HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE

Agenda Item: Public Halls Business Report

Meeting Date: Monday 9 November 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

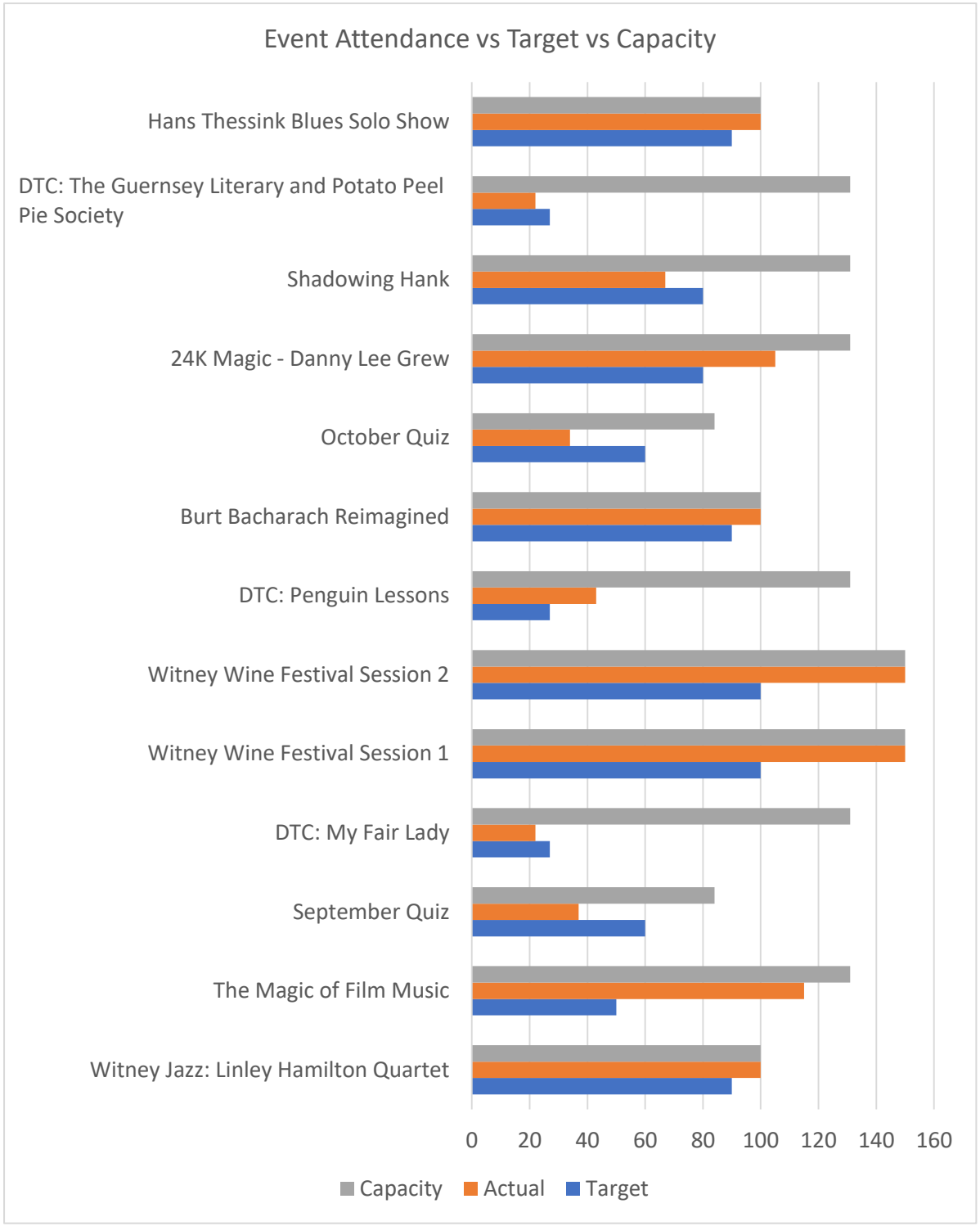
Witney Town Council aims to provide an affordable, sustainable, inclusive community arts facility that is valued and supported by the residents of Witney and West Oxfordshire. This objective is supported by funding from West Oxfordshire District Council for this purpose.

