

PUBLIC HALLS COMMITTEE OF WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL

Held on Monday 22 September 2014
At 6pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Witney

Present

Councillor: R F N Curry (Chairman)

Councillors: Mrs J C Baker J S King
 Mrs B J Churchill T J Morris

Officers: Town Clerk Democratic Services Officer
 Facilities Supervisor

Also present: 3 members of the public

H419 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for their absence were received from Cllrs M J C Curry, D S Enright and C K Woodward.

H420 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

H421 **MINUTES**

- a) **RESOLVED:** that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2014 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.
- b) There were no matters arising from the minutes.
- c) The Town Clerk explained that it had been agreed an action plan should be drawn up for each Committee to highlight the Committee recommendations and to track these as they were carried through. She also advised that she had recently met with the Chairmen to update the "Vision" for each Committee. The main project for this committee was the re-opening of the Corn Exchange and the sale of the Langdale Hall.

H422 **OPERATIONAL REPORT**

The committee received and considered a report from the Facilities Supervisor which set out the performance for each of the Council's halls.

It was noted that despite some effort to increase it, the usage of Burwell Hall remained constant. As Madley Park Hall usage was similar, perhaps this was what was to be expected. However the Chairman had undertaken a comparison of costs and income and highlighted that the hall was budgeted to make a loss of £68,000 this year compared to £50,000 four years ago. Members agreed this was going in the wrong direction.

The committee discussed what could be done to improve the situation and thought that Burwell Hall might be better managed in the same way as Madley Park Hall.

It was agreed that there was greater competition than in the past and that some people who used to hire the hall had gone elsewhere. Lessons could be learned from Madley Park Hall and applied to Burwell Hall to create a similar model.

RECOMMENDED: that the Chairman and the Town Clerk work together on a transparent model for running Burwell Hall based on Madley Park Hall and bring back recommendations to the Committee.

H423 **FINANCIAL REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk/RFO, as circulated prior to the meeting.

The Town Clerk reminded the Committee of the pending budget setting cycle approaching and the Council's current policy to cap any precept increase to 2%. She asked if any members had any ideas on long term savings or new income streams.

A member commented that he expected significant savings when the Langdale Hall was sold, but Burwell Hall's deficit needed to be reduced. The Facilities Supervisor explained that both Burwell and Langdale Halls were exceeding predicted income levels and he had many positive comments on the Langdale Hall. He hoped this would carry over to the Corn Exchange.

Attached to the financial report was correspondence from the proprietor of The Screen at the Square which had closed when the Corn Exchange closed. The Town Clerk gave the background to this request, which Members had previously dealt with at the time. As a result Mr Richards had been offered £250 as a goodwill gesture by the Town Council in 2012.

Members discussed the correspondence and agreed that as a commercial operation, the Screen at the Square took its own commercial risks. A line needed to be drawn under this.

A member asked if the proprietor had an agreement with the Town Council and it was explained that he had not signed it.

RECOMMENDED:

- 1) that the financial report be noted
- 2) that a front page summary be added to the Financial Report.
- 3) that a solicitor's letter be sent to the proprietor of the Screen at the Square rejecting his request for compensation.

H424 **CORN EXCHANGE**

The Committee received and considered the reports of the Town Clerk and Facilities Supervisor, as circulated with the agenda.

- a) The Town Clerk updated the Committee on the current situation with regard to the removal of asbestos and the tenders for the refurbishment works.
- b) The Facilities Supervisor's report detailed points to consider for the future operation of the Corn Exchange, following research with other similar venues.
- c) The Committee considered the report of the Town Clerk which detailed the recommendations arising from the Corn Exchange Advisory Board meeting held on 15 September 2014

With regard to the furniture and equipment a member suggested that decisions on phase 2 of the project – the stage lighting etc.- should be taken by the body operating the Corn Exchange. A member thanked Terry Powell for all the advice he had given on the project.

The Town Clerk had carried out research and had also sought advice from a solicitor which had been circulated to members. The solicitor's advice concurred with that of the Advisory Board – that the Corn Exchange should be run by a charitable trust. This could either be a new trust set up by the Council, or an existing trust. The other options available were also a Management Committee or a Community Interest Company.

Members discussed these and agreed that a trust would be the preferred option, with the inclusion of some Town Councillors. It was also felt that a charitable trust would have funding streams open to it that would not be available to the Council.

The Advisory Board had recommended that Jacqui Ibbotson and Euton Daley put together a proposal on what their consultancy could offer the Council in terms of fundraising options. A member said that she had put forward a proposal for a part time fundraiser some time ago. The EEC was a good source of revenue and a professional fundraiser would have knowledge of this. The Chairman asked that the Town Clerk speak to Jacqui Ibbotson about EEC funding.

The Advisory Board was keen for the Council to engage with the public and the Town Clerk had been obtaining costs for 3D visualisations on the refurbishment project. The Chairman explained that the idea was to open the exhibition to invitees on a Friday evening and then to the general public on the next day. It was agreed that it might be appropriate to invite hall users as well.

RECOMMENDED:

- 1) that the reports of the Town Clerk and Facilities Supervisor be noted;
- 2) that detailed operational matters and licence requirements be considered at a later stage. The Facilities Supervisor's report would be passed onto the appropriate body at the appropriate time;
- 3) that writing to current users be delayed until more detail could be given on a timescale for re-opening – this would become more apparent once tenders had been considered and a contract awarded.
- 4) that the Committee agrees with the Advisory Board's recommendations as follows:
 - a) that board member Terry Powell should work with the Facilities Supervisor in order to draw up a list of additional furniture and equipment required;

- b) that the Council's best option would be to set up a Charitable Trust to run the Corn Exchange and engage Hedley's Solicitors to act on behalf of the Town Council to this effect, up to a maximum cost of £2,000;
- c) that Jacqui Ibbotson and Euton Daley put together a proposal of what their consultancy could offer the Council in terms of fundraising options and to allocate £10,000 to pay for fundraising;
- d) that a public exhibition be held – over one evening and a Saturday morning.

H425 **LANGDALE HALL UPDATE**

The Committee received a verbal update from the Town Clerk. She advised that a press release had been issued by the Council's agent and a "for sale" board had been erected. As far as she was aware no offers had been received as yet.

A member queried if a previous offer was still on the table. The Town Clerk advised that she had passed these details onto the agent.

The meeting closed at 7pm.

Chairman