

HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE



Agenda Item: Public Halls Business Report

Meeting Date: 14th September 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.

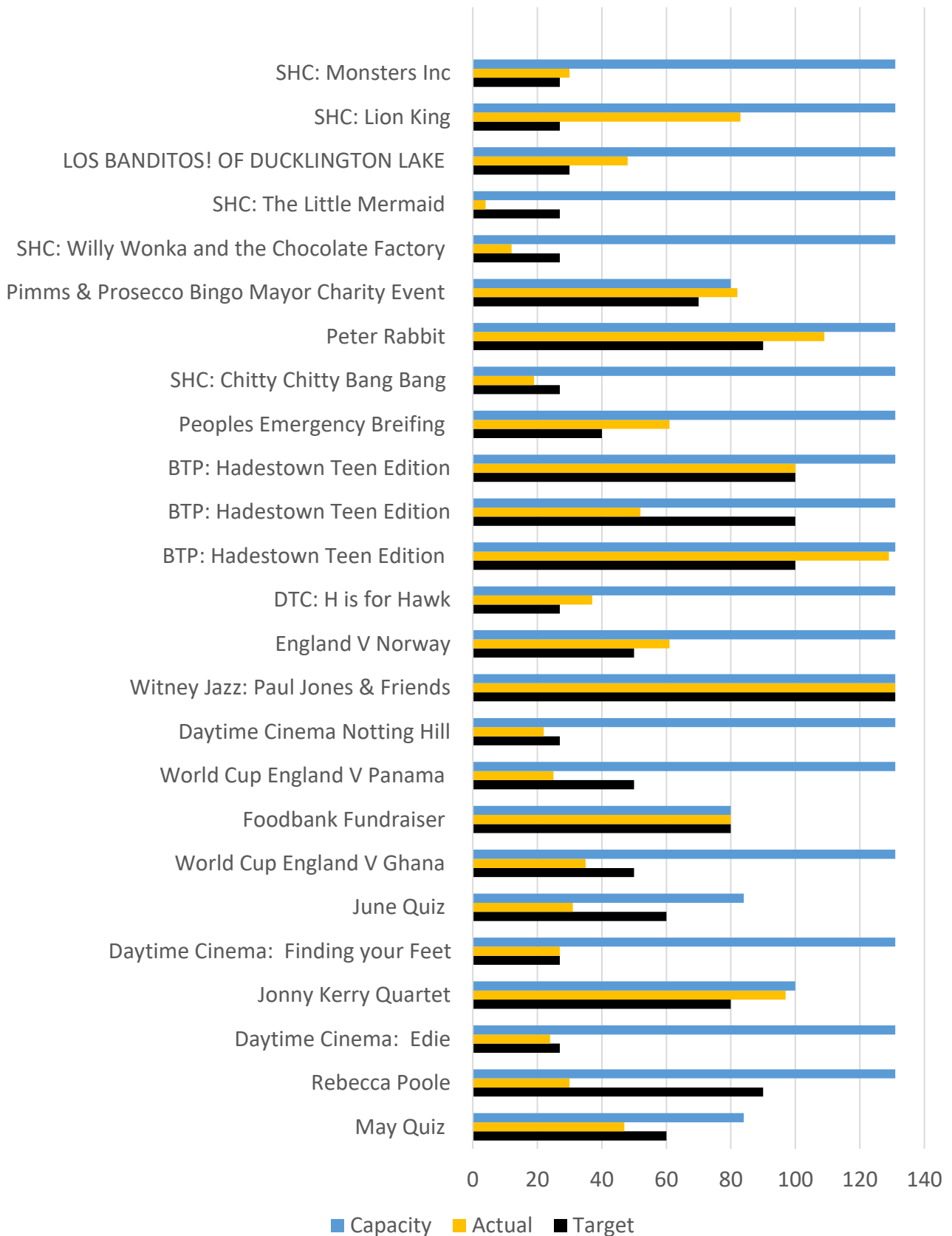
The Council seeks to make the Corn Exchange accessible to the whole community by encouraging participation and offering a diverse programme of music, arts and cultural events. In addition, the Council will provide a professional, well-maintained venue available to hire for private events such as parties,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