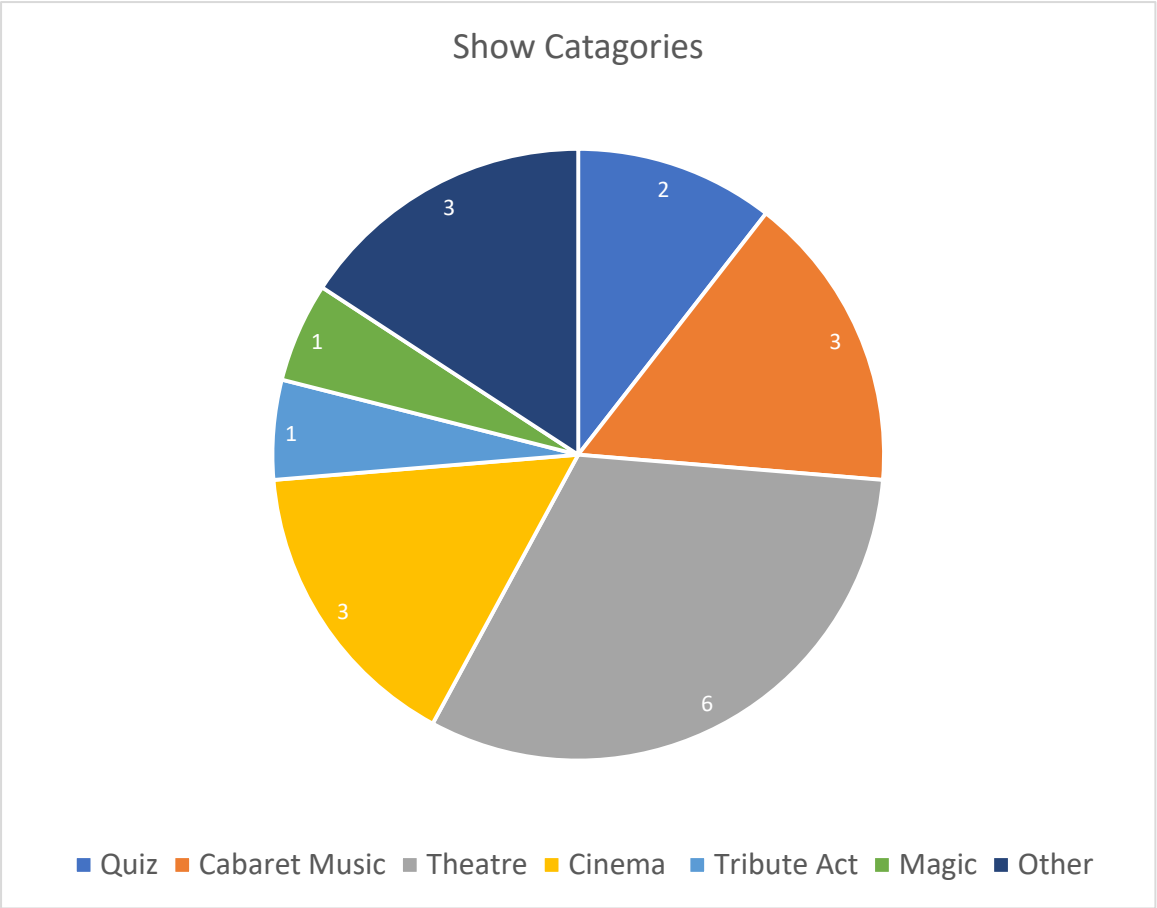
The Council seeks to make the Corn Exchange accessible to the whole community by encouraging participation and offering a diverse programme of music, arts and cultural events. In addition, the Council will provide a professional, well-maintained venue available to hire for private events such as parties,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

Current Situation

The Venue & Events team have continued to deliver a varied programme of in-house and third-party events, offering a wide range of opportunities for residents and visitors to engage with the Corn Exchange and Burwell Hall.

The graphs below show the number of ticketed events hosted by category, since the last report in June 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.


