
Agenda Item: Corn Exchange Business Plan

Meeting Date: Monday 14th September

Contact Officer: Venue & Events Officer

Appendix Summary

Appendix 1 (page 3): Corn Exchange Business Plan (June 2026 Update)

The purpose of this report is to outline projects and objectives planned in relation to the business plan, ahead of budget setting cycle in November.

Background

The primary purpose of the Business Plan is to define clear objectives and establish the strategies and procedures required to achieve them. The Corn Exchange Business Plan is regularly reviewed and updated to reflect the venue's ongoing development and operational changes.

As a community arts venue, the Corn Exchange places social value and community benefit at the core of its mission, while also recognising the importance of long-term financial stability. The Business Plan therefore seeks to balance these priorities; ensuring that the Corn Exchange continues to serve as a vibrant, accessible, and sustainable cultural hub for years to come.

Current Situation

Marketing

Whilst many comparable venues benefit from staff whose sole focus is marketing and audience development, these responsibilities at The Corn Exchange are currently undertaken by the Venue & Events Co-ordinator alongside a wide range of operational and event management duties, supported by the Venue & Events Officer.

Consequently, marketing has been identified as a key area for further development within the venue. The Venue & Events Co-ordinator has made significant progress in enhancing the venue's profile through initiatives such as an improved social media strategy, the introduction of a WhatsApp channel, and the production of a regular "What's On" brochure, all of which have contributed to increasing event attendance. However, there is an opportunity to develop a more comprehensive marketing strategy to further strengthen the venue's position and promote its

wider commercial offer, including weddings, hybrid conferencing, third-party events and general room hire.

The venue currently has a £3,000 “Publicity” budget for 2025/26, which includes marketing elements such as poster printing, advertising etc. Members should consider an increase to this budget line for 2026/27 to allow officers to work to a marketing strategy with the aim to increase; event attendances, wedding bookings, hybrid conference hirers, third-party shows and other general bookings.

Officers will research and provide proposed costed marketing projects for the November cycle, including; additional printing for what’s on and wedding brochures, third-party marketing agency options etc.

Tunes on The Square

Following the success of Tunes on the Square in 2026, officers recommend extending the period of these events in 2027, by starting in May to capitalise on the high footfall and bar sales. This would result in a greater spend on the events budget – however, members should be aware that due to the sales going through the bar and not tickets, there won’t be a direct reflection of the income from these events seen in the venues event budget line.

Officers will include Tunes on The Square as a key event within the business plan for 2027, with forecasted spend and strategy to maximise bar revenue, whilst maintaining the community feel of the event.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and

1. Consider the inclusion of 1863 Café and Bar Business plan within the Corn Exchange Business Plan at the next review.

Witney Town Council

Corn Exchange

Business Plan



November 2023

*"To create a modern, accessible, and affordable arts venue for **Witney** and its community, providing a space capable of hosting both **local** and **professional** arts performances, fostering creativity, and enriching the cultural life of the area."*

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Document Owner	Tom Smith	Venue & Events Officer
Date Created	06/11/2023	Tom Smith
Next review date	29/05/2024	Tom Smith
Next review date	03/03/25	Tom Smith
Next review date	27/10/25	Tom Davies

Amendments		
Additions or changes made	Date	WTC Officer
Vision in Exec Summery, staff roles,	29/05/24	Tom Smith
Review progress of objectives	7/3/24	Tom Smith
Update Staffing Structure, update pricing structure, provide updates on year 1 projects and objectives, update year 2 objectives.	Nov 2025	Tom Davies

Introduction of 1863 Café and Bar section Updated Hiring Fee's Updates on year 2 projects	June 2026	Tom Davies

Executive Summary

Witney Town Council's key objective in serving the community through the Corn Exchange is 'Bringing and supporting the arts to everyone in Witney and West Oxfordshire'.

This business plan will demonstrate the benefits of the strategic actions ahead to ensure we provide a facility of choice, and all of our customers enjoy a professional and pleasant experience.

At all times the Town Council's commitment to working within the remit of a declared climate emergency. Consideration will be given to ensure our operations and facility are as efficient and effective as possible.

Background

Witney is a medium sized Market Town with a population of approximately 30,000 and serves as a gateway for the Cotswold's as well as being a popular destination in its own right. Situated in West Oxfordshire and having the potential scope to draw audiences from far and wide, Witney can be looked at as a destination town, saving people the travel time to get to Oxford or Cheltenham.

The Corn Exchange historical and current use

Until the mid-19th century, corn merchants traded from the ground floor of Witney Town Hall. In the early 1860s, a group of local businessmen decided to form a company, to be known as the "Witney Corn Exchange and Public Rooms Company", to finance and commission a purpose-built corn exchange for the town. The site they chose in Market Street had accommodated the "Corn Returns Office", a structure, which was designed in the Tudor style using timber-frame construction, and which dated from 1593.

The new building was designed by John Collier of Putney in the neoclassical style, built by a local builder, Malachi Bartlett, in ashlar stone at a cost of £2,500 and was officially opened on 17 September 1863. The design involved a symmetrical main frontage of three bays facing onto Market Street. The central bay featured a round headed doorway with a fanlight and a rusticated surround. There was a cross-window, with a segmental pediment and a balcony, supported by brackets, on the first floor. The outer bays were fenestrated by

segmental headed sash windows with rusticated architraves on the ground floor and by square headed sash windows with cornices on the first floor. At roof level there was an entablature inscribed with the words "Corn Exchange", a modillioned cornice and a central pediment. The central pediment contained a clock, which was flanked by pairs of pilasters, in the tympanum. Internally, the principal room was the main hall which was 70 feet (21 m) long and 35 feet (11 m) wide.

The use of the building as a corn exchange declined significantly in the wake of the Great Depression of British Agriculture in the late 19th century. After the area was advanced to the status of urban district in 1895, the new civic leaders decided to hold their meetings in the corn exchange, rather than in Witney Town Hall. The council went on to raise the necessary money to acquire the corn exchange, after the Witney Corn Exchange and Public Rooms Company was placed into liquidation in January 1911.

During the First World War the local branch of the Volunteer Training Corps used the corn exchange for drill practice on a weekly basis. Witney Urban District Council relocated from the corn exchange to a large Victorian era property at 26 Church Green in 1936. During the Second World War, the corn exchange was requisitioned for use as an entertainment place for soldiers and was also used by the council for fund raising in support of War Weapons Week.

The building became very dilapidated in the 1960s and was closed for public use in 1968. A local petition was initiated, demanding that the building be restored in the 1970s. Witney Town Council acquired the corn exchange in July 1977: an extensive programme of refurbishment works costing £150,000 was carried out and the building was re-opened by the mayor, Michael Chadwick, in February 1979. The building was remodelled internally, to enable the ground floor to be used as a cinema, in 1992. Two programmes from the BBC Radio 4 show, Gardeners' Question Time, were recorded in the building in February 2004. The ground floor was further upgraded in 2020 when the cafe/bar, 1863, was installed in the lobby area, run by the Town Council and operating as an ancillary function to the hall. Further improvements to the hall have been installed including tiered seating, which was completed 2022 giving the main hall a seated capacity of 131, as well as the re-introduction of the cinema screen and projector, thereby enabling the building to be re-opened by the then mayor, Liz Duncan, as an arts and performance hub in March 2023.