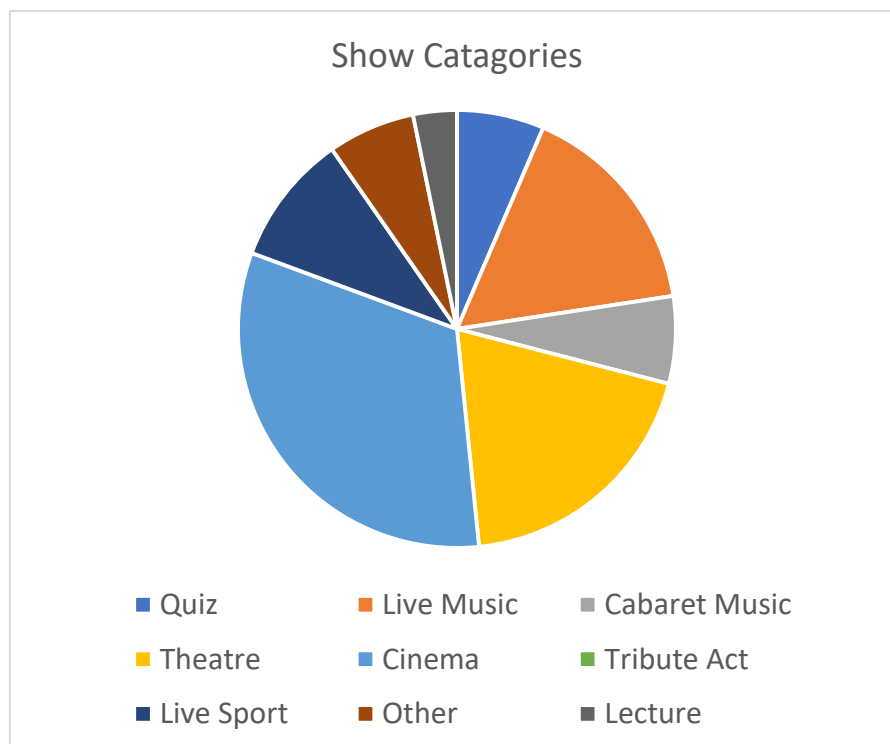
Current Situation

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 June 2026, including attendance figures and 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.

Target Attendance, Actual Attendance and Capacity





Recent

Tunes on the Square

Tunes on the Square has been hugely successful this year. The event has been consistently well attended, with audience numbers increasing week on week.

The increased popularity of the event created additional staffing requirements. Officers responded by deploying additional staff and opening a second outside bar during periods of peak demand. This increased service capacity, reduced queues and enabled the venue to maximise bar sales.

Overall feedback has been very positive, with attendees making recommendations for how the event could be developed further next year, including suggestions to expand the event across a greater area of the Square. The pavement license renewal application has been submitted with an amended layout, to cover the width of the square up to the access road.

The events have had a positive impact on bar revenue, evident by a **26.5% increase** in revenue (source of data is EPOS reports) during the period 19th June – 29th August in comparison to last year. Direct comparison of revenue on the Fridays that the event took place, show a **110% increase** in total bar revenue generated on these days compared to last year. This comparison includes daytime takings and, on some dates, other events taking place within the venue. It therefore should not be interpreted as a direct measure of revenue attributable solely to Tunes on the Square; however, it provides a useful indicator of the event's positive impact on overall bar performance.

The event has also had a positive community impact, providing a regular weekly opportunity for residents to meet, socialise and enjoy live music in the town centre. The event has attracted repeat attendees throughout the series, as well as visitors from surrounding communities including Bampton and Carterton.

Events

The decision was made to amend the time to 19:00 – 21:00 this year, which had a number of benefits:

- **Increased window for sales:** customers arrived earlier each week to secure their seats, leading to a longer window of drinks sales. It also meant that people are able to stay for a drink after the performance.
- **More daylight:** By bringing the finish time forward to 21:00, we had more daylight for a longer period of the series. Officers are looking for some atmospheric lighting solution for next year, as the trees are unable to be lit during nesting season.
- **Less conflict with other venues:** Other local venues with live music tend to start at 21:00, meaning people are still able to support these other venues after attending Tunes on The Square.

Based on the success of the 2026 series, officers recommend continuing Tunes on the Square in 2027, with consideration given to expanding the event footprint, starting the series earlier in the year, and exploring additional atmospheric lighting options. The experience gained this year will also enable staffing and bar operations to be planned more effectively around anticipated demand.



Witney Jazz & Blues

Witney Jazz & Blues events continue to be popular and successful, with the programme gaining increasing traction. The Paul Jones performance was particularly successful, selling out several months in advance of the show date. These regular events are now a staple of the Corn Exchange calendar, with tickets frequently requested during Box Office sessions.