Event Attendance vs Target vs Capacity
Hans Thessink Blues Solo Show
DTC: The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society
Shadowing Hank
24K Magic - Danny Lee Grew
October Quiz
Burt Bacharach Reimagined
DTC: Penguin Lessons
Witney Wine Festival Session 2
Witney Wine Festival Session 1
DTC: My Fair Lady
September Quiz
The Magic of Film Music
Witney Jazz: Linley Hamilton Quartet
0
20
40
60
80
100
120
140
160
Capacity
Actual
Target



Recent Events

Witney Jazz & Blues

Witney Jazz & Blues events continue to be popular and successful, with the programme constantly achieving a near or full sell out.

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

Cinema

Recent daytime cinema screenings have included:

- My Fair Lady
- The Penguin Lessons
- The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society

The Daytime Cinema programme continues to grow and develop, with an average attendance of 25 people per screening since January. The Penguin lessons was a standout this cycle attracting 43 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, the slightly later starts has been a welcome change among regular attendees with no evidence of a drop in numbers due to the change. Officers do need to consider the length of films going forward to avoid overly tight change overs for later bookings.

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

Magic of Film Music

Magic of Film Music attracted a good audience and proved to be a successful addition to the programme, offering something a little different from the venue's usual events. The talk was relatively low-maintenance from the performer's perspective, although it did require some additional input from venue staff, particularly with assisting with audience check-in.

Audience feedback was positive, with attendees expressing their enjoyment of the performance and appreciation for the variety it brought to the programme.

The hirer also provided positive feedback about the venue and staff, particularly praising the theatre-style layout of the Main Hall and tiered seating. Staff were commended for their friendliness, communication and willingness to assist throughout the hire, with the performer describing this as the most welcoming and comfortable experience they had received at a venue.

The hirer did identify some areas for improvement, particularly the transition between backstage and stage areas, which can be restrictive due to the current curtain arrangement. The possibility of introducing more formal stage wings was suggested. They also highlighted the potential benefit of having an in-house technician available to hirers as an additional service.

Buttercross Theatre Productions: Cluedo

Although confirmed ticket sales figures have not yet been shared by the hirer, bar takings suggest that Cluedo achieved attendance in line with Buttercross Theatre Productions' usual audience figures of approximately 90–120 people.

Quiz Nights

Attendance at Quiz Nights has been lower than anticipated since their return following the summer break, despite an increase to the prize offering.

Officers will continue to monitor ticket sales and attendance over the November event before reviewing the financial viability of continuing the quizzes on Friday evenings. A decision on the future of the programme will be made in the new year, taking into consideration attendance, income and overall operational costs.

Witney Wine Festival

Now in its fourth year, Witney Wine Festival was once again a success, with both sessions selling out.

The festival continues to demonstrate the versatility of the Corn Exchange, providing an opportunity to host events outside our usual programme and attract audiences looking for something a little different. Its continued success highlights the potential for the venue to accommodate a diverse range of events and experiences.

Waterways Day

Despite some initial challenges with event marketing, Waterways Day was a success.

Following the event, we have recommended that organisers contact the venue earlier when planning future events. This will allow more time to the venue to display marketing materials.

24K Magic
24K Magic was very well attended and received positive feedback from audiences. The performance was clearly enjoyed by those attending, and the event proved to be a successful addition to the programme. This is an act we would be very happy to welcome back to the Corn Exchange in the future.

Shadowing Hank
Shadowing Hank was less well attended than in previous years, suggesting that audience demand for this particular event may have reached its limit.
Marketing undertaken by the artist was relatively limited, which is likely to have contributed to the lower ticket sales.

Witney Dramatic Society: The Hound of the Baskervilles
Audience figures for The Hound of the Baskervilles are still awaited. However, bar takings were lower than average for this type of production.
There were some logistical challenges with the changeover between daytime events and the evening performance. The production set was larger than originally anticipated, creating additional complications for the turnaround. Despite this, venue staff worked hard to accommodate the requirements and ensure the changeover was completed successfully.

