

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

Held on Monday, 19 January 2026

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

Present:

Councillor R Crouch (Chair)

Councillors:	J Treloar	G Doughty
	J Robertshaw	D Temple
	A Bailey	J Aitman (In place of O Collins)
Officers:	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Thomas Davies	Deputy Venue & Events Officer
Others:	None	

H32 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Smith and O Collins, for whom Councillor J Aitman attended as a substitute.

H33 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest from Members or Officers.

H34 MINUTES

That, the minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 10 November 2025 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 10 November 2025 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

H35 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

H36 **PUBLIC HALLS REPORT**

The Committee received and considered a detailed report from the Venue & Events Manager.

Bar Hire Policy – Private Hire Events

The Committee discussed at length the introduction of a proposed cost-based bar hire policy, which comprised of two options for private hirers.

Members noted that the proposed policy was focused on loss prevention rather than profit generation, with the primary aim of protecting the Council from subsidising private events and reducing financial risk. It was highlighted that the existing £50 flat fee no longer reflected the true cost of operating a bar service.

The Committee welcomed the transparency of the two options presented, considering them a fair and proportionate approach to address the variety of usage at both the Corn Exchange and Burwell Hall. Members noted that the policy would help support the proposal to increase booking volumes, particularly at Burwell Hall, while ensuring that the Council was protected from potential losses.

It was further noted that hirers would retain the option not to use the bar, and that the policy would be subject to review to assess its effectiveness.

With regard to community and charity events, the Venue & Events Manager explained that four options were presented within the report for consideration. A Member highlighted that charities come in various sizes and that the policy should be fair to all. It was also noted that smaller charities and community groups may continue to benefit from the opportunity to apply to the Council for a subsidised let. The Committee were unanimous in agreement with proceeding with Option two meaning that the Council would equally bear the risk of losses with the community groups.

Cancellation Policy Review

The Committee reviewed the existing cancellation policy, which had been in operation for over twelve months. It was noted that the policy had been applied successfully with no complaints being recorded and that the policy would continue to be monitored by Officers.

1863 Café – Local Art Display Proposal

The Committee considered a proposal to use wall space in the café for the display of local artwork. Members broadly supported the principle and emphasised that the scheme should be kept simple, with arrangements that were easy for staff to manage. The display should maintain accessibility for emerging and young artists, with a limited display period to ensure that no single artist dominates the space.

It was suggested that artists could be asked to offer an honest commission on any sales, perhaps in the range of 10–20%, rather than charging any fee to display.

Members agreed that a draft policy should be prepared by officers for consideration, and that they should structure this in a similar way to the community window initiative.

Recommended:

1. That, the Minimum spend policy for private event hires be approved with a review in six months and
2. That, Option two be adopted for charity and local community events, applying a 50% cost-based staffing charge for bar provision and,
3. That the cancellation policy remains appropriate, and no changes are required and
4. That, the 1863 Local Art Display scheme be approved and officers draft a policy for further consideration

H37 CORN EXCHANGE BUSINESS REPORT

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

Members were informed by the Deputy Town Clerk that the use of the word “obligation” in the second paragraph of the report had been raised by a member of the public. While the provision of an arts facility was not a statutory duty of the Council, the Town Council was obliged to provide it in respect of the funding received from West Oxfordshire District Council towards the renovation of the Corn Exchange.

Members welcomed the report on the café and bar, noting a significant year-on-year increase in takings, as well as the positive feedback received from recent events, including the Advent Fayre and Christmas afternoon teas.

Members congratulated officers and staff on the success of recent events and the ongoing improvements at the Corn Exchange.

Resolved:

That the report and verbal updates be noted.

H38 WAA - REQUEST TO INSTALL RAISED BEDS AT LAKESIDE ALLOTMENTS

The Committee considered a request from the Witney Allotment Association for funding to install raised beds to improve accessibility at Lakeside allotments which would also help to reduce the waiting list.

Members supported the principle of improving accessibility and agreed in principle that practical solutions should be explored, particularly given the flooding issues at Lakeside. However, they noted concerns regarding the wide cost range quoted and requested that Officers obtain a more detailed, itemised cost breakdown from the Allotments Association so as the proposed expenditure could be assessed alongside the long-term value for money and potential return on the investment

Members heard that the costs could be met from the existing Allotments Ear Marked Reserve.

Resolved:

That officers seek further detailed costings and additional information from the Lakeside Allotments Group before a decision is made on the proposal.

The meeting closed at: 7.07 pm

Chair