
Agenda Item: Public Halls 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.

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.

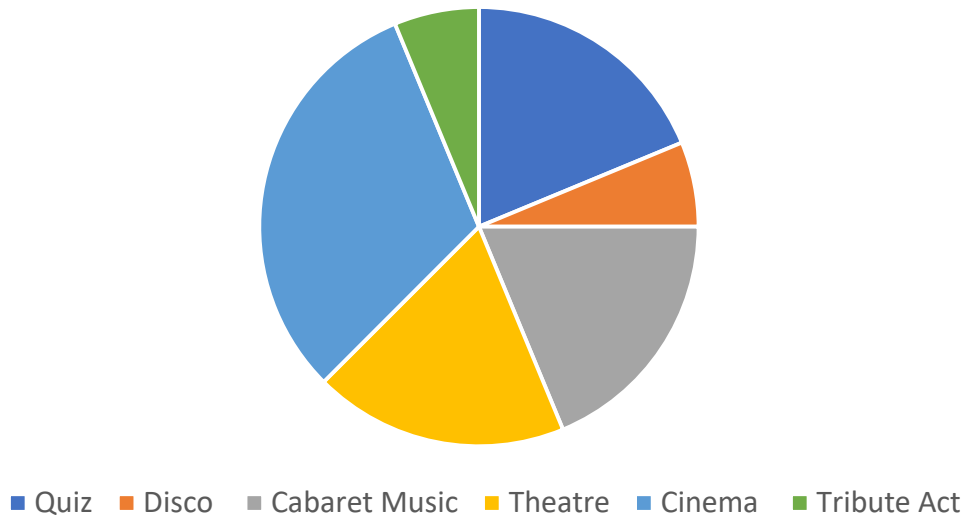
Current Situation

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

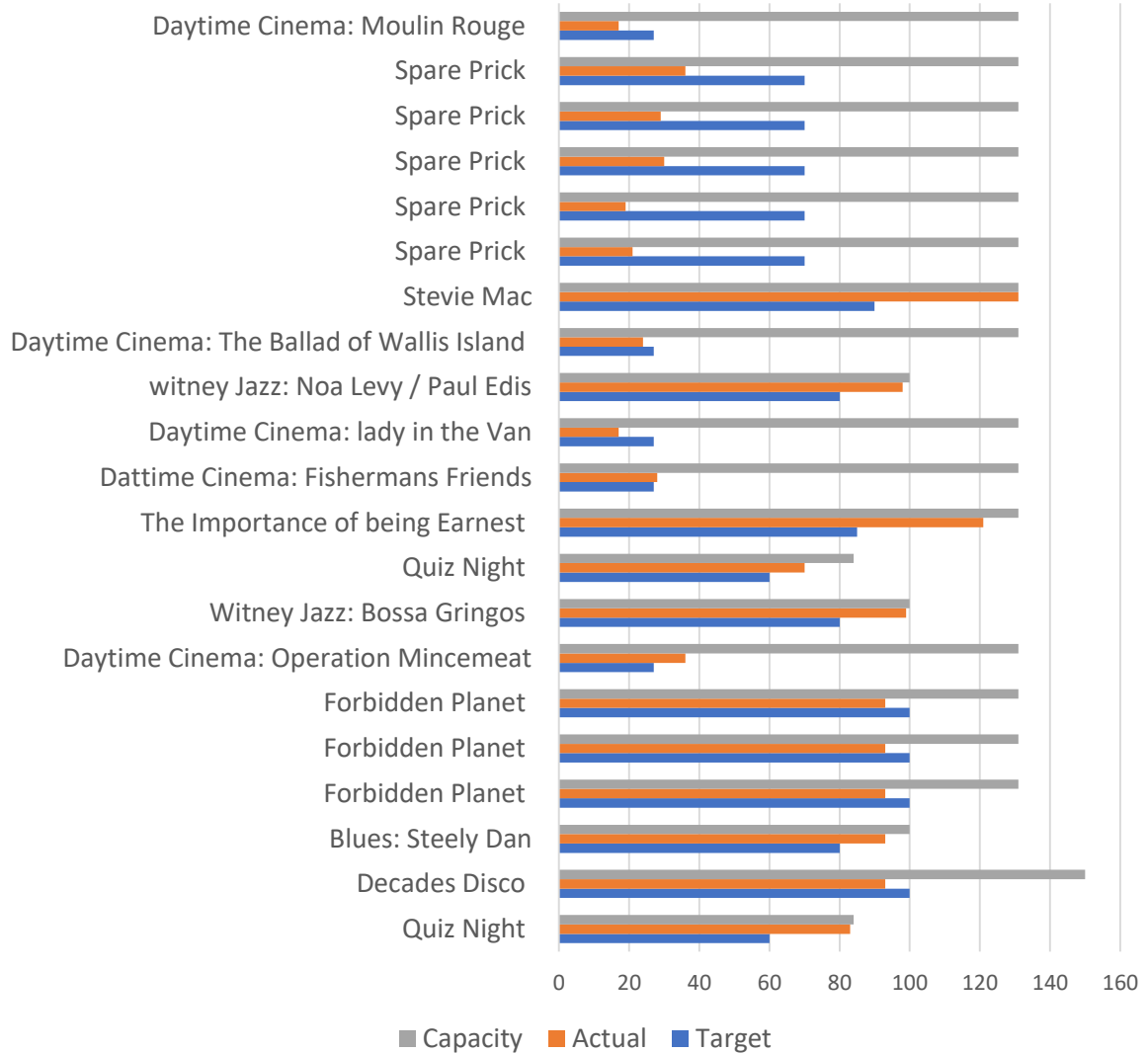
The graphs below show the number of ticketed events hosted by category, since the last report in January 2026, and attendance figures (where available) for each event at The Corn Exchange since the last report, alongside a target attendance to show how each event is performing in line with officers' 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.