Cinema

Recent daytime cinema screenings have included:

- *Edie*
- *Finding Your Feet*
- *Notting Hill*
- *H is for Hawk*

The Daytime Cinema programme continues to grow and develop, with an average attendance of 25 people per screening since January. The lowest-attended screening this quarter was *Notting Hill*, with 22 attendees, while *H is for Hawk* attracted 37 attendees.

Audiences have consistently expressed enthusiasm for the return of Daytime Cinema following the summer break. Officers are considering the potential to move to weekly screenings, which may make the programme easier to market to a wider audience and help establish a more consistent routine for customers.

Following audience feedback regarding public transport and bus times, we will be moving screenings slightly later in the day.

Officers are additionally in discussion about reintroducing evening cinema screenings to broaden the programme and reach new audiences.

Summer Holiday Cinema

The Summer Holiday Cinema programme was an overall success, although it took a couple of weeks for attendance to build.

Attendance figures were:

- *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* – 19
- *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory* – 12
- *The Little Mermaid* – 4
- *The Lion King* – 83
- *Monsters, Inc.* – 30

The screening of *The Lion King* benefited from the attendance of 40 members and staff from the ICE Centre, significantly increasing the overall audience. This has established a positive relationship that officers will look to develop further for future holiday programmes.

The attendance figures and audience response have also helped inform potential themes for next year's programme. We have decided on the theme '90's Nostalgia' and have begun to short list films.

World Cup Matches

The Corn Exchange streamed England matches during the summer. A small number of matches could not be screened due to time-zone considerations and existing bookings in the Main Hall. The target audience for these events was affected by the later kick-off times.

The key selling point of the screenings in previous years was their family-friendly environment, providing an alternative for people who may not feel comfortable watching matches in a pub. However, with some matches kicking off between 9pm and 1am and several taking place mid-week, many families opted to watch from home.

As England progressed through the tournament, audience numbers increased. Unfortunately, the venue was unable to screen the quarter-final due to existing commitments.

Mayoral Charity Fundraisers

Two Mayoral charity fundraising events have taken place since the previous report. Both events were reported as successful in achieving their fundraising objectives.

Hadestown: Teen Edition

Buttercross Theatre Productions presented *Hadestown: Teen Edition*, providing an opportunity for their young performers to showcase their work.

The young performers also provided a warm-up performance for Tunes on the Square to help market their upcoming show. This was a positive addition to the event and is something that could potentially continue in future years.

The Tale of Peter Rabbit and Benjamin Bunny

The Tale of Peter Rabbit and Benjamin Bunny was well attended and received positively.

There were also strong sales of drinks, ice creams and snacks. Although these sales cannot be directly measured through the till figures, there was a noticeable number of audience members taking refreshments purchased in 1863 into the auditorium. The theatre company continues to provide a cost-effective programme and is keen to return next year with a production of *The Wind in the Willows*.

Los Banditos! of Ducklington Lake

Los Banditos! of Ducklington Lake attracted fewer attendees than anticipated; however, the screening provided a valuable opportunity to showcase the work of a local young filmmaker.

The post-screening Q&A with members of the cast and crew was a particularly positive addition, providing audiences with an opportunity to engage directly with those involved in the production.

Candy Girls

Following slow sales and feedback from customers, the *Candy Girls* event has been postponed until March. Feedback indicated that August may not be the most suitable time of year for theatre-style or higher-commitment events.

The event will therefore be revisited in March, when audience availability is expected to be more favourable.

Private Events and Venue Hire

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

Recent hires have included:

- Two dance showcases
- A birthday party
- Teacher training
- A conference
- A photography exhibition
- Recruitment events for other businesses

Most hirers have completed feedback forms, providing valuable information on their experience of the venues and highlighting areas for continued development.

Upcoming Events

The Corn Exchange will continue to host a range of regular in-house and third-party events, including:

- Witney Jazz & Blues – First Friday of every month
- Tea Dance – Every Wednesday
- Buttercross Theatre Productions classes – Multiple classes every week
- Witney Speakers Club – Every other Wednesday
- Specsavers Coffee Morning – First Thursday of each month
- West Oxfordshire Art Society Lectures – Once a month
- St Mary's Art Group – Every Monday
- White Feather Spiritualist Church – Once a month

Several new groups have also been added for the upcoming term, including a support group and a teaching group.

