideas being explored which included revisiting the potential of introducing National Theatre cinema events which had seen changes to its offering since the last review. Also, potential improvements to the existing kitchen were discussed, it was noted that although options were limited due to the limited space, a small budget should be set to improve storage and for the purchase of new or replacement professional catering equipment.

The Committee agreed with the proposal to include the Café 1863 in the business plan as this would bring together both events and bar revenues and would evidence and further support the transition from a traditional public hall to an arts centre venue.

Members also heard that changes would be proposed to create a minimum bar spend agreement for private event hirers. This would be presented at the next meeting of the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee on 24 November.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, a budget be set for improvements to the Corn Exchange kitchen and,

3. That, the Café 1863 be included in the Corn Exchange Business Plan and,
4. That, the idea of national Theatre live be explored and,
5. That, that future reviews of the business plan be presented to the committee in May and November of each year

The Venue & Events Officer left the meeting at 6:54pm

H634 **WINDRUSH CEMETERY - NEW ASHES SECTION**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations Manager which provided further details of the proposal for the introduction of the new ashes section at Windrush Cemetery.

Members were pleased to hear that the proposal had the support of the Friends of the Cemeteries group and that all the feedback received from existing users by Officers during their investigations of what was a niche market, was positive.

A Member raised the illustration of the breakdown of figures for the new vault solutions; it was believed that it gave an indication that the Council would be profiting from the sale of these plots when the reality was that only initial outlay costs would be being recovered.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the proposal as detailed in the report for the new ashes section at Windrush Cemetery along with the proposed charging schedule be progressed and,
3. That, a budget of £25,000 to install 40 burial vaults & 20 Trident Vaults in the new ashes section be approved and,
4. That, a budget of £1,500 be approved for the initial purchase of 20 ashes urns and,
5. That, it be delegated to officers to set additional guidelines in line with current cemetery guidelines for the new ashes vault section.

H635 **WITNEY ALLOTMENT ASSOCIATION - REQUEST FOR PLOT CLEARANCES AT NEWLAND ALLOTMENTS**

The Committee received a request for help clearing two plots at the Newland Allotment site, linked to the new fencing and replacement sheds the Council had already approved.

It was noted that the request had not been formally made via the Witney Allotment Association (WAA) and would incur additional labour/disposal costs due to the volume of waste involved. The Town Council had not previously undertaken such work, which had historically been arranged and funded WAA and Members expressed concern that agreeing to the request could establish a precedent for future cases.

Resolved:

That, the request for Town Council assistance in clearing two plots at Newland allotments be declined and referred to the Witney Allotment Association.

The meeting closed at: 7.04 pm

Chair