

Agenda Item: Corn Exchange Business Report

Meeting Date: Monday 16th March 2026

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 aims to provide an affordable, sustainable, inclusive community arts facility that is valued and supported by the residents of Witney and West Oxfordshire. This objective is supported by funding from West Oxfordshire District Council for this purpose.

The Council seeks to make the Corn Exchange accessible to the whole community by encouraging participation and offering a diverse programme of music, arts and cultural events. In addition, the Council will provide a professional, well-maintained venue available to hire for private events such as parties, weddings, and conferences.

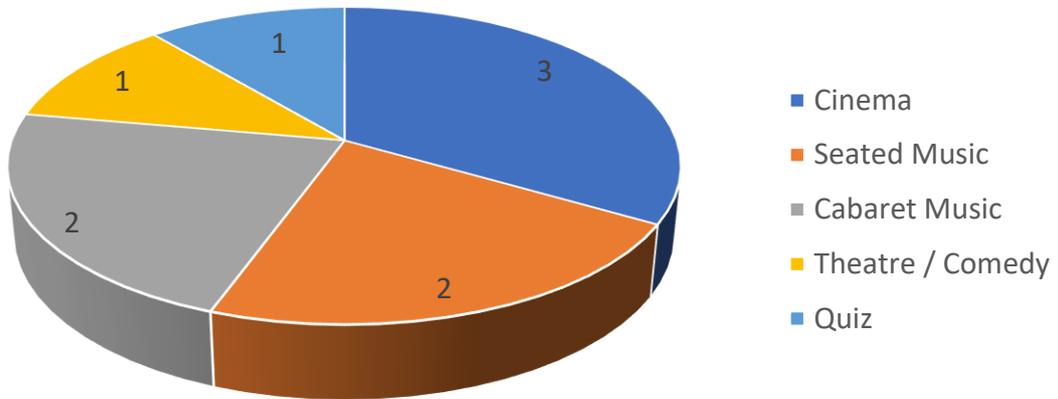
Current Situation

The Venue & Events team have been working hard to deliver a range of in-house and third-party events.

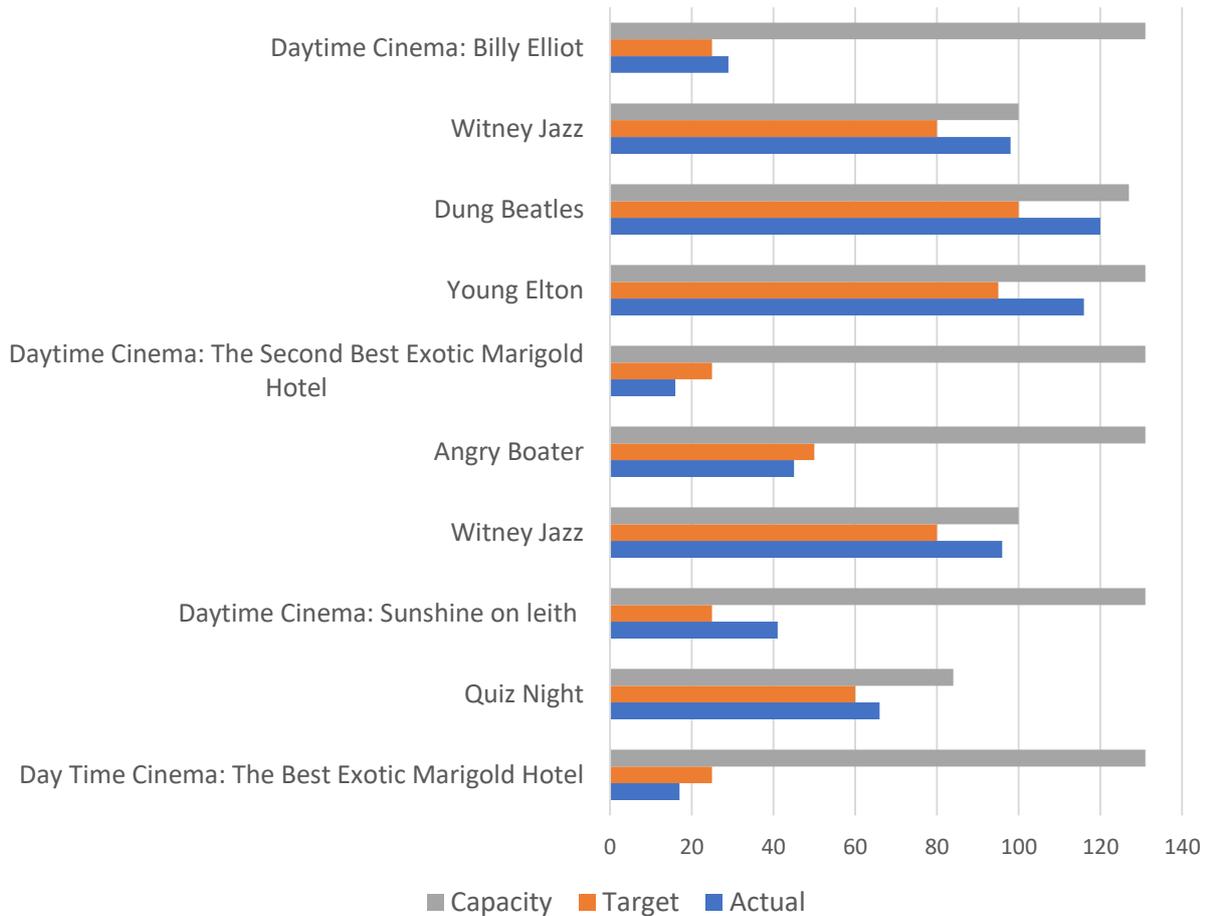
The graphs below show the number of ticketed events hosted by category, since the last report in January 2026, and attendance figures (where available) for each event at The Corn Exchange since the last report, alongside a target attendance to show how each event is performing in line with officers' goals and expectations. Each event capacity has also been included, upon request from members.

