

**CORN EXCHANGE WORKING PARTY MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 11 January 2021

At 5.00 pm in the Virtual Meeting Room via Zoom

Present:

Councillor O Collins (Chair)

Councillors:	L Ashbourne J Aitman	L Duncan J King
Officers:	Adam Clapton John Hickman	Office Manager Operations & Estates Officer
Others:	no members of the public.	

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest in matters to be discussed at the meeting.

3 MINUTES

The Working Party received and considered the minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2020.

RECOMMENDED:

That the minutes of the Corn Exchange Working Party meeting held on 7 December 2020 are an accurate account and should be signed by the Chair.

4 1863 CAFE BAR OPERATION

Members received and considered the report of the Office Manager as circulated with the agenda.

The Working Party was advised that the daytime weekly sales figures were not what had been hoped for in the run up to Christmas; the equipment and staffing costs were currently outweighing sales and this was unlikely to change in the immediate future. However, the jazz evening takings in December had been encouraging.

The Working Party agreed that consumer confidence and footfall in the town had been severely dented due to the pandemic which had impacted on the sales for such a new venture. Although

the Corn Exchange and café would currently remain closed due to the pandemic, members discussed the merits of reducing day-time opening hours in the future and felt that it was important to have a clear plan moving forward for the Council, staff and customers.

Members agreed with the recommendations by officers and asked that as the weather improves, an element of flexibility is incorporated into plans in relation to opening days and outside seating.

As the café had not had time to fully establish itself it was agreed that amending drink charges was not something to consider at this point but would be undertaken by the Venue Manager as a matter of course in the future.

RECOMMENDED: - that the report be noted and: -

1. That the 1863 Café Bar opens three days a week in the daytime (Thursday through to Saturday) with indoor seating when the Government guidance allows, to maximise the possibility of the Council meeting its running costs, and;
2. That this will 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 the Venue Manager & Office Manager/Town Clerk so that they may be acted on quickly and effectively, and;
4. That these decisions be reported to the next appropriate meeting of this Working Party, or Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee, whichever should fall first.
5. That a full weekly opening of the 1863 Café 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 days.

5 **CORN EXCHANGE REFURBISHMENT UPDATE**

The Working Party received and considered the report of the Office Manager as circulated with the agenda.

Members were advised that progress on a Community Cinema in the Corn Exchange was on hold due to the Covid-19 lockdown. Further discussions would be held on this project when Government guidance allowed.

The Working Party was also advised that Oxford Arts Consultants would not be available to offer technical advice on the enhancements to the Main Hall in the Corn Exchange; these being retractable seating, lighting, sound and acoustics.

With funds of approximately £132,000 available to make these improvements via earmarked reserves, Section 106 contributions and a Community Facilities Grant from West Oxfordshire District Council, the project was at an important juncture. The Venue Manager was currently

attempting to source other consultants and members asked if previous quotes could be revisited as part of this process. Once expertise had been sourced, a tender could be advertised.

RECOMMENDED: - that the report be noted and: -

That the Venue Manager reviews original quotations concerning the refurbishment of the Main Hall of the Corn Exchange, the previous consultants no longer being involved in this part of the project.

The meeting closed at: 5.35 pm

Chair