

CORN EXCHANGE WORKING PARTY

Date: 1st March 2021

Title: Corn Exchange Phase Two Refurbishment

Contact Officer: Venue Manager – Tomas Smith

Background

Witney Town Council had employed the services of the Oxfordshire Arts Consultants to assist the Venue Manager in the continued development of the Corn Exchange. As advised in the previous meeting, further assistance by this company is not possible at this time. Therefore, the Venue Manager was tasked to source alternative Consultants to allow the development of the Main Hall as a performance space to continue.

It was also delegated to the Venue Manager, at the last working party to commission several minor works in the Corn Exchange.

Current Situation

The Town Council is now in the position where it needs to appoint a firm of specialist Consultants to work with the Venue Manager on the next critical and time-sensitive stage of the Corn Exchange's continued development. Their primary job will be to advise on the equipment, focused on retractable seating, lighting, sound, and a specification of all materials required for the Main Hall; Specifically, to use their knowledge and expertise in drawing up the Tender which can then be advertised in line with the Council's financial regulations.

The Venue Manager has gathered quotes from three different Consultants he feels meet the criteria of the Corn Exchange development over the next twelve months. These are Drama by Design, Adrian James Acoustics and Theatreplan. All three firms appear to offer the services required and between them offer previous knowledge of the Corn Exchange and a portfolio of local and national developments. **The full quotes and a comparison summary are attached as appendices to this report for the Working Party's consideration (all prices are excluding VAT).**

As previously advised the Town Council has been awarded £35,951.00 by way of a Community Facilities Grant from West Oxfordshire District Council. This was based on audio, lighting and retractable seating being installed in the Main Hall for a total cost of £131,806.00 based on preliminary quotes already received for the works. The breakdown of this funding is as follows:

- Retractable Seating £55,000 (approximately)
- Audio & Lighting £77,000 (approximately)

Mr T Powell has indicated he is available and willing to assist with the recommendation and future development of the Corn Exchange. It should be noted that Mr Powell has vast experience of both working on the Corn Exchange and putting on high profile shows in different theatres. He knows the Corn Exchange well and has always been a great source of information and enthusiasm.

Consultation

Once the Town Council has agreed on the consultants it would like to employ, it would be prudent to invite the local performing groups most associated with having a vested interest in using the Corn Exchange to meet with the chosen consultants to get their desired requirements across. We can therefore acknowledge the requests and wishes of the community and ensure we have the full list of requirements from any potential hirers and in turn use this information in the process of drawing up the tender.

Given the timeframe for expending the Community Facilities Grant is Autumn 2021, a suggested course of action for the above process should be agreed at the earliest opportunity.

Maximum capacity

The absolute maximum capacity of the hall is **180 seated**. This has been confirmed by the Compliance and Environment Officer. The total capacity is dictated by the width of the fire exit leading into the café and bar area. Due to the shape of the building this doorway cannot be widened so this ultimately caps the occupancy. 180 seated works with the original retractable seating quotes so there should not be any disruption to the original plans as developed by the original companies who quoted for the work.

Main Kitchen Access & Function

Following a previous meeting, officers have undertaken further investigation on the possibility of moving the door which leads into the main hall from the larger kitchen to allow for the retractable seating to be installed across the original exit point. The Compliance and Environment Officer has stated that the current larger kitchen does not require a second door and unless we plan on turning it into a fully kitted out commercial kitchen there is no need to relocate the door to sit alongside the noticeboard. Any door which was installed would have to be clear and fire regulation compliant and would have to be covered by the existing hall door when the hall was open to allow hirers to enter and exit the hall.

Considering this information, officers have investigated the possibility of installing a hatch looking into the kitchen instead of relocating the door. The Compliance and Environment Officer has confirmed that this would need to be fire rated and therefore unattractive as it would be a metal shutter which would automatically close in the case of a fire. Therefore, installing an aesthetically pleasing shutter in place is not as straightforward as previously thought.

Bar Vinyl

The Venue Manager has sourced suitable vinyl to be installed behind the bar, this will be installed on March 3rd and will protect and maintain the existing floor.

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.

- Minimal as majority of consultancy work will be undertaken online.

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 risk of employing consultants to advise and assist with tender process and following through on their recommendations.
- Reputational Risk of employing the consultants to work on this arts centre which will be suitable for the people of Witney.
- Operational risk of disruption due to construction which might hinder the existing hirers and therefore income revenue.
- Health and Safety of Employees and Hirers must be considered during this development process.

Financial implications

- A budget for consultancy work of £10,000 has previously agreed and was going to be used by Oxfordshire Arts Consultants. To date, £450 of this has been allocated.
- Any funds above the amount remaining would need to be requested from the Policy, Governance and Finance Committee, the expenditure coming from the Town Council's general reserve.

A grant assistance request from Witney Town Hall Charity was made in 2020 – correspondence advising the request was unsuccessful is attached for information.

Recommendations

- That the report be noted; and,
- That the Working Party decides which consultants to recommend to the Town Council for undertaking this project (including Mr T Powell as an advisor)
- That the setting of the timeframe and possible consultation with users be delegated to Officers
- That the function of the main kitchen be agreed

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Confidential Quote Summary
- Appendix 2: Quote from Theatreplan
- Appendix 3: Quote from Adrian James Acoustics
- Appendix 4: Quote from Drama by Design
- Appendix 5: Witney Town Hall Charity Correspondence