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:

- Birthday parties
- Parenting courses
- x2 Weddings (one ceremony hire, one full venue hire)
- A celebration of 90 year in business on Arnold Specialists
- Hybrid Meetings
- Job Fayre
- Jewellery buying events
- Choral workshops

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
  - Greg Abate Quartet – 6th November
  - Marvin Muoneke's Christmas Quartet – 11th December
- Daytime Cinema:
  - The Great Escaper – November 3rd
  - Evita – November 17th
  - White Christmas – December 1st
  - The Muppet Christmas Carol – December 21st
- The Wolf on Corn Street Book Launch – 6th November
- Break the Rules: A Tribute to the Music of Status Quo – 7th November
- Two Crosses – 7th November
- Rock & Roll Dance Party – 13th November
- November Quiz Night – 13th November
- Mynt Image Market
  - November 14th
  - December 5th
- BTP: A Night at The Musicals – 14th November
- Oxfordshire Festival of Speech and Drama – 21st November
- Sobell house Christmas Shopping Extravaganza – 28th November
- Advent fayre – 29th November
- Air Cadets Christmas Grotto – 6ht December
- Christmas Concert & Sing Along – 12th December
- BTP: Sleeping Beauty – 18th December to 30th 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.

Venue usage has **increased overall by 3.5%** compared to the previous year. The Corn Exchange Main Hall experienced a 4.9% increase in usage, whilst Burwell Hall saw the largest growth at 7.3%. The Gallery Room experienced a slight reduction of 3.7%.
These figures demonstrate continued demand for the Council's venues, with increased usage across two of the three hireable spaces.

Week commencing	15th Sept	22nd Sept	29th Sept	6th Oct	13th Oct	20th Oct	27th Oct	3rd Nov	10th Nov		
CORN EX 2026											
Hours booked	44.00	40.00	42.00	44.00	35.00	44.00	53.00	43.00	37.00	**382.00**	**Total Hrs**
Usage Percentage	52.38	47.62	50.00	52.38	41.67	52.38	63.10	51.19	44.05	**32.48**	**Average %**
SAME PERIOD 2025 CORN EXCHANGE											
Hours booked	36.00	55.00	39.00	35.00	40.00	25.00	33.00	54.00	47.00	**364.00**	**Total Hrs**
Usage Percentage	42.86	65.48	46.43	41.67	47.62	29.76	39.29	64.29	55.95	**27.25**	**Average %**
GALLERY 2026											
Hours booked	16.50	41.00	39.00	24.00	21.00	45.00	15.00	22.00	23.00	**246.50**	**Total Hrs**
Usage Percentage	19.64	48.81	46.43	28.57	25.00	53.57	17.86	26.19	27.38	**20.96**	**Average %**
SAME PERIOD 2025 GALLERY											
Hours booked	29.00	38.00	43.00	20.00	26.00	42.00	8.00	18.00	32.00	**256.00**	**Total Hrs**
Usage Percentage	34.52	45.24	51.19	23.81	30.95	50.00	9.52	21.43	38.10	**21.77**	**Average %**
Burwell Hall											
MAIN HALL 2026											
Hours booked	33.00	37.00	46.00	49.00	45.00	39.00	21.00	56.00	43.00	**369.00**	**Total Hrs**
Usage Percentage	39.29	44.05	54.76	58.33	53.57	46.43	25.00	66.67	51.19	**31.38**	**Average %**
SAME PERIOD 2025 MAIN HALL											
Hours booked	40.00	44.00	36.00	41.00	48.00	38.00	19.00	38.00	40.00	**344.00**	**Total Hrs**
Usage Percentage	47.62	52.38	42.86	48.81	57.14	45.24	22.62	45.24	47.62	**29.25**	**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 10.7% for the period April – October 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.

Salary expenditure has increased this year following the Real Living Wage increase implemented in April 2026. Officers continue to review pricing regularly, introducing modest and incremental increases where appropriate to help offset rising costs while ensuring products remain affordable and accessible to customers. Staffing levels are also kept under regular review to ensure resources are used efficiently whilst continuing to meet the demands of day-to-day operations and events.

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 sued 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