

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

Held on Monday, 16 March 2026

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

Present:

Councillor R Crouch (Chair)

Councillors:	J Robertshaw	J Doughty (In place of G Doughty)
	R Smith	J Treloar
	D Temple	J Aitman (In place of O Collins)
Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer &
		Committee Clerk
Others:	None.	

H133 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors O Collins and G Doughty, Councillors J Aitman and J Doughty attended as substitutes.

An apology was also received from Councillor A Bailey.

H134 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor J Robertshaw declared a pecuniary interest in agenda item 6 as he was an established author.

There were no other declarations from Members or Officers

H135 MINUTES

That, the minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 19 January 2026 were received.

H38 – The Committee heard that at the meeting of Policy, Governance and Finance on 2 February a grant of £2,000 was awarded to Lakeside allotments for the installation of raised beds. (Minute: F82 PG&F 02.02.2026 Relates)

Resolved:

1. That, the minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 19 January 2026 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.
2. That, the update be noted.

Cllr R Smith joined the meeting at 6:02pm.

H136 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

H137 FINANCE REPORT

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.

Members were pleased to receive details of the sales increases for the Café & Bar in the Corn Exchange and asked that their thanks for the hard work of the whole team be extended.

The Committee welcomed the news that the Responsible Financial Officer had moved quickly to secure the energy contract ahead of the increases due to the outbreak of hostilities in the Middle East.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the management accounts of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee for the period to 31 December 2025 be approved.

H138 PUBLIC HALLS REPORT

The Committee received a report from the Venue and Events Officer (VEO).

The VEO advised that an Art Display Policy had now been drafted. Members considered the policy and proposed an amendment to the honesty commission on sales feeling that 10% was more appropriate, in recognition of the requirement for the Council to charge VAT. The amendment was unanimously agreed.

The VEO also presented details of the proposed 1 in 200 Local Author scheme. He reported that a positive meeting had been held with the organisers and that the Corn Exchange would be the only venue in Witney to stock the books. A dedicated, clearly defined zoned area would be created for the display and the sale of books.

Members noted that there would be no cost to the Council for hosting the bookcase, that administration required from Corn Exchange staff would be minimal and that books would be rotated on a quarterly basis. It was further suggested that an Authors Day could be introduced, providing an opportunity for local authors to attend, promote the scheme, and engage with the community.

Members expressed enthusiasm for both the Art Policy and the 1 in 200 schemes, commenting that these initiatives would bring energy to the Corn Exchange.

With regard to proposed hearing loop improvements, Members agreed that a future-proofed scheme should be pursued and requested that all available grant and funding opportunities be fully explored to provide this equipment in all areas.

In response to a Member question, it was confirmed that there had been no uptake on the seating sponsorship scheme. Officers advised that they would continue to highlight the scheme.

Following discussion on the report the Town Clerk read a letter of appreciation that she had received from a visitor to the town which praised its facilities and appearance.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the Local Art Display Policy be recommended for approval by the Policy, Governance & Finance Committee, subject to the amendment introducing a 10% honesty commission and,
3. That, the 1 in 200 local author scheme be supported and progressed.

H139 CORN EXCHANGE BUSINESS REPORT

The Committee received the Corn Exchange Business Report from the Venue and Events Officer (VEO).

The VEO reported that January was traditionally a quieter month; however, events had been well attended overall. Cinema attendance was noted to be improving, and two quiz events had been held, both of which had received positive feedback.

Members were also advised of the two tribute music events had taken place. One featuring a returning performer, which had seen a 25% increase in ticket sales and a second event had performed at near full capacity. The VEO highlighted that much of this success had been attributable to the Venue and Events Assistant, particularly in relation to effective ticket promotion.

Venue usage figures were presented, including the addition of a new regular hirer. It was noted that the hirer had also transferred some existing sessions to the Corn Exchange, citing the high level of service provided by the caretaking and bookings staff as the reason.

In response to a question regarding cinema programming, the VEO advised that feel-good British films had proven most successful, based on audience feedback and it was further noted that the potential for private cinema hire by groups would be explored.

The Committee considered a proposal relating to schools' theatre provision. Members heard that children's theatre events at the Corn Exchange had previously taken place outside of term time however there was interest in introducing term-time performances, with three schools having expressed interest. The Corn Exchange offered a cost-effective alternative to trips to Oxford or further afield, where the cost of coach hire for schools made trips prohibitive. The programme would be self-funding and therefore would not place any financial burden on the Council and events that events would potentially start from September.

The VEO also reported on discussions with West Oxfordshire Performing Arts Foundation (WOPAF) regarding their Speech and Drama event. Plans were being developed to host this

community arts event at the Corn Exchange, with the organisers having presented a well-prepared proposal.

In addition, the Deputy Town Clerk (DTC) advised that a meeting would be arranged with the WOPAF organisers, alongside Councillor Crouch as Chair of the HCA Committee, to discuss the allocation of the Council's £1,000 grant and how this would be used to support a bursary award.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and
2. That, Officers progress with exploring the idea of theatre programming for schools and,
3. That, the Deputy Town Clerk progress the discussions with WOPA in conjunction with the Chair.

H140 PROPOSAL TO IMPROVE BIN STORAGE AREA AT THORNEY LEYS SHOPS

The Committee considered the request from West Oxfordshire District Council regarding the use of Town Council land to site the bins.

Members heard that Officers were arranging a site visit to better understand the proposal and the requirements.

The Committee discussed the matter and gave agreement in principle to proceed with the siting of the bins, with delegated authority to Officers to progress and implement the necessary actions and due diligence.

Recommended:

1. That, the request be noted and,
2. That, it be delegated to Officers to proceed with the arrangements.

H141 FRIENDS OF THE CEMETERIES

The notes of the meeting of the Friend of the Cemeteries meeting held on 11 March 2026 were received by the Committee along with a verbal update from the Committee Clerk.

Members were pleased to hear of the meeting and that the date for the next meeting was already set and would be widely advertised to ensure a greater attendance.

Resolved:

That, the notes of the Friend of the Cemeteries meeting of 11 March 2026 be noted.

The meeting closed at: 6.43 pm

Chair