Event Categories



Target Attendance, Actual Attendance and Capacity



Recent events

Quiz Nights

Quiz Nights sold out in March, while April was almost sold out. Attendance in May was slightly lower, likely due to the heatwave and the Bank Holiday weekend; however, feedback from attendees remained positive and bar takings continued to be strong.

The quiz continues to be a cost-effective and popular event. Adrian, our Quiz Master, has been booked to resume quizzes following the summer break, commencing on 19 September and running through to the end of the year.

Decades Disco

The Decades Disco experienced slower-than-expected ticket sales in the lead-up to the event; however, strong walk-in attendance on the night resulted in the event reaching approximately 75% capacity. Audience feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with many attendees commenting on their enjoyment of the evening and expressing a desire for similar events to be held in the future.

Witney Jazz & Blues

Witney Jazz & Blues events continue to be popular and are gaining increasing traction. The programme has attracted notable guests, including Paul Jones, who will be visiting in July, bringing significant attention to the Corn Exchange.

These regular events are now a staple of the Corn Exchange calendar, and tickets are frequently requested during Box Office sessions.

Cinema

Recent screenings have included:

- Operation Mincemeat
- Fisherman's Friends
- The Lady in the Van
- The Ballad of Wallis Island
- Moulin Rouge

The daytime cinema programme continues to grow and develop. Both *Fisherman's Friends* and *Operation Mincemeat* generated a profit. The introduction of trailers before screenings has created opportunities to promote upcoming events to a captive audience.

Audiences continue to enjoy the film selection and regularly provide suggestions for future screenings. Officers are currently considering reintroducing evening screenings.

The Summer Holiday Cinema programme will launch weekly screenings of children's films under the theme *Childhood Classics*, featuring five films from five different decades over five consecutive weeks.

Feedback from some customers suggests that later afternoon screenings would be preferable, as lunchtime screenings can be difficult to attend. This feedback will be considered for implementation following the summer break.

Stevie Mac

The Stevie Mac show sold out several weeks in advance. Audiences thoroughly enjoyed the performance and left positive feedback on social media regarding the quality of the lighting and sound. This has subsequently attracted interest from future hirers.

The band has expressed a strong interest in returning and is looking to book another performance in 2027.

Spare Prick

Attendance for *Spare Prick* was unfortunately lower than anticipated. We believe this may have been due to the extended run from Tuesday to Saturday, which is unusual for our venue. Despite the lower attendance, the hirer remains keen to return and is planning another run of performances in 2027.

Rebecca Poole

The Rebecca Poole event was also under-attended. This may have been due to limited marketing reach both online and in person.

The Importance of Being Earnest

The Importance of Being Earnest sold extremely well and was close to a sell-out performance. The hirer is looking to return either at the end of 2026 or during 2027.

The Corn Exchange stands out as the only venue on the group's Oxfordshire tour capable of providing professional lighting and sound services, which continues to be a significant advantage.

There was a minor sound issue during the performance; however, this was managed effectively by the group. The cause was subsequently traced to a faulty cable, which has since been removed from service.

Return to the Forbidden Planet

Buttercross Theatre Productions' spring production was *Return to the Forbidden Planet*. The show was well attended throughout its run.