Officers schedule less events in January as it is typically a quieter month due to finances being tight for a lot of people after Christmas. However, officers are pleased to report successful attendances at recent events as shown in the table below.

Number of Events Per Category



Capacity, Target and Actual Attendance per Event



Recent events

Day Time Cinema

The Corn Exchange has hosted 4 Day Time Cinema screenings since the last report and officers are pleased to report an increase in attendance figures. Officers set a target of 25 attendees per film and have hit an average of 26 with the last 4 screenings. This can be attributed to the hard work and creative ideas of the Venue & Events Co-Ordinator. The 3-for-£10 deal has likely played a part to the increased attendances, along with a careful selection of feel-good British films which seem to be the most popular.

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. Impressively, the Witney Jazz show on Friday 2nd January sold out.

Quiz Night

The Corn Exchange hosted another quiz at the end of January with 66 attendees. Officers are pleased with the attendances seen at the regular quiz nights and have booked them in monthly where possible.

Tribute Shows

The last weekend of February saw 2 WTC promoted tribute shows at The Corn Exchange, both of which were close to selling out. Young Elton, a returning favourite from 2025, had a 25% increase in attendance on last year with 116 tickets sold. The Dung Beatles performed at the Corn Exchange for the first time to an audience of 120, which is 94% capacity. Both shows ran smoothly and successfully and officers are in communication to book return shows with both acts.

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
- 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:

- 14th March - Decades Disco
- 20th March - Music Box at Witney Presents: The FEZZ and The Music of STEELY DAN
- 26th – 28th March – BTP Presents: Return to the Forbidden Planet
- 31st March - Day Time Cinema: Operation Mincemeat
- 10th April – Quiz Night

- 11th April - What You Will Presents: The Importance of Being Earnest
- 8th May – Stevie Mac (Steve Nicks and Fleetwood Mac Tribute)
- 12th – 17th May - Balancing Act Presents: Spare Prick

Venue Usage

As well as hosting public events, The Corn Exchange and Burwell Hall are hireable spaces available for a wide variety of bookings. Both venues receive a range of regular hirers as well as one-off private hirers.

Burwell Hall secured a new weekly hirer a few months ago, who has now also booked dates at The Corn Exchange, which will eventually be weekly when available. This is largely attributed to the positive customer service the hirer experienced with our bookings and caretaking team.