The Corn Exchange is open to all, not just to the hirers of the building and as such as part of the Town Councils commitment to a vibrant and welcoming community hub, the Corn Exchange is designated as both a cool and warm space, dependant on season, as well as a safe space for those who need it.

Historically the entrance to the Corn Exchange was divided into two rooms acting as a venue office and the other as small hireable space. This area was developed during the original refurbishment in 2015 and opened into one large hireable space, the area was never fully utilised and became an office area for the caretakers and bookings officer. With the appointment of a dedicated Venue Manager in 2019, one of the first decisions was to

change the use and create a café and bar area which was to be run by the Town Council. 1863 Café Bar was opened in 2020. Initially opening on just a Monday and Tuesday and being ran by a very small team of staff. After an interrupted first few months due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the café & bar was fully reopened in 2021 and since has become a popular destination point for regular customers. The Bar is equipped with EPOS till system and a bespoke bar designed and installed by a local carpenter.

Management Structure



The current staffing has evolved as the Corn Exchange has evolved, 5 years ago there was only a requirement for caretakers to facilitate the smooth running of the hall. This was deemed sufficient for the types of bookings that were being made at this time as well as managing the level of customer expectation associated with those bookings.

Now there is a wide variety of diverse events being held in the Corn Exchange every week throughout the year, the types of bookings have changed, the frequency of bookings have changed and as such the need for a different staffing structure has become apparent to fulfil the Town Council's vision of a destination venue in the centre of Witney. Customer expectation has grown with the development of the hall, and the staffing level in the hall has had to grow alongside this to support the new bookings being made.

The café and bar, 1863, has been installed to offer the public a reason to start using the Corn Exchange and to encourage new bookings as well as providing decent support to the multitude of events that are run in the hall. This was initially implemented and run by the Venue and Events Officer but due to the success of the business it has outgrown the

achievability of one or two people to successfully run it. Due to other areas which require the Venue and Events Officers time, the café has had to be restructured to allow it to grow.

Venue and Events Officer

- **Event Programming and Management:** Overseeing the delivery of events and ensuring they run smoothly, maintaining high standards of customer service, and attention to detail.
- **Staff Development and Wellbeing:** Ensuring the team is properly trained, developed, and supported, promoting a positive work environment.
- **Business Growth and Strategy:** Taking a strategic approach to the venue's growth, analysing opportunities for development while maintaining sustainability.
- **Licensing and Risk Management:** Ensuring all legal and safety requirements are met, including managing risk assessments, licenses, and ensuring the safety of the public and staff.
- **Hirer Relationships and Code of Conduct:** Managing relationships with event hirers, ensuring they adhere to a code of conduct, and maintaining the professional standards of the venue.
- **Caretaking and Support:** Overseeing the caretaking team at both the Corn Exchange and Burwell Hall, ensuring the spaces are maintained and well-prepared for events.

Venue & Events Co-Ordinator

After a small re-structure in 2025, the previous Deputy Venue & Events Officer moved into the Venue & Events Officer role, and the deputy role was replaced by a Venue & Events Co-Ordinator role. This role is designed to be hands-on, co-ordinating day-day operations of the Corn Exchange and Burwell Hall, as well as playing a key part in developing the events program and marketing delivery.

Café and Bar Manager

The Café and Bar Manager is responsible for the daily management and smooth operation of the café and bar at the Corn Exchange and Burwell Hall. This role involves managing service standards, overseeing stock control, coordinating casual staff, and ensuring a high level of customer service is delivered at all times.

Caretakers

There are two part time caretakers currently working for the halls with responsibility to lock and unlock the halls, set up hirers' rooms, meet and greet hirers as well as providing support for the hirer during their booking. Caretakers are deployed in The Corn Exchange and Burwell Hall.

Café and Bar Staff

1863 employs approximately 10 staff who are all deployed at different hours to suit the needs of the business. Daily running of the café and support for evening bar events. Café

staff are usually the first contact for someone entering the Corn Exchange, so it is vitally important that they are trained to provide excellent customer service as well as working knowledge about what events are happening in the hall on any given day.

Future Staffing

As the business grows, so will the level of staffing required to maintain and deliver the excellent level of customer service and varying diverse events which will be delivered by the Events team.

Regular reviews will be undertaken to ensure the correct level of resource is in place to match the growth and demand. This will adhere with the vision of the Town Council of the hall being a destination arts hub.

Market Appraisal and Approach

What are we offering?

Café 1863 is a vibrant, community-focused café located within the Corn Exchange, open six days a week (08:30 – 17:00, Monday to Saturday). Offering a wide selection of locally sourced hot and cold food and drinks, the café is known for its affordable and competitive prices. Designed to provide a welcoming and friendly environment, Café 1863 is a perfect spot for locals and visitors to enjoy a relaxing break, whether for a coffee, lunch, or a light snack.

On selected Fridays, Café 1863 stays open later until 22:00 to run the popular Fizzy Friday offer, where guests can enjoy a range of sparkling beverages and evening treats.

This is a licensed premises to serve alcohol that supplements the activities and events held in Gallery Room and Main Hall.

Gallery Room: A function room with IT facilities enabling video conferencing is available for hire and Council use that provides a broad range of use for the local community.

This includes, weddings, parties, art events, mental health and wellbeing support, business meetings, training, to name a few.

Main Hall: Available to hire 7 days a week between 08:00-23:00 offering a space that can be hired for a wide variety of events. The retractable tiered seating increases the type of events that can be held in the hall along with very good stage lighting, sound system, projector and screen.

Some of the types of events held are, music, theatre, dance school, religious services, comedy, magic shows, lectures, drama and film clubs etc.

Who are we targeting?

The main objective of the Corn Exchange is to provide high-quality facilities and services to the local Witney community and West Oxfordshire residents, as well as organisations, associations, societies, clubs, groups, and businesses. By offering a versatile and welcoming space, the Corn Exchange aims to support a wide variety of events, activities, and functions that enrich the cultural, social, and business life of the community.

Regional and Local Residents/Businesses

The table below details the use of the facilities in the Corn Exchange.

Corn Exchange	Local Residents	Regional Residents & Visitors
Café 1863	75%	25%

Corn Exchange	Local Businesses and Groups	Regional Businesses & Groups
Main Hall	80%	20%
Gallery Room	80%	20%

Local Residents and businesses: These are mainly repeat loyal customers that appreciate the services and facilities we provided.

