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

Held on Monday, 8 June 2026

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

Present:

Councillor R Crouch (Chair)

Councillors:	J Robertshaw	D Enright
	J Treloar	J Aitman (In place of O Collins)
	R Smith	
Officers:	Adam Clapton	Deputy Town Clerk
	Derek Mackenzie	Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk
	Thomas Davies	Deputy Venue & Events Officer
	Nigel Warner	Responsible Financial Officer
Others:	None.	

H282 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors G Doughty & J Doughty.

A further apology for absence was received from Councillor O Collins, Councillor J Aitman attended as a substitute.

The Committee Clerk reminded all Members of the importance of submitting their apologies directly to him ahead of the meeting so that they may accurately be recorded.

H283 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

H284 **ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR**

The Chair called for nominations for the position of Vice-Chair of the Committee.

It was proposed and seconded that Councillor J Treloar be elected. There being no other nominations it was:

Resolved:

That, Councillor Jack Treloar be elected Vice-Chair of the Committee for the 2026/27 municipal year.

H285 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the Halls Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 16 March 2026 were received.

Resolved:

That, the minutes of the Halls Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 16 March 2026 be approved as a correct record of the meeting and be signed by the Chair.

H286 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There was no public participation.

H287 **COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The committee considered whether any changes were needed to the current Terms of Reference.

No amendments were required therefore it was:

Recommended:

1. That, no amendments be made to the Terms of Reference and,
2. That, the Terms of Reference be recommended for approval by the Full Council at the meeting of 13 July 2026.

H288 **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 informed that the end-of-year adjustments were being undertaken. It was noted that the Committee held a relatively large number of earmarked reserves within its remit, which would be reflected in the general reserves following this work.

Members welcomed, the significant reductions in the running costs of Café 1863, which resulted in a lower overall net cost for the facility. The RFO provided additional detail and rationale regarding the continued decision to not “opt to tax” Burwell Hall and clarified the accounting treatment of the Council’s properties within the relevant framework.

Overall, it was reported that the service areas within the Committee’s remit had been delivered under budget for 2025/26. This could be attributed to the setting of a prudent initial budget, alongside stronger than anticipated income streams, particularly from Café 1863. Additionally, improved accuracy in the coding of expenditure and strengthened internal processes had contributed to greater transparency in financial reporting.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and,
2. That, the management accounts of the Halls Cemeteries & Allotments Committee for the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026 be approved.

The Responsible Financial Officer left the meeting at 6:19pm

H289 **ANNUAL RESIDENT'S SURVEY**

Members received the results of the annual resident survey which it was noted were consistent with previous discussions on this topic via Committees earlier in the cycle, Members observed that responses were often submitted predominantly by residents wishing to raise concerns, rather than those providing positive feedback.

Despite this, Members welcomed the positive comments that had been received. In particular, it was noted by Members that the Corn Exchange was a “wonderful asset” to the town, providing a valued and welcoming community space.

Members expressed a desire to obtain a broader and more balanced range of feedback throughout the year. It was requested that Officers review approaches to gathering feedback on an ongoing basis to ensure a more representative range of responses. Officers confirmed that this matter would be considered further at the forthcoming meeting of the Stronger Communities Committee.

Members also recommended that the Stronger Communities Committee consider the provision of a community litter picking station for the area around Burwell Hall area at its upcoming meeting.

Additionally, a Member reported having held an initial discussion with another local arts venue, which had expressed an interest in collaborating with officers. The Member confirmed that details would be shared with the Venue and Events Team for further exploration.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, the Stronger Communities Committee along with Officers further review and implement improved methods for gathering resident feedback throughout the year, to ensure a broader and more representative range of responses and;
3. That, the Stronger Communities Committee gives consideration to the provision of a community litter-picking station at its meeting on 15 June and;
4. That, Officers explore the potential collaboration opportunity with the local arts venue, once details had been shared.

