

HALL, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE

Date: 9th November 2020

Title: Corn Exchange – Request to run a Cinema

Contact Officer: Venue Manager – Tomas Smith

Background

The Council has received a request from Mr Richards (former Cinema Operator of the Screen on the Square) to run a cinema in the Corn Exchange, initially as a response to the temporary closure of Cineworld. The request is attached as Appendix A.

Current Situation

National events have overtaken this request, but the Committee may wish to still consider it for when the Covid-19 lockdown ends, and restrictions are removed enough to permit this to take place.

Officers have met with Mr Richards to discuss, and the proposal is that the Town Council would run screenings as its own events with Mr Richards providing the technical support. Mr Richards would provide the projector, screen, and sound. We would then look to run the event and ensure the covid guidelines are being adhered to throughout the duration of the showing.

Initially this will be a matinee twice a month on a Saturday or Sunday primarily targeting the older residents of Witney as both entertainment and a chance to gather if not mingle in a safe space. It was also discussed about the benefit of such a service when it came to supporting younger children in the school holidays.

If the operation were successful it could be feasible to increase the number of showings per week as well as marketing the cinema to a wider audience.

Mr Richards would not look to hire or pay rates to use the main hall at the Corn Exchange, instead he would propose to implement a profit share business model with himself initially paying for the hire of the film, we would then sell tickets and any money made after breaking even would be divided 50 – 50. It is important to consider the need for us to safely manage the event if it is being classed as a Town Council event. We would require 3 members of staff on duty, one to run the café, one to deliver drinks and one to ensure social distancing etc is being followed and the event is safely attended as well as deep cleaning the hall after the event as our cleaner doesn't work at weekends.

Members should also bear in mind that Town Council-run screenings are in the long-term business plan for the Corn Exchange.

Environmental impact

There is no perceived environmental impact regarding this proposal.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should consider any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

Obviously COVID-19 has many risk factors for the Council to take account of and implement secure measures so that business can operate safely – having a duty of care to its staff and the general public. With this goes reputational risk.

There would also be a financial risk that this might not be a viable business opportunity and would have some irrecoverable costs associated with it.

Financial implications

- The associated cost of operating the cinema without a guaranteed return, including;
 - Implementation of Covid-19 secure measures,
 - Caretaking and Bar staff,
 - Compliance Officers' time in ensuring the event is Covid-19 compliant.
- The cafe/bar could be open during the performances, with 100% profit coming back to the Town Council once operating costs were taken out.

Whilst it is hoped that this operation could be run from existing Council budgets – and would present an opportunity to receive some income from the café/bar – this is not certain, because Officers are unsure of the confidence in the public to operate such a facility at this stage.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

- To decide in principle about the return of the cinema at the Corn Exchange when national Covid-19 measures allow, on the basis as put forward by Mr Richards.