Regional Residents and businesses: These vary with lots of scope to increase customer base via promoting our services.

Tourist Visitors: It's difficult to measure the ratio of tourist however through general observations and discussions it is deemed to be in the region of 5%.

Comparable Local Businesses

In Witney the Corn Exchange is unique when compared to other operators and premises where it provides multiple facilities. These include a vibrant and busy Café, a safe space in extreme conditions, a refuge in the event of disasters to act as a temporary shelter, public toilets, function room and main hall hire, all with charitable concessions.

Langdale Hall, (leased by Witney Town Council) is located almost adjacent to the Corn Exchange, which boasts a capacity of 400 but offers no tiered seating or cinema facility. Similarly, to the Corn Exchange, Langdale Hall is used for a variety of different events, and boasts a wide range of different hall hires. Generally used for disco and band nights as well as being available for private function hire.

Halfway down Corn Street there is Fat Lils, another entertainment venue located on Corn Street, but this is quite a significantly different business, not one that would be booked out for a variety of events, instead dedicated to live music.

Located at the bottom of the High Street, is the Methodist Church, which also offers more hireable space however restrictions and the normal church activities limit the events that can be held.

Also, in local proximity there is the Masonic Hall on Church Green. This is a smart function hall which is smaller than the Corn Exchange, but it does include an on-site bar within the hall.

When comparing the Corn Exchange hire rates to other local venues the Council are providing an affordable vital hub for the community that is capable of holding many diverse events

Hall	Capacity	Minimum Booking Time	Cost	Additional Hours	Exclusive Use	Sundries Tea/Coffee/water etc
Main Hall	131 Tiered Seating 200 Standing	2 hrs	Group 1: £78.50 Group 2: £115.50 Group 3: £184.00	£30.50 per hour	Y	Hot water/cold water
Gallery Room	90	2 hrs	Group 1: 34.50 Group 2: 50.50 Group 3: 76.75	£30.50 per hour	Y	Hot water/cold water
Langdale Hall	300	2hrs	By negotiation	By negotiation	Y	Hot/Cold water
Masonic Hall	100	4 hrs	£200	£25 per hour	Y	Hot/Cold water
Methodist Church	400	4 hrs	£150	£25	N	Hot/Cold water
Madley Hall	400	2 hrs	By negotioation	By negotiation	Y	Hot/Cold water
Ducklington Hall	100	1hr	£12 per hour	£12 per hour	Y	Hot/Cold water
Part & Parcel conferencing room	20	4 hrs/8hrs	£100 4 hrs £200 8 hrs	N/A	Y	Included

Competitor Analysis

The Corn Exchange stands out in the local market, offering a unique experience that differentiates it from all other venues in the area. One of the main challenges in the past has been increasing public awareness of the venue, but over time, this has improved significantly.

Feedback from hall users has been largely positive, with many appreciating the recent improvements and the continued development of the space.

Similarly, Café 1863 has built a loyal following and is a popular destination for shoppers in the town. Its success is further supported by the café's convenient location, just a short distance from the bus stops across the Market Square, making it easily accessible for those visiting the area.

Financial Appraisal

Corn Exchange

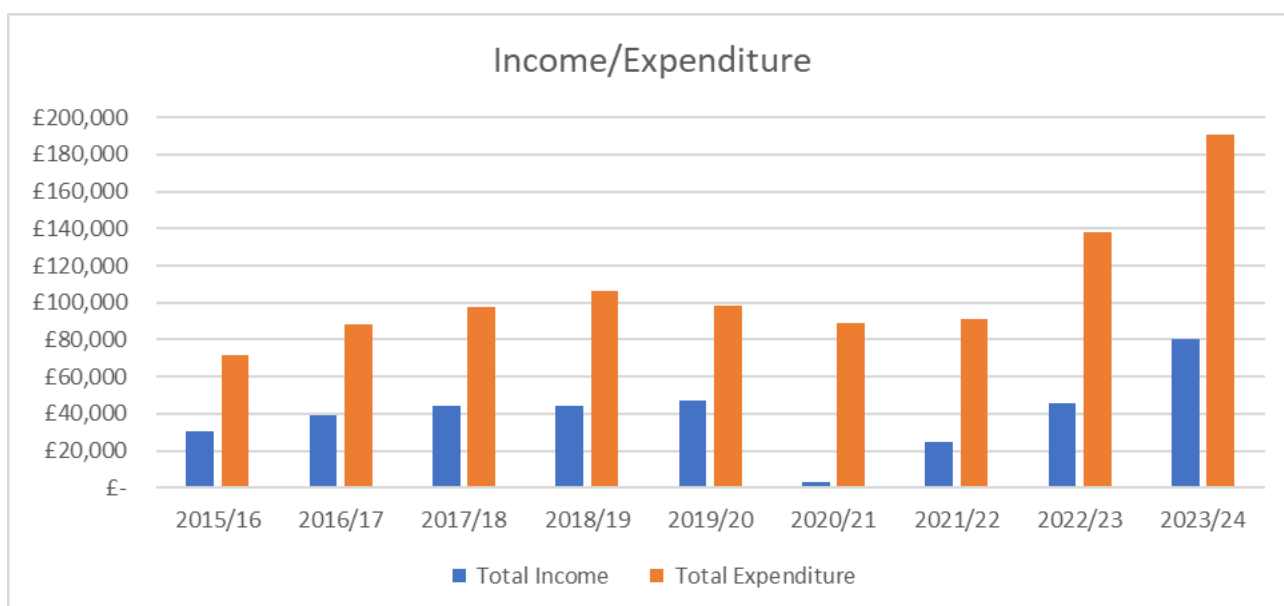
The table below details the income generated and expenditure costs for the previous 8 years.

DEPT 104 - CORN EXCHANGE	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21 Covid	2021/22 Covid	2022/23	2023/24	2024/2025	2025/26
Total Income	30,631	39,286	43,934	44,117	46,791	3,401	24,846	45,693	80,399	77,654	86,072
Total Expenditure	71,595	87,983	97,930	106,438	98,507	88,749	90,785	138,368	190,984	205,275	195,764
NET EXPENDITURE	-40,964	-48,697	-53,996	-62,321	-51,716	-85,348	-65,939	-92,675	-110,585	-127,621	-109,692
Percentage of income vs expenditure	43%	45%	45%	41%	48%	4%	27%	33%	42%	37%	44%

Note the green section is affected by the pandemic and the 2023/24 year is forecasted amounts and this does not include the income and expenditure for the café/bar.

The total income this year is estimated to exceed last years, primarily due to the increased number of well attended events with the new equipment now installed in the main hall such as the new retractable main hall seating, lighting and sound infrastructure.

The increase in expenditure 2023/24 includes an increase in energy costs linked to the rise in gas and electricity rates, plastering and redecoration of the Gallery room, an upgrade to the pigeon deterrent system, and an increase in staff allocated to the total salary costs to the running of the Corn Exchange.



