

HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 13 September 2021

Title: Public Halls & 1863 Café Bar Report

Contact Officer: Venue & Events Officer - Tomas Smith

Background

The Corn Exchange, Burwell Hall and 1863 are now operating without restrictions. 1863 has been open in some form from April, being either takeaway only, or outside seating only this has dictated the takings and initially made it heavily reliant on the Weather. The Corn Exchange has continued to be open, but with only limited groups returning. Burwell Hall has proven to be the most resilient due to the smaller nature of attendees from the groups who use the facility.

All staff have been working well and we have a very strong and resilient team who continue to showcase the best the Town Council has to offer.

Current Situation

1863

1863 café Bar has continued to get busier since reopening in April in line with Government Guidance regarding the pandemic. There is now a strong core group of regulars who ensure the bar is always busy during the opening hours of 10:00 – 16:00. The presence of the tables on the Market Square has proved to be extremely popular and has attracted praise from both our customers but also from other business in Market Square. The consensus is the more people who are attracted to this part of town the better for all the business owners. The café staffing has increased with the addition of new member of staff who joined the Council in July 2021, on a normal week the café is now run on alternate shifts (morning and afternoon) by 2 team members. This ensures cover is in place over lunchtimes as well as allowing for the high standards of customer service, cleanliness, and the standard of our product to be consistently high.

Customers are returning due to word of mouth and so far, this has resulted in a steady increase on daily transactions with the café regularly taking over £150.00 a day.

This is positive and shows the business is moving in the right direction, staffing cost account for approximately £66.50 per day so on average, the cost of staffing the café and any outlay for machine rental and stock are being covered.

Add in the excellent performance which we get for evening events the café should increase its profitability and by doing this fulfil its primary function of providing a wonderful addition to the Hall for the hiring groups as well as encouraging people who may not have been in before to spend time in the hall and in turn learn about who we are and what we do.

Corn Exchange

The Corn Exchange has been the hardest hit with the lockdown, looking at it's occupancy from June to September the Main Hall was at **4.5%** occupancy, and the Gallery Room slightly better on **7.3%**. This is due to the Pandemic, and the hiring groups reluctance to start up again as most of them are larger groups who use the Corn Exchange.

There are a few groups who have continued to hire, two art groups have both continued to attend, although they have stopped for the Summer Holidays, White Feather spiritualist Church and the Redeemed Church have also been in regular attendance. The art groups and Spiritualist Church had been using the main hall at the cost of the Gallery Room during the pandemic and where social distancing was an issue. Now that the restrictions have been lifted, they have returned to their regular rooms. There has also been continued use from the Camden Society and Witney Speakers Club at a two-weekly interval.

NHS Blood Donors have been in 4 times, as well as Mynt Image Markets once a month since July. There has also been monthly Jazz in the Main Hall, although that was running, and still is, at reduced capacity to make sure that the guests who are attending are in a space in which they feel safe.

There have been two Weddings, one just a service in the Gallery Room, the other an exclusive use. Both were very successful and ran smoothly with the exclusive use wedding enabling the bar to perform extremely well on the evening.

There is also the commencement of Buttercross Theatre Company who have a booking 4 days a week starting in September, as well as providing a resident theatre school they are also putting on a Pantomime in December which has already been receiving strong ticket sales. They have been offered a 2-hour rate initially for their bookings as they will be potentially using the hall daily. This rate was offered to bring the Theatre group into the hall and to increase the daily use of the building. We are also going to be welcoming back the Arts Society, Filling Station (monthly Church group) and NHS Complex needs.

Burwell Hall

Although the occupancy at Burwell is low, down to 6% the Hall has continued to be used by several groups since lockdown started easing including, Dancemania, Monkey Music, Tumble Tots, Windrush Martial Arts and Jill Timms dog training school. There have also been a couple of children's birthday parties which have gone ahead with no issues, as well as the May Elections. Groups that are looking to return in September include MS Society, Probus Club, Witney Bridge Club and Witney Spiritualist Church. There are numerous birthday parties and anniversary celebrations lined up throughout September and October.

Publicity & Events

We have been working on the website and day to day updates will be handled by the Administration team, there is increased signage outside the Corn Exchange and as footfall increases so too has the pickup of ticket sales for the upcoming events. We are putting on both a Gary Numan & Kraftwerk night on the 25th of September and a rescheduled Sea Shanty Night on the 2nd of October. These were both events that were scheduled to go ahead in 2020 so it's good to get them booked in again. We are selling tickets up to a capacity of 150. There has also been interest from Johnny Coghlan to bring his Quo band back to the Corn Exchange although this has not been confirmed. It is expected the cost of this will exceed the remaining events budget at the Corn Exchange so members are asked to consider if they would like to agree a supplementary amount for the remainder of the year.

Environmental impact

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 – with this in mind Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

Risk

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

Financial implications

Described here or as stated in the report above.

- Ongoing operation of the café and importance of groups returning.

Recommendations

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

1. Members are invited to note the Public Halls Report; and
2. Consider a supplementary budget for Town Council organised events at the Corn Exchange in the current year 4141/104 which currently has a balance of £1200 remaining.