

PUBLIC HALLS COMMITTEE OF WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL

Held on Monday 14 July 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
	Ms M J C Curry	T J Morris
	D S Enright	C K Woodward
Officers:	Town Clerk	Democratic Services Officer
	Facilities Manager	Facilities Supervisor

Also present: 2 members of the public and 1 member of the press

H313 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for her absence were received from Cllr B J Churchill.

H314 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

H315 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held on 2 June 2014 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

H316 **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 2 JUNE 2014**

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the meeting held on 2 June 2014 to be discussed at the meeting.

H317 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The members of the public present did not wish to address the Committee.

H318 **OPERATIONAL REPORT**

The Committee received and considered a report by the Facilities Supervisor, as circulated with the agenda.

Cllr Baker queried the £800 required for remedial lighting works. The Facilities Supervisor said that the reason that the cost was so high was due to the amount of lights in the Langdale Hall and the fact that LED lights cost between £7 and £8 each. The external lighting needed some attention as only 4 out of 8 lights were functional. This could be bulbs or circuit boards that needed replacing. The £800 had been a "guesstimate" on his part.

The Committee discussed the spot-check health & safety audit that had been carried out in June by GH Safety, particularly items relating to Madley Park Hall. The Chairman said that as a representative on the Madley Park Hall Trust, he knew that all of these items had been addressed. A Member asked if all items had therefore been attended to and he confirmed that they had.

The Chairman stated that the hall was leased to a trust and part of the lease required them to maintain it. A Member stated he was concerned that some issues noted by the health and safety audit were the same as the previous year. The Chairman pointed out that this was not true of all the issues as the gate could not have been open for a year. The Facilities Supervisor added that the open gate had been a case of bad timing.

The Facilities Manager commented that none of the issues identified were high profile, but it served to demonstrate the difference between a trust running a hall with volunteers and the Council's team managing halls. In her opinion, many issues arose from the fact that there was not a caretaker present in the hall when bookings were going on and therefore groups may be less careful. She had recommended that a trustee had responsibility for fire safety and health and safety, and they could request a health and safety audit at any time, which may have picked up issues earlier. The Facilities Supervisor could help put systems in place and offer advice. The Chairman remarked that as the hall was leased to a tenant, the health and safety audit should have been sent to them and taken up with the tenant. The Facilities Supervisor explained that he had offered his assistance on various matters a year ago, but had not forced it on the tenant. The Chairman said that he would meet with the Facilities Supervisor and the Facilities Manager to discuss what help, if any, was needed.

Several Members agreed that the hall was not an issue for discussion by the Public Halls Committee, although it was nice to see the Facilities Supervisor supporting the Trust. A Member commented that as an agent, the Town Council was entitled to inspect its properties.

The Chairman noted that the Facilities Supervisor had raised questions in his report about the move from Langdale to the Corn Exchange, and said that the Council was working hard to get the Corn Exchange open by the end of the year. However he felt that April 2015 should be a date that could be given with reasonable confidence for accepting a wedding or similar booking at the Corn Exchange. He thought that the Langdale Hall would still be open past April. A Member commented that people could definitely have one venue or the other.

The Facilities Supervisor said that his fourth question was especially important. The Chairman replied that the facilities at the Corn Exchange would be exactly the same as those at the Langdale Hall. In response to a Member's question regarding a cut-off for not accepting any more bookings for the Langdale Hall, the Facilities Supervisor explained that he had navigated this issue so far by telling people that their bookings would be moved when the Corn Exchange was open. A Member felt that at this stage it was important to keep options open.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that the report be noted.
2. that although it was hoped the Corn Exchange would be open by the end of the year, realistically Officers should only be taking firm bookings from April 2015 at this stage for the Corn Exchange.
3. that bookings made prior to setting new hire charges will be accepted at the original price quoted regardless of venue or increase in hire charges.

H319 **FINANCIAL REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the RFO as circulated prior to the meeting.

A Member asked why the cost of gas was so high in Langdale Hall and the Facilities Manager said that the building was poorly insulated with an energy efficiency rating of “E”.

The Town Clerk explained the situation regarding the VAT and the potential again for having to repay VAT back to HMRC at the end of the tax year once the partial exemption calculation is complete. She advised that DCK Beavers Ltd had carried out a preliminary calculation and had recommended that both Langdale and Burwell halls be registered for VAT. In the current year she suggested that VAT be extracted from the hall hire rather than adding 20% onto the hirer charges as Mr Kemp had demonstrated that this would still work out favourably.

RECOMMENDED: that the report be noted.

H320 **CORN EXCHANGE**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk as circulated with the agenda.

The report highlighted areas for consideration in the near future, particularly fundraising and how the Corn Exchange could be managed. She also raised whether the Advisory Board needed to continue and if so what its remit now was in light of the HLF grant application being rejected.

The Chairman suggested that the Advisory Board should continue in some form, and it should meet with the Officers to discuss how the hall could be operated and then make recommendations to the Public Halls Committee. He felt that the hall needed to be promoted as a proper arts venue and fundraising was a long term project. The Council needed to get the town on side and perhaps set up a “Friends of the Corn Exchange” group. The Facilities Supervisor commented that the SOTA Gallery had just made a commitment to booking the Langdale Hall and had been very interested in the opening of the Corn Exchange.

The Town Clerk drew members’ attention to the extra charges from Ridge incurred due to not securing the HLF grant and having to amend phase 1 plans.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that the report be noted;
2. that the Corn Exchange Advisory Board continues with appropriate input from existing members as appropriate;
3. that the Town Clerk’s recommendation to ***consider the need for a part-time fundraiser and if in agreement refer the matter to the Council’s Personnel Sub-Committee*** be considered by the Advisory Board with a recommendation being brought back to a future meeting;
4. that the Advisory Board meets with Officers to discuss possible structures – both operational and management, and make recommendations to a future meeting;
5. that the additional charges from Ridge be agreed.

H321 **LANGDALE HALL UPDATE**

The Committee received and considered the Town Clerk's report and correspondence from the Planning Authority as circulated with the agenda.

RECOMMENDED: that the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 6.47pm.

Chairman

1. *To*