The projection for future years expenditure and income has not been included in this report at this stage however the Council are working to collate this information to enable future targets to be incorporated.

1863 Café and Bar

Vision and Purpose

The 1863 café and bar operation functions as both an independent daytime hospitality offer and an integrated service for performances, cinema screenings, community activities, private hire, and cultural events within the Corn Exchange venue. Positioned in the reception of the Corn Exchange, this naturally provides a welcoming front of house for visitors of the wider venue as well as its own customers.

The vision of 1863 café and bar is to work towards three primary goals:

1. Community Social Hub

- To provide a warm welcoming, accessible and inclusive environment for residents
- Affordable pricing on hot drinks and loyalty cards to reward regular customers
- Primary customers are elderly residents, but also includes town centre workers, families, and tourists.

2. Supporting Events

- Provides a valuable service for public and private events, boosting customer experience
- Increases venue revenue through bar sales
- Enables packages and advanced sales at private bookings, generating guaranteed revenue.
- Provides solid regular footfall and audience for event marketing

3. Commercial Sustainability

- By increasing bar sales through events, to help keep our daytime café prices affordable and accessible for the whole community.

Operating Model

Opening Hours:

Monday – Saturday 8:30 – 17:00

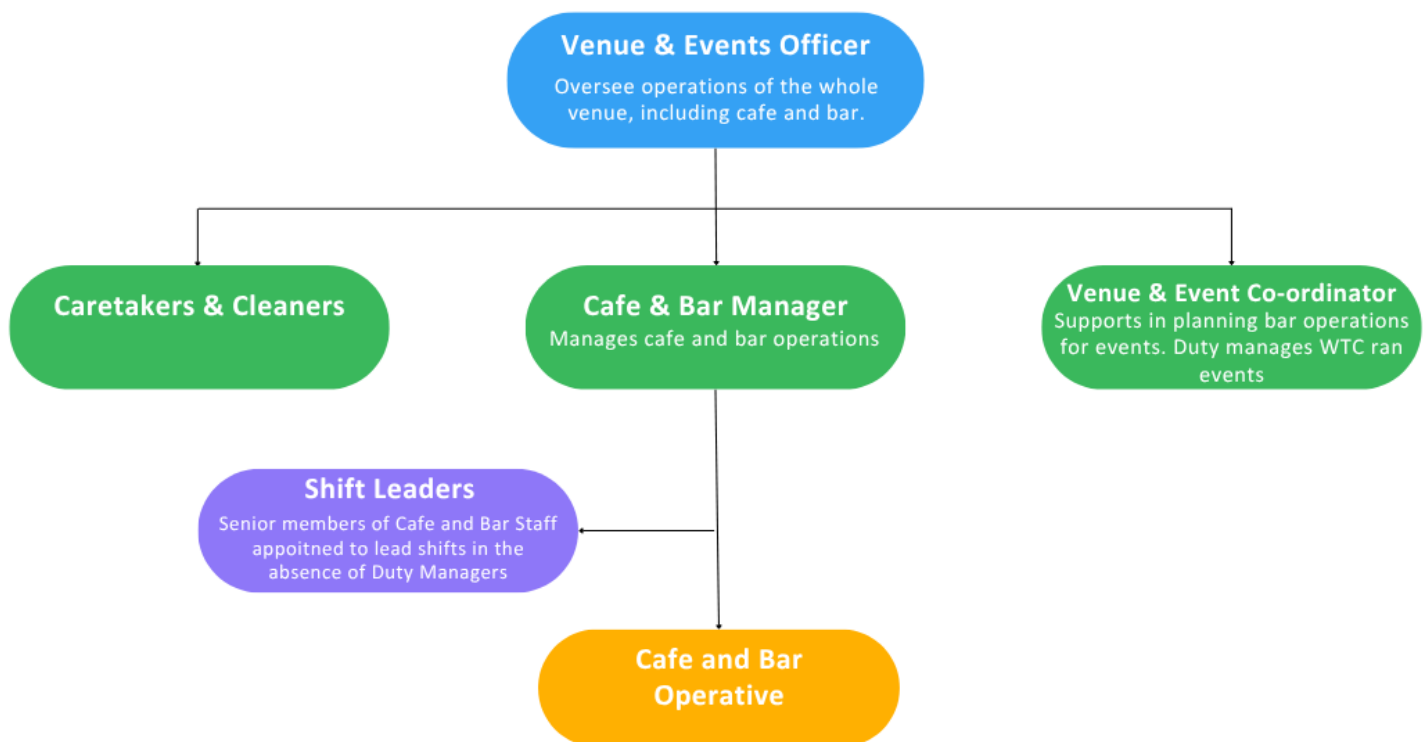
Evenings for Events

Fridays until 10pm during summer months to facilitate “Tunes on The Square”

Daytime Café transition to Evening Event

Café closes between 17:00 and the opening time of the event to reduce staffing cost. The transition between café and bar set up after closure is minimal, allowing it to be done by one member of staff.

The below model outlines the staffing structure of Corn Exchange in relation to the 1863 Café and Bar.



Food and Drink Offer

- High-quality coffee, tea and cold beverages.
- Light lunches, cakes and snacks.
- Locally sourced products where commercially viable.
- Seasonal and event-specific offers.
- Flexible menu designed to meet customer demand while minimising waste.

Integration with Events

A key area in reaching the goal of commercial sustainability, is through integrating with events. The café and bar provides a service which enhances the audiences experience and creates a revenue generating opportunity.

Enhanced Visitor Experience

- Provides a welcoming space for audiences before and after events.
- Encourages visitors to arrive earlier and remain on site longer.
- Improves the overall customer experience through convenient access to food and drink.
- Creates opportunities for social interaction and community engagement around events.

Additional Revenue Generation

- Generates secondary spend from event attendees through food and beverage sales.
- Increases average customer spend per visit.
- Provides revenue opportunities before performances and during intervals
- Supports financial sustainability through diversified income streams beyond ticket sales.

Private Hire and Commercial Events

- Enhances the attractiveness of the venue for private hire.
- Provides in-house bar services for corporate events, receptions and community functions.
- Creates opportunities for tailored hospitality packages, generating up-front sales.
- Increases revenue generated from venue hires.
- Operates on Minimum Spend Policy to ensure financial responsibility of the service.