The production featured a large-scale professional scaffolding set, creating a tiered performance space. This unique staging provided a significant visual impact and offered audiences an experience unlike anything previously seen at the Corn Exchange.

The production also demonstrated the flexibility and adaptability of the Main Hall as a theatre performance space.

Private Events and Venue Hire

The Corn Exchange and Burwell Hall have hosted a variety of private events during this period, including regular group meetings, private parties, presentations, and other community activities.

In early May, we hosted a wedding ceremony in the Gallery Room, followed by a small cocktail reception in the Café. The couple were extremely pleased with the service provided and left positive feedback for both the venue and bar staff, both on the day and afterwards.

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:

- 5th June Witney Jazz Jonny Kerry Quartet
- 13th June Yellow Submarine's Got Talent Charity Show Case
- 16th June Daytime Cinema Finding Your Feet
- 19th June Quiz Night
- 26th June Foodbank Charity Fundraiser Gala
- 30th June Daytime Cinema Notting Hill
- 3rd July Music Box Events Paul Jones & Friends
- 14th July Daytime Cinema H is for Hawk
- 17th – 18th July Buttercross Theatre Productions Hadestown Teen Edition
- 23rd July Music Box events Julia Titus' Speakasy Band
- 28th July – 25th August Summer Holiday Cinema:
 - 28th July Chitty Chitty Bang Bang
 - 4th August Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory
 - 11th August The Little Mermaid
 - 18th August The Lion King
 - 25th August Monsters Inc.
- 30th July The Tale of Peter Rabbit and Benjamin Bunny
- 7th August Witney Jazz Ben Porter's Tribute to Porter and Gershwin
- 21st August Candy Girls Cabaret Night
- 28th August Teddy Bears Picnic

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 **23rd March – 14th June** indicates a **10% increase** in hours booked for the Main Hall and a **11% increase** for Burwell Hall, while bookings for the Gallery Room show a **9% decrease** compared with last year.

Week commencing	23rd March	30th March	6th April	13th April	20th April	27th April	4th May	11th May	18th May	25th May	1st June	8th June		
CORN EX 2026 - 27														
Hours booked	39.00	43.00	25.00	42.00	32.00	45.00	41.00	48.00	41.00	25.00	39.00	31.00	451.00	Total Hrs
Usage Percentage	46.00	51.00	30.00	50.00	37.00	54.00	49.00	57.00	48.00	30.00	46.00	37.00	38.21	Average %
SAME PERIOD 2025 - 26														
CORN EXCHANGE														
Hours booked	43.00	41.00	46.00	11.00	38.00	39.00	38.00	38.00	26.00	19.00	42.00	30.00	411.00	Total Hrs
Usage Percentage	51.00	39.00	55.00	13.00	45.00	47.00	45.00	45.00	27.00	20.00	43.00	29.00	31.09	Average %
GALLERY 2026 - 27														
Hours booked	31.00	23.00	32.00	10.00	31.00	18.00	31.00	20.00	18.00	15.00	13.00	10.00	252.00	Total Hrs
Usage Percentage	37.00	27.00	37.00	12.00	21.00	21.00	37.00	24.00	21.00	18.00	15.00	11.00	20.07	Average %
SAME PERIOD 2025 - 26														
GALLERY														
Hours booked	27.00	13.00	26.00	13.00	26.00	22.00	32.00	37.00	34.00	18.00	15.00	13.00	276.00	Total Hrs
Usage Percentage	32.00	15.00	31.00	15.00	30.00	27.00	37.00	43.00	35.00	19.00	18.00	15.00	22.64	Average %
Burwell Hall														
MAIN HALL 2026 - 27														
Hours booked	45.00	17.00	25.00	42.00	51.00	49.00	45.00	48.00	43.00	24.00	39.00	42.00	470.00	Total Hrs
Usage Percentage	54.00	20.00	30.00	50.00	60.00	58.00	54.00	57.00	50.00	28.00	46.00	50.00	39.79	Average %
SAME PERIOD 2025 - 27														
MAIN HALL														
Hours booked	34.00	32.00	26.00	26.00	39.00	53.00	36.00	39.00	39.00	17.00	39.00	42.00	422.00	Total Hrs
Usage Percentage	40.00	37.00	31.00	31.00	46.00	63.00	42.00	46.00	40.00	16.00	46.00	50.00	34.86	Average %

1863 Café & Bar

The 1863 Café & Bar has increased in popularity year-on-year - final figures show sales increased by 20% for the year 2025/26 compared to 2024/25.

Since 1st April 2026, sales have increased a further 7% in comparison to the same period last year.

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 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.

Recommendations

Member are invited to note the report.