

HALL, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE

Date: 9th November 2020

Title: Public Halls Report

Contact Officer: Venue Manager – Tomas Smith

Background

We have had a busier time in the halls of late with the returning of some groups and more importantly the opening of our new café/bar 1863. Staff have continued to work hard and have been diligently cleaning all rooms thoroughly in line with current Government Guidance.

Current Situation

Covid-19 Lockdown

Regrettably, the implementation of the Covid-19 national lockdown from 4th November has resulted in a full closure for the Public Halls until 2nd December. The legislation on Community Centres/Halls is as follows:

Community Centres

18 (9) A person who is responsible for a community centre or hall must ensure that the community centre or hall is closed except where it is used—

(a) to provide essential voluntary activities or urgent public support services (including the provision of food banks or other support for the homeless or vulnerable people, blood donation sessions or support in an emergency),

(b) for the purposes of education or training,

(c) for the purposes of support groups, or

(d) for the purposes of— (i) childcare provided by a person registered under Part 3 of the Childcare Act 2006, or (ii) supervised activities for children.

1863 Café/Bar

The café opened with no official fanfare on Wednesday 22nd October. It has been such hard work getting to the point of opening and everyone involved has been completely dedicated to get us to this point during the ongoing pandemic.

Opening during a time like no other proved challenging with the council having to work with the restrictions of the pandemic and the safety of the customers and existing hirers at the forefront of all that we are trying to achieve. The main hurdle to overcome was running the safest operating procedure possible while at the same time making the running of the café a viable pursuit. To that extent, officers worked hard to make sure the public had the best opportunity to enjoy our wonderful new café in the safest and most comfortable manner possible.

The café opened twice a week, for 6-week trial period opening on a Monday and Tuesday, the consecutive days to enable continuity for customers. An outdoor seating area was implemented but sadly, there has been little success due to the change of season bringing colder and wetter weather. The people we speak to all indicate that they want to be able to sit indoors in some capacity due to the weather or to be able to wait inside to collect a takeaway.

For the above reason, officers have held several meetings on this subject and will be proposing 5-day hot drink takeaway service to the Corn Exchange Working Party when lockdown restrictions permit.

Staffing

All public halls staff have continued to work hard during these uncertain times ensuring that they were kept clean and covid secure.

Due to the lockdown, with no bookings, the caretaking and cleaning staff will be redeployed where possible to assist the Works Team, take time off and reduce hours where practical. As the buildings will be closed officers will be working from home answering telephone and email enquiries and working on the long-term projects, events and website production.

Long-term staffing of the 1863 Café/Bar will be considered as part of the 2021-22 budget-setting process and, as with all staffing matters will be referred to the Personnel Sub-Committee by the Town Clerk. Additional staffing will ensure the Council can run the bar during the week and at events while still being able to maintain adequate caretaking cover for the hoped-for increase of events throughout 2021.

Website

The website is imminently able to go live following agreement by the Corn Exchange Working Party on the following domain name: www.cornexchangewitney.org.uk

We will just have to wait for this to be completed and registered and we can get started, within the site we can advertise all our events, our facilities as well as using it as a perfect showcase for potential hirers. It will be packed full of content and information about the history of the hall, location, and information about facilities as well as advertising our upcoming events.

Other Corn Exchange Development

We are trying to arrange a time to discuss the tender of the retractable seating and other aspects of the future refurbishment. We have contacted Oxford Arts Consultants but at this time we have no date booked in the diary. Officers will continue to work on the requirements to the best of our ability to move this project forward.

Environmental impact

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make regarding its facilities and services it operates.

Risk

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

Financial implications

There are no direct financial implications from this report however, the committee should note there will be further loss of income due to the Covid-19 lockdown due to the reduction of bookings and closure of 1863 from 4th November.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report.