Audience Development and Cross-Marketing

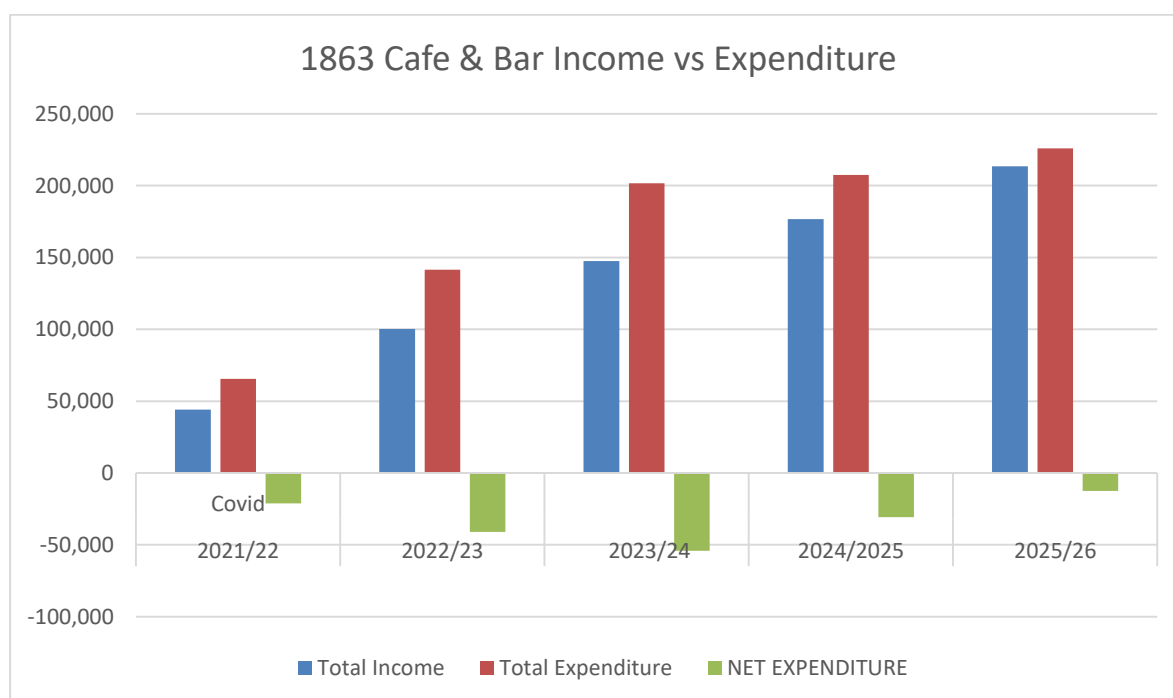
- Café customers are exposed to event marketing through venue displays and promotional activity.
- Event attendees are encouraged to return during daytime trading hours.
- Private hire customers gain confidence in the venue through their experience of the café and bar service.
- Regular café users represent a valuable audience for future cultural programming and community events.

Risk Management

- Café staffing levels adjusted in line with demand.
- Event bar operation activated only where financially viable.
- Minimum spend requirements for private hire bookings.
- Regular review of product pricing and supplier costs.
- Monitoring of waste and stock control procedures.

1863 Café & Bar Finances

DEPT 104 - CORN EXCHANGE	2021/22 Covid	2022/23	2023/24	2024/2025	2025/26
Total Income	24,846	100,339	147,473	176,648	213,433
Total Expenditure	90,785	141,395	201,616	142,077	149,748
NET EXPENDITURE	-65,939	-92,675	-110,585	-30,681	-12,552
Percentage of income vs expenditure	27%	33%	42%	37%	44%



The above data shows the growth in financial performance year-on-year as the deficit narrows. It is important to note that 1863 Café and Bar reported figures don't absorb utility costs, making the burden fall greater onto the 104 Corn Exchange cost-centre. However, this has been the case since the creation of the Café & Bar and therefore the tables above are an accurate reflection of the progress being made.

The 1863 Café & Bar is designed to deliver both community and commercial value. By balancing affordable daytime provision with income-generating event activity, the operation supports the

Corn Exchange's wider objectives of accessibility, community engagement and long-term financial sustainability.

Current Pricing for Venue Hire

Hire charges for the Corn Exchange function rooms are determined by the Town Council and typically increase by approximately 5% at the start of each new financial year. The current hire prices (2026/27) are as follows:

CORN EXCHANGE (Vatable)	£
THE MAIN HALL - WEEKDAY	
GROUP 1 - CHARITY OR LOCAL ORGANISATION	168.00
GROUP 2 - NON-CHARITABLE EVENTS	247.00
GROUP 3 COMMERCIAL AND SALES	394.00
THE MAIN HALL - WEEKEND	
GROUP 1 - CHARITY OR LOCAL ORGANISATION	215.50
GROUP 2 - NON-CHARITABLE EVENTS	325.50
GROUP 3 COMMERCIAL AND SALES	514.50
THE GALLERY ROOM - WEEKDAY	
GROUP 1 - CHARITY OR LOCAL ORGANISATION	73.50
GROUP 2 - NON-CHARITABLE EVENTS	108.50
GROUP 3 COMMERCIAL AND SALES	168.00
THE GALLERY ROOM - WEEKEND	
GROUP 1 - CHARITY OR LOCAL ORGANISATION	102.00
GROUP 2 - NON-CHARITABLE EVENTS	143.00
GROUP 3 COMMERCIAL AND SALES	189.00

3 Year Objectives

Year	Main Hall
Year 1	Asset Equipment: Review of current equipment, new furniture and painting of the green rooms and backstage area. Identified need, established from feedback, for led lighting to be installed on steps as luminescent strips don't hold charge long enough and make use of the stairs difficult in softer light. Officers have asked seating supplier for a quote to install LED lighting on the stairs of the tiered seating. Analise the costs for full surround sound in the main hall triggered by results of customer feedback suggesting this that would provide an enhanced experience. Original installers of Hall upgrade have been approached for quotes. Update Nov2025: This is being re-visited as part of NT Live requirements and will be reported to members for consideration once costings and potential benefits are confirmed. Research costs of modular stage, more flexibility and easier set up for different events. Easier to store and reduced resource required. Officers are in the process of obtaining quotes. Work with Project Officer to erect partition and doorway to storage area in the corridor behind the retractable seating. The work to update and improve storage in the Corn Exchange has been completed. There is now additional storage underneath the main staircase, lockable storage behind the seating in the Main Hall and behind the stage area also in the Main Hall. The addition of this storage allows for better housekeeping standards to be maintained. Updating furniture in artists rest area will make the C/E look more professional and attractive to visiting groups. Addition of smart sockets in Main Hall and artists rest areas Events Continue work on a yearly schedule of events to provide the town with the diverse and desired programme of events. Continual analysis of popularity, demand and success will help shape future events. Pilot new events to determine interest and value. Officers are working on a busy Autumn/Winter season and all events will be marketed via the What's On guide, website, social media and physical advertising and reported to committee.

The Corn Exchange is establishing a regular Film Club that is intended to appeal to a different market to those that are going to visit Cineworld or Similar. The Film Club focusses on classic films which aren't often shown on the big screen and the films screened are chosen by feedback from attendees of the screenings and advice from Officers who have a vested interest in film. The Film club is going to be held on the second and fourth Tuesday of the month throughout the year to build momentum and gain regular audience numbers. This is actioned and implemented. Officers are also working on an afternoon film club for those that either don't want or can't attend evening screenings.

