

## HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE

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**Date:** Monday 18<sup>th</sup> January 2021  
**Title:** Public Halls Report  
**Contact Officer:** Office Manager – Adam Clapton

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### **Background**

The purpose of this report is to provide the committee with an update on operations within the Public Halls since the last meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

### **Current Situation**

Since the last meeting business at both the Corn Exchange and Burwell Hall has continued to be severely impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. While a small number of hirers returned to the halls at the end of the summer, they reduced substantially while in Tier 2 and there are none in the present lockdown.

The Public Halls and 1863 Café Bar are effectively closed with caretaking and cleaning staff working minimal hours or being redeployed to assist the works team, per the needs of the business. The Venue Manager and Bookings Administrator continue to work from home in line with Government guidance but remain contactable via phone and email and are assisting with general administration at the Town Hall where appropriate.

### Website & Administration

A dedicated website for the Corn Exchange [www.cornexchangewitney.org.uk](http://www.cornexchangewitney.org.uk) (which includes a page for Burwell Hall) is now live and continues to be developed by officers as a primary marketing tool for the Council's halls.

The Public Halls Team are also keeping in contact with the halls regular hirers and have recently sent a new year's message updating them on the website and bar and informing of them of the Council's hopes for 2021.

### 1863 Café Bar

The Café opened five days a week from 8<sup>th</sup> December through to Christmas Eve as a trial period following ad-hoc opening from September.

At its meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2021, the Corn Exchange Working Party recommended that once current lockdown restrictions come to an end, the café re-opens Thursday-Saturday for the foreseeable future as sales figures for the December period were low and consumer confidence will take some time to return in the current climate. Further details on these recommendations can be found in the minutes of this meeting included in the pack for this committee for approval.

### Corn Exchange Main Hall Refurbishment

Since the last meeting, Witney Town Council has been awarded a Community Facilities Grant of £32,951.00 by West Oxfordshire District Council towards retractable seating, lighting and sound. An amount of approximately £132,000.00 which includes this grant, section 106 funding and earmarked reserves is now available for these aspects of the refurbishment.

Oxford Arts Consultants who had been employed by the Council to assist with the technical expertise in these areas are unfortunately not able to help at this time so officers are researching further options so there is no necessary delay.

### Burwell Hall WiFi

WiFi was originally installed several years ago at the hall by one of the regular weekly groups and paid for by them. Since this group's departure there has been no internet access which is now deemed a basic requirement of any lettable community facility. WiFi will be installed here imminently.

### **Environmental impact**

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

### **Risk**

There is a financial risk concerning the refurbishment of the Corn Exchange which has and will continue to be addressed by the Corn Exchange Working Party. **As the parent committee overseeing the Corn Exchange members should note this risk, considering the amount of funding for these projects.**

### **Financial implications**

The financial implication from this report continues to be the reduction of income being generated from the Council's public halls during the Covid-19 pandemic. While all works detailed above have already been budgeted for, there is little room for manoeuvre on anything further.

### **Recommendations**

Members are invited to note the report.