The usage report for the period **19 January – 22 March** indicates a **4.5% increase** in hours booked for the Gallery Room and a **15.5% increase** for Burwell Hall, while bookings for the Corn Exchange Main Hall show a **1% decrease** compared with last year.

Week commencing	19th Jan	26th Jan	2nd Feb	9th Feb	16th Feb	23rd Feb	2nd March	9th March	16th March		
CORN EX 2026 - 27											
Hours booked	32.00	33.00	39.00	26.00	23.00	34.00	50.00	44.00	44.00	325.00	Total Hrs
Usage Percentage	33.00	40.00	46.00	30.00	28.00	41.00	59.00	52.00	52.00	42.33	Average %
SAME PERIOD 2025 - 26											
CORN EXCHANGE											
Hours booked	17.00	25.00	44.00	34.00	46.00	39.00	49.00	33.00	41.00	328.00	Total Hrs
Usage Percentage	20.00	29.00	52.00	40.00	55.00	46.00	58.00	40.00	42.00	42.44	Average %
GALLERY 2026 - 27											
Hours booked	22.00	29.00	12.00	19.00	21.00	25.00	28.00	39.00	30.00	225.00	Total Hrs
Usage Percentage	26.00	35.00	14.00	22.00	25.00	29.00	33.00	46.00	35.00	29.44	Average %
SAME PERIOD 2025 - 26											
GALLERY											
Hours booked	32.00	32.00	14.00	23.00	11.00	19.00	21.00	23.00	40.00	215.00	Total Hrs
Usage Percentage	33.00	33.00	17.00	28.00	13.00	22.00	25.00	28.00	41.00	26.67	Average %
Burwell Hall											
MAIN HALL 2026 - 27											
Hours booked	45.00	48.00	50.00	41.00	32.00	48.00	44.00	40.00	47.00	395.00	Total Hrs
Usage Percentage	46.00	49.00	59.00	42.00	33.00	49.00	52.00	41.00	48.00	46.56	Average %
SAME PERIOD 2025 - 26											
MAIN HALL											
Hours booked	40.00	44.00	40.00	37.00	20.00	47.00	39.00	38.00	37.00	342.00	Total Hrs
Usage Percentage	41.00	47.00	41.00	38.00	19.00	48.00	46.00	39.00	38.00	39.67	Average %
*based on x3 4-hour sessions per day; 12 hours total per day - 84 hours per week.											

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 19.5% on the same period in 2024/25. This positive figure can be attributed to several factors. Good summer weather allowed us to maximise use of the pavement license on the square coupled with the Tunes on the Square event series providing consistent weekly trade. The decrease in footfall in the autumn and winter months was less significant this year, contributing to the overall increase. Improved reputation has led to more regular repeat café customers. An increase in event frequency and focus on promoting drinks for private events by the bar manager has encouraged an increase of bar sales.

Other Business

Theatre Programming for Schools

Officers have been exploring opportunities to introduce term-time theatre programming for local schools at the Corn Exchange. This work has been undertaken in collaboration with free advice and support from a local professional from the theatre industry who specialises in promoting productions for school audiences.

The Corn Exchange has previously hosted cinema screenings and a theatre production aimed at school-aged children during school holidays. However, there is an opportunity to expand this offer by hosting curriculum-linked or culturally enriching theatre productions during term time, enabling local schools to attend performances as part of the school day.

Officers have contacted several local schools and recently hosted an open discussion session at the venue with representatives from a number of them. This meeting identified strong interest in the initiative and indicated that a programme of performances could potentially be introduced from the next academic year.

If progressed, this initiative would provide educational and cultural benefits for local children, strengthen engagement between the Corn Exchange and local schools, and help develop future audiences for the arts within the community.

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 events 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, providing people with an opportunity to connect through shared experiences, reducing loneliness.
- 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.

The proposed model would be **self-funded through ticket sales**, with schools typically booking between one and four classes per performance. Ticket costs are usually met through a combination of school funding and parent contributions, which is standard practice for school theatre visits.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and

- 1) Delegate to officers to progress the proposal and undertake the necessary actions to enable Term-Time Theatre Productions for school audiences to be introduced.