H290 **PUBLIC HALLS REPORT**

The Committee received the report of the Venues & Events Officer (V&EO), together with a verbal explanation on the technical aspects contained within it.

Members received updates on the “1 in 200” local author scheme and the local art display initiative. It was noted that both initiatives are generating interest among users of the Corn Exchange and Café 1863.

A request to light up the Corn Exchange for Long Covid Awareness day in March each year was considered and received unanimous approval.

Members considered the comprehensive report outlining proposed wedding packages for the Corn Exchange. It was agreed that the venue was a valuable asset, that would offer excellent value through the proposed three-tier package structure.

Members raised questions regarding catering arrangements and insurance requirements, which were addressed by the V&EO to the satisfaction of Members.

Members noted that offering the packages in a tiered format provided clarity for both Officers and customers from the outset, ensuring a shared understanding of the services to be delivered by the Venues and Events Team, both in advance of and on the day of events.

Members were unanimous in their support for the rollout of the wedding packages and looked forward to receiving updates following implementation.
Members noted that the previously approved budget for a basic hearing loop system would not, following further exploration by Officers, be sufficient or suitable for the Council's requirements. The report therefore presented alternative options for consideration.

Following discussion, it was unanimously agreed that the Auracast system be selected for installation at the Corn Exchange (Main Hall), and Infrared for Burwell Hall and the Corn Exchange (Gallery Room), at a cost of £20,000, based on the quote received. This would provide the best coverage for the bespoke needs of the venues, ensuring clarity of audio and confidentiality for hirers. Members also recognised that individuals with hearing difficulties did not always raise concerns when audio quality was poor, they emphasised the importance of ensuring accessibility so that all users are able to fully enjoy and engage with events.

In addition, Members agreed to the purchase of two independent and portable hearing loop systems, at a cost of £210 each. These would support one-to-one conversations and would be available within the Administration Office and Café 1863.

It was further suggested that an application be submitted to the Witney Town Hall Charity for grant support, alongside the continuation of the application to Arts Council England. Members also noted that the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) had advised that as part of the year-end review of available earmarked reserves, that a potential funding stream may become available and that this could be reported to the Policy, Governance and Finance Committee on 22 June 2026.

Members discussed the findings of the recent fire safety audit at the Corn Exchange and considered a number of proposed improvements. It was unanimously agreed to amend the booking conditions to emphasise the importance of hirers recognising and fulfilling their responsibilities when using the Council's venues.

Members sought clarity regarding responsibility for the preparation of Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs), and how the Council could ensure that electrical equipment brought on site by hirers had undergone appropriate PAT testing. The V&EO confirmed that established procedures were in place to work with hirers to ensure these requirements were met and compliance was maintained.

Recommended:

1. That, the report together with the verbal update, be noted and;
2. That, the request to light up the Corn Exchange for Long Covid Day annually be approved and;

3. That, the proposed wedding packages for the Corn Exchange be recommended for approval and implementation and;
4. That, the Auracast system (Corn Exchange Main Hall) and Infrared systems (Burwell Hall and Corn Exchange Gallery Room) be approved for installation, together with the purchase of two portable hearing loop systems and;
5. That, Officers submit a grant application to the Witney Town Hall Charity and continue the application to Arts Council England to support the hearing loop project and;
6. That, the RFO reviews potential funding from earmarked reserves, with any proposals to be reported to the Policy, Governance and Finance Committee and;
7. That, the proposed amendments to booking conditions, following the fire safety audit, be recommended for approval.

H291 **CORN EXCHANGE BUSINESS REPORT**

Members received and considered the report of the Venue & Events Officer.

Members noted the feedback on the recent events held at the Corn Exchange.

The Committee also received the forthcoming events calendar and venue usage figures, which demonstrated positive increases in activity levels. The continued popularity of Café 1863 again acknowledged following the improvements in income performance compared to previous years.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

H292 **PUBLIC HALLS BUSINESS PLAN REVIEW**

Members received and considered the updated Business Plan. The principal amendment was the inclusion of Café 1863, following an earlier request of the Committee.