Upcoming Public Ticketed Events

- Witney Jazz & Blues
 - Linley Hamilton Quartet – 4 September
 - Burt Bacharach Reimagined – 2 October
 - Hank Theessink – Colo Blues – 23 October
- Magic of Film Music – Lecture – 5 September
- Buttercross Theatre Productions: Cluedo – 10–12 September
- Quiz Nights – 18 September, 9 October and 13 November
- Witney Wine Festival – 3 October
- Danny Lee Grew – 24K Magic – 10 October
- Shadowing Hank – 17 October
- Witney Dramatic Society: The Hound of the Baskervilles – 29–31 October
- Status Quo Tribute (with John Coghlan) – 7 November
- Daytime Cinema
 - *My Fair Lady* – 22 September
 - *The Penguin Lessons* – 6 October
 - *The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society* – 20 October
 - *The Great Escaper* – 3 November
 - *Evita* – 17 November
 - *White Christmas* – 1 December

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.

The summer is a typically quieter period for bookings, due to the term time nature of many of our hirers. This year has seen an increased usage across all three hireable spaces, compared to the same period in 2025.

The usage report for the period **15th June – 20th September** indicates a **3.2% increase** in hours booked for the Corn Exchange Main Hall, a **3.6% increase** for the Gallery Room and a **16% increase** for Burwell Hall.

Week commencing	15th June	22nd June	29th June	6th July	13th July	20th July	27th July	3rd Aug	10th Aug	17th Aug	24th Aug	31st Aug	7th Sept	14th Sept		
CORN EX 2026 - 27																
Hours booked	28.00	27.00	39.00	38.00	45.00	33.00	30.00	25.00	38.00	20.00	35.00	40.00	44.00	28.00	470.00	Total Hrs
Usage Percentage	33.00	32.00	47.00	45.00	54.00	39.00	35.00	30.00	45.00	24.00	42.00	48.00	52.00	33.00	39.93	Average %
SAME PERIOD 2025 - 26																
CORN EXCHANGE																
Hours booked	51.00	31.00	47.00	31.00	38.00	35.00	31.00	20.00	22.00	12.00	15.00	49.00	29.00	44.00	455.00	Total Hrs
Usage Percentage	61.00	37.00	56.00	36.00	45.00	42.00	37.00	24.00	26.00	14.00	18.00	58.00	35.00	52.00	38.64	Average %
GALLERY 2026 - 27																
Hours booked	22.00	29.00	22.00	8.00	23.00	22.00	17.00	22.00	13.00	29.00	23.00	14.00	16.00	20.00	280.00	Total Hrs
Usage Percentage	26.00	34.00	26.00	9.00	28.00	26.00	20.00	26.00	15.00	34.00	28.00	17.00	19.00	24.00	23.71	Average %
SAME PERIOD 2025 - 26																
GALLERY																
Hours booked	34.00	27.00	14.00	50.00	20.00	12.00	6.00	18.00	11.00	13.00	8.00	20.00	20.00	17.00	270.00	Total Hrs
Usage Percentage	40.00	32.00	17.00	60.00	23.00	15.00	7.00	21.00	13.00	15.00	10.00	24.00	24.00	20.00	22.93	Average %
Burwell Hall																
MAIN HALL 2026 - 27																
Hours booked	38.00	46.00	44.00	47.00	39.00	45.00	18.00	23.00	29.00	30.00	24.00	26.00	40.00	53.00	502.00	Total Hrs
Usage Percentage	45.00	55.00	52.00	56.00	46.00	53.00	21.00	27.00	34.00	35.00	28.00	30.00	47.00	63.00	42.29	Average %
SAME PERIOD 2025 - 26																
MAIN HALL																
Hours booked	37.00	39.00	31.00	41.00	40.00	35.00	31.00	18.00	23.00	15.00	18.00	20.00	41.00	33.00	422.00	Total Hrs
Usage Percentage	44.00	46.00	37.00	49.00	47.00	42.00	37.00	38.00	28.00	18.00	21.00	23.00	49.00	39.00	37.00	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 continues to provide a valuable and well-loved community space for many local residents.

As reported at the end of the financial year March 2025, the 1863 Café and Bar revenue increased by around 20% in comparison to the previous year. So far this year, EPOS figures indicate that the revenue has increased a further 15.6% for the period April – August. This is due to the continued increase in daily turnover in the

café, as well as the huge success of Tunes on The Square during the summer months.

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