Update Nov2025: See year 2 below.

The weekly Tea Dance that has proven to be an essential activity with many benefits (exercise, social interaction etc) supported by the Council serving the older residents of Witney and the surrounding areas. Explore opportunities for increased attendance.

To introduce a box office counter to support the ever popular and well attended annual Christmas pantomime includes up to 15 performances that is extremely popular including a relaxed performance, a show that's been adapted to suit people who might require a more relaxed environment when going to the theatre. Usually, these are adults or children with learning difficulties, autism or sensory communication disorders.

Update Nov2025: Officers will research the possibility of introducing a centralised booking system for all shows at The Corn Exchange. This will improve customer experience as the confusion between in-house and third-party show ticketing is a frequent consumer pain point. A centralised system, embedded into the venues website, would professionalise our approach to ticketing whilst solving this consumer pain. Once this is in place, officers can explore a permanent solution to an in-person box office, an essential service for much of our customer base.

The accompany the annual Civic Events that are a compulsory part of a Councils working year that includes Citizen of the Year, the Annual Civic Reception and the Annual Town Meeting, we shall make use of the projector screen to display the achievements to suit the event. These are accounted for by a transfer of funds from the Democratic Budget to the Corn Exchange meaning no significant impact on the halls bottom line. This has already worked really well with the successful running of the Civic Reception which utilised all the new equipment in the Main Hall.

To reinstate the Council managed Indoor Markets to be held 2-4 times per month. This will be dependent on uptake however with planned promotions and liaison this is the target that has been set. The focus will be on themed markets on a rolling cycle i.e., antiques market, craft & gift market and tabletop car boot market. By defining the type of trade, we can advertise and promote accordingly to attract more sellers and drive footfall through the hall. Officer exploring this possibility and will implement if there is opportunity.

Update Nov2025: The current Venue & Events Officer does not endorse the idea of WTC ran markets at The Corn Exchange, as it will directly compete with a long-standing hirer of The Corn Exchange. Running our own market in conjunction with this hirer could damage our relationship and potentially lead to a loss of a regular commercial booking. Officers would have to spend time and resource to try and replace this income through their own ran market, when that time and resource could be better spent producing other events whilst the market is still run by a third-party.

Work on developing and marketing a physical 'what's on' brochure, can be distributed in town and serve to boost awareness of the Corn Exchange increase and ticket sales. The Deputy Venue & Events Officer has started work on this.

Update Nov2025: The Venue & Events Co-Ordinator is working on designing a brochure for The Corn Exchange. This will include detail on upcoming events as well as information on regular groups and classes available at the venue, advertising 1863 Café & Bar and private hire packages for both Corn Exchange and Burwell Hall. The brochure will act as an all-in-one advert for The Corn Exchange and help promote all operations of the venue.

Quotes are being obtained for the cost printing of these, the design is being done in-house to reduce costs.

Review options for digital marketing to include notice boards increasing professional visibility and attendance. Officers are looking into the cost and feasibility of this.

Update Nov2025: This project is not urgent and can be re-visited in year 3. Officers identify a need to improve the marketing strategy across the board and more cost-effective approaches will be tried and tested, before committing to a spend of this nature. For example, increasing social media coverage and engagement, improving SEO to increase online visibility, engaging with more local groups and organisations forming mutually beneficial partnerships,

Work with Project Officer to research funding streams, grants etc This will allow for more events with a higher level of promotion and enhanced reputation.

Update Nov2025: Officers to explore additional revenue streams for Corn Exchange to help improve financial stability. Possible avenues include grant funding for projects & improvements, sponsorship opportunities and increasing commercial bookings through target marketing.

Explore National Theatre Live to determine feasibility of screening live productions. Budget for the equipment required to meet their minimum standards will be a primary factor.

Update Nov2025: See year 2 below.

Year 2	Asset Looking ahead at projects for 2026/27: Hearing Loops: To promote accessibility and ensure compliance with the Equality Act (2010), Officers are looking to implement hearing loop systems into The Corn Exchange and Burwell Hall. Exact quotes are TBC but look to be at least £2,000 per system. Officers are searching for suppliers to come and give a specific quote and will ensure the best value for money option is sought after. Update June 2026: Project update provided in Public Halls Report Seat Sponsorship: Full proposal has been presented to HCA committee, who expressed eagerness to launch this initiative ahead of Christmas 2025. This project is an opportunity to raise funds for the Corn Exchange via sponsorship whilst increasing community engagement with the venue. Update June 2026: Only one uptake in May 2026 (ongoing enquiry). Kitchen Facilities The existing kitchen facilities at the Corn Exchange are not currently equipped to operate as a fully functional café kitchen, which limits the range and quality of the food offering within the 1863 Café. To enhance the café's performance and support increased revenue through food sales, there is a clear need to review and upgrade the kitchen infrastructure. Ensuring the café's financial sustainability will remain central to this process. The Venue & Events Officer will work closely with the Café Manager to assess current operations and develop a practical improvement plan focused on boosting efficiency, expanding menu options, and enabling the café to better meet customer expectations while contributing more effectively to the venue's overall income. Update June 2026: Café has continued to operate with existing facilities whilst officers have had to prioritise other projects. Year 2 Assets and Projects Summary: Planned investment into assets and venue infrastructure improvements are minimal for this year, to allow a greater focus on improving operational procedures, functions and events, with a view to increase the financial sustainability of the venue through increased hirings, ticket sales and expanding revenue streams. Officers will continue to review essential improvements, such as urgent repairs, compliance issues (such as hearing loops) etc. Events & Functions Review of past 12 months, reconfirm which events were successful and those that weren't, learning which ones to promote in the coming year.
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In-House Events

Cinema Screenings

The Daytime Cinema events experienced varying success last year. The purpose of these screenings is to provide a low-cost, warm space daytime activity during the colder months. The screenings attendances declined in the approach to summer 2025, which also coincided with the Corn Exchange management personnel being down a role. The Venue & Events Co-Ordinator has been tasked with re-introducing these screenings, with a target attendance to reach to ensure they are not operating at a loss. Update June 2026: Average attendances have increased in-line with break even point as of 2026. Officers will continue with the screenings and review periodically.

Tunes on the square

This event series, utilising the Corn Exchange pavement license on Market Square, proved to be a popular feature of the summer program. This event ran every Friday from 13th June – 5th September, either independently, or in conjunction with an event on inside The Corn Exchange with very minimal disruption caused to those events – organisers happy with the events running at the same time. Officers estimate that, when being ran independently, these events averaged a 12% NET profit on the bar when accounting for staffing, estimated overheads and our 50% share of the artist fee.

Officers have collected feedback from attendees, which was overwhelmingly positive. Many attendees have noted the positive community atmosphere and holiday like feel to the square during the evenings. These events will be re-introduced next year based on the positive feedback and successful takings – officers will explore how to improve this further by increasing footfall and takings.