The Venues and Events Officer (V&EO) outlined the vision and purpose sections of the Plan. Members were unanimously supportive of the three strategic pillars identified, which underpinned Café 1863 as an affordable, accessible, sustainable and community-focused venue.

Members noted that, wherever possible, Café 1863 seeked to source products from local suppliers and those that were endorsed as Fairtrade. It was also recognised that this approach should be balanced with the Council's duty to ensure value for money and responsible use of public funds.

It was further noted that the integration of Café 1863 with the wider events offerings at the Corn Exchange was delivering improved financial performance. This would continue to be monitored and reported to the Committee through future updates.

Members discussed the potential role of the Corn Exchange in supporting provision for young people. It was recognised that the Council already contributed to youth engagement through its support of The Station's BREAK and that Café 1863 has been utilised during holiday periods. Members agreed that, while the Council remained committed to supporting youth provision, venues such as The Courtside Hub at the Leys may be better suited to regular youth focused activities, ensuring that provision could be accommodated without impacting on existing bookings and the operational viability of the Corn Exchange.

Resolved:

1. That, the updated Business Plan be noted and;
2. That, the three strategic pillars underpinning the Café 1863's vision and purpose to be a community social hub, support events and had commercial sustainability be approved.

The Venue & Events Officer left the meeting at 7:20pm

H293 **COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUE REQUEST - CORPORAL JOHN S. CHRISTIANSEN**

Members received and considered the report of the Administration Assistant (Facilities) regarding a request for the establishment of a memorial plaque for a US soldier who was interred at Tower Hill Cemetery prior to repatriation to New York.

Members were unanimous in their approval of the purchase and installation of the plaque. It was further requested that a QR code be incorporated to provide access to additional information for those wishing to learn more.

Recommended:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, the purchase and installation of a memorial plaque for Corporal John S. Cristianssen at Tower Hill Cemetery be approved from budget 301/4350.
3. That, a QR code be included on the plaque to provide access to further historical information.

H294 **CEMETERY REGULATIONS REVIEW**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Senior Administration Officer regarding the forthcoming review of the Cemetery Regulations.

Members were pleased to note that cemetery users, funeral directors, and the Friends of the Cemetery were being consulted to gather their views on potential changes, which would be taken into consideration by Officers as part of the review process.

Members received details of requests to scatter ashes within the Cemeteries and heard that the Council was accommodating in this respect when compared to other local parishes. A specific request relating to scattering within plots on the Windrush Ashes Path had been received.

Following discussion, it was unanimously agreed that Officers should draft clear wording within the Cemetery Regulations to ensure that the process and conditions relating to the scattering of ashes were fully understood by all cemetery users.

Members also welcomed the opportunity to review the updated regulations and noted that these would be presented for approval at the meeting of the Committee scheduled for 14 September 2026.

Resolved:

1. That, the report be noted and;
2. That, Officers carry out a full review of the cemetery regulations as proposed including clear wording regarding the scattering of ashes and;

3. That, the updated Cemetery Regulations be presented to the Committee for approval at its meeting on 14 September 2026.

H295 **BRAMM CEMETERY OF THE YEAR AWARDS 2026**

The Committee received and considered the invitation from BRAMM (Burial and Cremation Administration Register Management Mentorship) to enter the Cemetery of the year awards for 2026.

Members agreed that both the Tower Hill & Windrush Cemeteries should be entered as this offered the potential to gain feedback on the cemeteries and allow both Officers and the Council to focus its strategic and operational aims.

Resolved:

That, Tower Hill and Windrush Cemeteries be entered into the Parish, Town & Community Council category of the Cemetery of the Year Awards 2026.

The meeting closed at: 7.34 pm

Chair