

CORN EXCHANGE WORKING PARTY

Date: Monday 11th January 2021
Title: 1863 Café Bar Operation
Contact Officer: Office Manager – Adam Clapton

Background

At the previous meeting of this Working Party on 7th December members will recall the opening times of the 1863 Cafe Bar were extended to five days a week with immediate effect, to be reviewed in January.

Current Situation

Tier 4 Covid-19 restrictions were introduced in West Oxfordshire on 26th December 2020, followed by the national lockdown on Wednesday 6th January 2021 resulting in the closure of the Public Halls and the 1863 café Bar until further notice.

The day-time weekly sales figures for 1863 in December during the run-up to Christmas were disappointing but given the pandemic, not surprising. Public confidence in entering hospitality venues remains low, clearly impacting on the profitability and viability of the café at the present time. 1863 figures for December can be seen in the table below.

Dates (weekly)	Cumulative takings (Gross)	Equipment Costs (exc. VAT)	Staffing Costs
Tuesday 8 th – Saturday 12 th December	£ 161.50	£ 42.00	£ 225.00
Tuesday 15 th – Saturday 19 th December	£ 160.90	£ 42.00	£ 225.00
Tuesday 22 nd – Thursday 24 th December	£ 99.10	£ 42.00	£ 135.00

However, takings from the jazz evenings continue to be positive, affirming the Council's decision to go ahead with this project to transform the Corn Exchange into a Community Arts Centre and to enhance events being held there. While the takings from these events off-set some of the costs above, consideration should be given to prioritising this aspect of operation, with every day use falling into place in the future when the pandemic is over and public confidence has returned.

Date	Takings (Gross) Including day-time takings	Staffing Costs
Wednesday 9 th December	£ 330.70	£ 36.00*
Monday 21 st December	£ 185.20	£ 36.00*

*Does not include the assistance of the Venue Manager

It should also be noted that utilities, licensing and other subsidiary costs are not included in the above figures, nor is VAT or mark-ups on purchased goods. A report on VAT and 'profit' can be obtained from the Café's till by the Venue Manager for a future meeting.

Environmental impact

There is no perceived environmental impact pertaining from the contents of this report.

Risk

There is a potential financial risk to the Council given the sales figures for 1863 in December amidst the continuing Covid-19 Pandemic.

Financial implications

Members should consider the financial implications of continued opening of the 1863 Café Bar five days a week while Covid-19 is in general circulation. Based on the weekly day-time figures in their simplest form, the Council made an approximate loss of £100 per week in the first two weeks of December. If the café had not been open at all, the loss would have been approximately £42 (equipment hire only).

The difference in the events income for the jazz evenings is self-evident from the figures.

Recommendations

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

1. Opening the 1863 Cafe Bar three days a week in the daytime (Thursday through to Saturday) with indoor seating when the Government guidance allows to maximise the possibility in the Council meeting its running costs, and;
2. That this be reviewed on a two-weekly basis, or based on up-to-date guidance and perceived footfall in the town, and;
3. That this decision be delegated to Officers so that they may be acted on quickly and effectively, and;
4. That these decisions are reported to the next appropriate meeting of this working party, or the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee, whichever should fall first, and;
5. That a full weekly opening of the 1863 Cafe/Bar is delayed until the effective* end of the Covid-19 pandemic, and;
6. At that time there is an official opening event with appropriate entertainment and publicity.
7. That outdoor seating (complimenting the indoor seating) is utilised safely when the guidance and weather allow on non-Market trading days.

*when the Council judges that Government guidance/statistics instil public confidence that it is safe to resume a semblance of normal daily activity and hospitality venues can welcome back patrons in substantive numbers.