Update June 2026: This event series is returning with an amended time of 19:00 – 21:00 following attendee feedback. This will also increase the window to trade relating to this event as we can continue to serve until 22:00 following the performance.

Touring Performances

Corn Exchange has hosted some touring performances in-house, operating on a 70/30 net ticket split for most of them. This arrangement has allowed us to host shows with minimal financial risk, by eliminating up-front fees.

Update June 2026: This has continued to be a successful provision in 2026, with high attendances and top quality shows. The Corn Exchange is the only venue in the area with the ability to host touring theatre productions and provides great value to the community by doing so.

Seated Shows

The Corn Exchange offers a unique experience for Witney, as the only venue with a tiered seating option for live shows. This gives the venue a unique selling point, allowing excellent visibility and comfort and ensuring every attendee enjoys an unobstructed view of performances. However, these shows often generate a poor level of bar income, in comparison to standing shows which often receive at least 2x bar spend per head. To address lower bar sales typically seen at seated events, officers have already adjusted shift patterns to reduce spend, but more importantly will implement a targeted strategy to enhance audience engagement and increase average spend per head. Options currently being explored include promoting pre-show and interval drinks through advance ordering systems, opening the bar earlier to encourage pre-event socialising, mobile or interval bar services to improve convenience, and “drink and ticket” bundles to incentivise purchases at the point of sale. Each option presents its own challenges to be overcome so careful consideration is vital before launching, to avoid further loss or reputational damage.

Standing Shows

As outlined above, standing shows frequently generate greater bar income than seated shows. This is down to the individual nature of each event type - with increased bar access, crowd movement and drinking culture at standing shows, naturally, bar income is higher as a result.

Officers will look to increase the number of standing shows hosted at Corn Exchange in 2026, to help increase bar income. Whilst the venue needs to make use of the tiered seating and plans to increase revenue associated with its use, standing shows also make the most of the versatile nature of the venue.

New Events

The Venue & Events Officer and Co-Ordinator are working together on building a diverse 2026 events program. A varied and well-curated events programme will be central to the Corn Exchange Witney’s strategy for driving audience growth, community engagement, and financial sustainability. By offering a balanced calendar of arts, cultural, business, and social events, the venue can attract a broad demographic and maximising use throughout the year. Popular and high-yield events such as live music, comedy, themed parties, and business networking sessions will generate strong bar, ticket and venue hire revenues, while community-led activities, workshops, and family-friendly events will reinforce the venue’s community impact and social value. This combination of commercial and community programming not only diversifies income streams but also positions the Corn Exchange Witney as a vibrant, inclusive hub for entertainment, learning, and connection within West Oxfordshire.

Ideas in the pipeline include but not limited to:

- **Big Quiz** – capitalising on the popular Mayor Charity Quizzes and utilising the big screen and sound system, separating us from ordinary pub quizzes.
- **Disco Nights** – after a successful “Decade’s Disco” in 2025, these are a low-cost event with high potential income through ticket sales and bar revenue. They can remain financially accessible for attendees due to the low-production cost in comparison to live performance-based shows and provide a safe and enjoyable night out for locals. Regular themed disco’s will be trialled in 2026. **Update June 2026:** Disco well attended in March, date TBD for a second one in autumn.
- **Business Networking Events** – Corn Exchange has the capacity to host small – medium business networking events and officers will explore the possibility of collaborating with an organiser of these events. In-person networking events have risen in popularity year-on-year post pandemic, outlining an opportunity to be explored.
This is not only a possibility for an income generative event for the venue but also increases awareness of the venue to potential commercial hirers of both the main hall and gallery room. This could lead to more commercial events such as seminars / workshops, product launches etc. **Update June 2026:** Officers are in discussion with a Business Networking professional looking to hire the venue for two types of recurring event.
- **National Theatre Live:** The Venue & Events Co-Ordinator is in contact with NT Live to determine if we have the facilities to be able to screen them. Once the minimum specifications are outlined, Officers will explore the cost of what is needed to be able to screen NT Live and report to members. It’s important to note that NT Live is currently available at Cineworld Witney, however, their pricing is at the maximum NT Live allows – this means that we can explore the potential to host the screenings at a more accessible price, if operating costs allow. **Update June 2026:** Audio upgrades required have been looked into and indicative costs are around £9,000. Officers don’t feel this is a viable investment, due to local competition and that the finances would likely not be recovered from hosting these screenings.

Third-Party Venue Hire & Events

An essential element to The Corn Exchange as a local community arts hub, is the ability for the public to hire the venue for events and classes, including public shows. The Corn Exchange hosts multiple shows ran by three locally based drama organisations as well as classes, workshops and seminars from more local art groups. This function not only provides a platform for local organisations but also makes up a steady revenue stream for the venue. Officers recognise gaps in the diary that can be filled by third-party hirings and are also conscious to explore more potential commercial / private hirers to increase hiring income alongside usage.

- **Private Venue Hire** - Events such as Weddings, Parties, Awards Ceremonies etc. Officers recognise the income potential of these events through venue hire and bar income and actively work to promote drinks revenue with these bookings, such as suggesting welcome drinks, table wine, pre-ordered drinks and running tabs for hirers to increase bar sales. Part of improving the venues marketing strategy includes increasing awareness of the venue as a space for these private events. Officers are working on packages, advertising materials and collaborating with local suppliers within the private event industry to help increase these types of bookings. Wedding packages will remain low-commitment from the venue due to the minimal staffing structure in place. The Corn Exchange is not designed or staffed as a full-time wedding venue and our packages must be realistic to reflect that. However, officers will be exploring how to promote the Corn Exchange as a wedding venue to increase hirings, and how to provide the best service it can with the current staffing set up whilst maximising revenue from these events. Opportunities include; collaborating with local suppliers, tiered packages to upsell services the venue can deliver, drinks packages and a minimum bar spend (*proposed policy for approval included in Public Halls Report to HCA on 10th November 2025*)

Update June 2026: Minimum spend policy has been approved and rolled out for future private hire bookings, to ensure financial sustainability in providing a bar for private events.

Officers have drafted a proposal to re-structure the Wedding charges and introduce tiered packages to reflect the additional services available to wedding couples, whilst keeping the venue as an affordable option. The proposal is included in the Public Halls Report to be considered on 8th June 2025.

- **Private Cinema Hire** – The Corn Exchange has hosted two private cinema bookings, via a couple of local organisations, which have been operated successfully. Officers are exploring launching a private cinema package to advertise, which will increase usage of the Cinema equipment whilst also increasing venue hire income.

Update June 2026: An additional reoccurring private cinema hirer has taken place for the past few months. Officers are yet to develop dedicated marketing for this due to other projects taking priority.

Third-Party Event Promotions – The Corn Exchange benefits from Third-Party event promoters who can hire the venue for a flat fee and promote their own show (keeping ticket revenue). This arrangement provides the venue with a fixed income figure, generates bar revenue, increases usage and adds to the venues public event diary, without the need for officer time organising the event. Officers will actively seek new Third-Party Event Promoters to help add to the calendar of events alongside our in-house events.

Year 3	Asset Equipment: Review current usage, maintain, update and purchase as required. Review of floor condition, need to maintain standard to continue building reputation. Events Continue to build up catalogue of repeat events, look to be the destination go to venue in west Oxfordshire. Regular competitor analysis will drive pricing and format for the years events.
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Year	Gallery Room
Year 1	Asset Large room available for hire with capacity to display artwork additionally being licenced for weddings. Equipment: replace and increase capacity of picture hanging system with the aim of attracting local artists, schools, photography clubs etc who would be interested in hiring the space. This would increase Highstreet visibility by driving footfall from different areas and to a different demographic. Officer are researching and will reach out to interested parties to have artwork displayed in the room. Modernise the IT infrastructure by installing USB plug points and conferencing equipment to modernise existing offer for users. This would result in a more desirable function room with a better offer and industry standard facilities. Officers are in the process of obtaining quotes for this. Work with project officer to ascertain feasibility of a ceiling mounted projector and wall mounted retractable screen. This is a standard in other halls and one that will increase use of the room when advertised correctly. The Conferencing system is being finalised and will be installed shortly. Update Nov2025: Conferencing system has been installed and trialled internally for hybrid meetings as well as being used by hirers for presentations. Final amendments are being made to improve the appearance, which will be followed by a plan to advertise and generate bookings to use the space as a hybrid meeting room. Events & Functions Officers promoting the Corn Exchange as a wedding venue, increasing the use of the room and a fostering a reputation as a multipurpose hall. Update 2025: The Gallery Room will be included in the Wedding packages, mentioned in the Corn Exchange Year 2 Objectives. Improvements to the decoration of the room have helped make the room more suitable for wedding ceremonies. Officers are working on ways to ensure the presence of the new IT equipment does not hinder the presentation of the venue for ceremonial events. To improve the IT equipment for the hosting of regular council and committee meetings and working parties. The Conferencing system is being finalised and will be installed shortly.

For the Arts week (2 weeks) the aim is to increase the number of groups being given the opportunity to show their art with the focus on local talent.

Reach out to local business and promote as solid space for training, conferencing etc. Increasing visibility and reach in the local area. Once conferencing equipment is installed, the Gallery Room will be marketed and promoted to increase use.

Continuous communication with existing groups to garner feedback and act on day-to-day issues. Shows we listen and understand hiring group's needs.

Year 2	Asset Large room available for hire with capacity to display artwork additionally being licenced for weddings. Equipment: Review of equipment, look to update and maintain as required to keep room as viable destination for multitude of different events. Review state of general decoration including wear to the carpet, keep the room looking fresh and well maintained, this will encourage continued use and strong reputation. Events & Functions Review wedding and corporate bookings to ascertain if successful, what worked well and what needs to be improved on.
Year 3	Asset Large room available for hire with capacity to display artwork additionally being licenced for weddings. Equipment: Review of equipment, update as necessary. Events & Functions Review past year, focus on which bookings work and where to focus marketing and advertising. By regular review of type of booking we can look to target most profitable bookings.

Marketing

Visual Identity and Marketing Strategy of the Corn Exchange

The visual identity of the Corn Exchange has been developed over the years with the support of Rumbl Ltd, a local web and graphic design company, alongside internal Council Officers. These efforts have utilized a mix of modern and traditional advertising methods to effectively reach and engage the public.

The Council will continue to leverage modern technology and communication platforms to connect with our target audience. A more targeted approach to social media updates is now in place, with a focus on Facebook and Instagram to ensure our events reach the right people. The Officers are also collaborating on coordinated social media campaigns to maximize audience engagement.

Networking with key organizations is a priority to further promote the venue and its facilities. Officers will continue to promote the Corn Exchange brand within Witney and the surrounding areas, reaching out to local businesses, organizations, groups, and residents.

The Corn Exchange website will be continuously updated and developed by the management team to ensure it is user-friendly, visually appealing, and effective in driving event engagement. In addition, regular content updates across social media platforms will ensure vibrant and timely updates. Recent improvements to the website have enhanced event visibility, particularly for events in both halls, and dedicated group pages have been launched for regular use.

By utilising modern technology, the marketing strategy will focus on targeting key stakeholders, expanding the visibility of events, and encouraging early ticket bookings. This approach is now a standard part of marketing for the venue and its facilities.

Additionally, public-facing information events will be organized to invite local businesses and groups into the hall, showcasing the flexibility of the venue. Officers will market and promote these events, particularly once the new conferencing equipment in the Gallery Room is successfully installed.

Risk

The table below summarises key areas of risk, the impact and how we mitigate these.

Risk	Impact	Mitigation
Decrease in bookings	Lack of suitable affordable facility for key groups and organisations and loss of revenue.	Adherence to business plan and operational process with regular reviews of performance and position.

Poor Customer Service	Witney Town Council Reputation	Good staff management, monitoring, and training.
Injury or sickness caused to customers	Reputation, legal implications, and cost.	Adherence to operating procedures, monitoring and training.
Failure to adhere to building compliance	Possible injury, shut down, fire etc.	Adherence to operating procedures, monitoring and training.
Non-competitive in the market	Decrease in use.	Continuous monitoring of competitors and liaison with event programmes.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Quarterly and monthly evaluation will enable managers to measure and review performance, adherence to the business plan and progress.

The key performance indicators are listed below.

- Programme of Events - Report being produced and in house, external and digital comms being created This will be updated quarterly and reviewed.
- Health and Safety - Dedicated staff members have responsibility over areas of H&S, which is audited by and external Health and Safety consultant.
- Marketing - A marketing update is going to be produced for each HC&A meeting to social value, finances, impact and return on investment.
- Financial Position – monthly analysis
- Staff – The training matrix has been developed and is maintained to monitor compliance. Customer Satisfaction - Customer feedback cards have been introduced in the café with excellent result to date. Feedback forms for hall hire are sent out at the point of booking.
- Facilities - A register of assets is compiled and stored internally, Officers understand value and condition of all equipment in the hall. This is updated as required and any asset deemed broken or unusable is disposed of via the asset disposal guidelines outlined by the RFO.
- Alignment with the Councils vision and direction – Achievements to date with the strategy identified demonstrate Officers are in alignment with the business plan.

Reporting

Regular progress reports will be compiled and presented to the Council's committee for review. These reports, generated by the Venue & Events Officer will be included in the regular HC&A Council meetings.

The reports will track the progress of the venues, events, and other relevant activities, ensuring transparency and accountability. The format of the reporting will be regularly reviewed and refined to ensure it remains effective and aligns with the needs of the Council, with a focus on continuous improvement.