



H231 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Mr Stewart Lilly thanked the Members for inviting him this evening to give a presentation on Langdale Hall. He gave a brief résumé of his involvement with the Langdale Hall since 2008 and the progress made in unravelling the boundaries, rights of way, etc.

He advised Members of the opportunities for development, remarking that his advice would be for the freehold to be retained by the Town Council in all events. He detailed the approaches he had received from several interested companies, however, he stressed that the property belonged to the Town Council and Members must decide what was best for the town.

Members commented that they recognised that the recent improvements to the Langdale Hall had extended its life. However, they were aware that if the hall was to be retained, there would be maintenance issues for the future.

H232 **INCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Two Members of the public re-entered the meeting.

H233 **COMMITTEE VISION**

The Deputy Town Clerk commented that this was an opportunity for the Committee to consider what it would like to see as the future for the public halls service. She advised that they should consider each hall one by one and that she would give a verbal report on each hall.

Langdale Hall. The Deputy Town Clerk apologised that there were no figures available, however she had been able to lift some information from the software package for the halls booking services and had made comparisons with the month of May over the last two years. She remarked that there was no significance difference in bookings for the Langdale Hall following the closure of the Corn Exchange and she was aware that a lot of groups had moved to the Methodist Church. The smaller meeting rooms were only used for 12% of the available times.

All the electrical work had been completed and would be compliant for 10 years – other work included external renovations, roof, dormer, windows, damp proofing. She advised that the heating system was still working with the old boiler and its life span could not be judged. The Deputy Town Clerk commented that she would give an operational update report to the next meeting.

She mentioned that the Committee would be considering the market research for the Corn Exchange later on the agenda, however they might wish to consider including some questions on the Langdale Hall. She commented that a public hall is only viable if it is used and answers needed to be found in order to increase the occupancy. A Member suggested something for young people, like a bowling alley, where families could go as well.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that the Methodist Church had applied for a grant, which would be considered by the Finance & General Purposed Committee, and included proposals for small meeting and entertainment space, together with a community cinema which had moved there from the Corn Exchange. She cautioned that many groups appeared happy with their new accommodation and may well not come back. The Chairman commented that Members needed to be mindful of this when considering the development proposals for the Corn Exchange.

(Mr Stewart Lilly left the meeting at this point, being 7pm).

Madley Park Hall. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that this hall would be closed in August to complete the flooring and outstanding larger snagging works. She reported that a meeting had been arranged with the Trustees and Treloar in order for all parties to agree a way to move forward with a full repairing lease. She was hopeful of a hand over in September/October.

Burwell. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that £28,000 had been spent on maintenance last year. This was an easy to run hall with 60-65% usage of the main hall and 20% usage of the meeting room.

The bar franchise had reduced costs as the bar manager was responsible for locking up after events, therefore there were no caretaker costs incurred.

West Witney Church was going ahead with the installation of the audio visual equipment, although the Deputy Town Clerk commented that the Church could soon outgrow the hall.

The application for the recreation ground to be given Queen Elizabeth II status was progressing and this could potentially open up grant funding, particularly for the changing facilities associated with the football pitches. This could allow the existing changing rooms to be developed into meeting rooms.

The graffiti was a problem and could only be removed with an angle grinder, however, The Deputy Town Clerk advised that she was looking to paint the hall, and followed by a treatment of anti-graffiti paint.

A Member congratulated the Deputy Town Clerk on a good job.

A Member queried the costs associated with the Corn Exchange and Langdale Hall, how much were they costing, aside from the capital expenditure, and queried whether this could be included with the operational report. The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that the usage would not be increased as much as anticipated. The Chairman commented that the public halls never made a profit and the question was to what level the Council was prepared to subsidise the halls. A Member remarked that going forward the Committee should be aware of the exact costs and maintain tight controls with targets for each hall and monitor in a business fashion.

Corn Exchange. The Deputy Town Clerk commented that there were a lot of unknowns and other things needed to be investigated before setting the design briefs – the impact of the development by the Methodist Church and a wider plan for Witney. The theatre groups appeared comfortable in their new homes. The stage in the Langdale Hall was being promoted at no cost with 15 bookings over the next few months.

**RECOMMENDED:**

- 1) that the verbal report be noted.
- 2) that the following be included in the Committee's vision for the future of the public halls:
  - a) Langdale Hall. That Stewart Lily reproduces his report from 2008, giving updated bullet points on progress since then.
  - b) Madley Park Hall. That the lease be agreed within a reasonable time frame, possibly October.
  - c) Burwell Hall. Maintain the management of the hall. Look at grants for sports changing facilities.
  - d) Corn Exchange. To proceed with the market research to help identify the appropriate route forward.

H234 **CORN EXCHANGE TENDER**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk, together with a market research proposal, as circulated.

The Deputy Town Clerk highlighted some relevant points within the market research proposal. The proposal detailed the sites for the market research and Member suggested that the Woolgate Centre should also be included as this had a large footfall, together with Marriotts Walk.

The Deputy Town Clerk enquired whether Members wished to include some questions relevant to the Langdale Hall in the market research. A Member considered that the research should concentrate on the Corn Exchange project in order to ensure that this was done properly and Members agreed, although they would need to consider the Langdale Hall at a future stage. A Member commented that the work completed on the Langdale Hall should enable its use over the next 10 years.

Members queried the costs associated with the market research, and the available budget. The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that the basic cost would be £6,855 +VAT, with possible optional extra costs, and that these costs would be met from the earmarked reserves.

**RECOMMENDED:**

- 1) that the report be noted.
- 2) that the market research, as presented to the meeting, be agreed, subject to the following
  - questions on proposals for the Corn Exchange to be backed up with questions on the financial implications on the Council Tax (precept).
  - the Deputy Town Clerk negotiates the costs of the Market Research, as discussed.
  - questions are included on what consumers would like to see and whether they would actually use it.
  - include question regarding retailing requirements for the Corn Exchange .
  - include the Woolgate Centre as well as Marriotts Walk for canvassing.
- 3) that as an incentive for consumers to complete the questionnaire, a donation of 5p, up to a limit of £200, be given to the Mayor's chosen charity (to be confirmed), for each completed questionnaire.
- 4) that an upper limit of £1,500,000 be agreed for the financial commitment to the Corn Exchange build.
- 5) that the long term financial subsidy limit for the running of the public halls be agreed as £150,000, with a view to reducing the subsidy over a five year period to £100,000.
- 6) that the interview panel for the tender shortlist interviews be Cllrs T J Morris, Mrs J C Baker and P J Dorward.

H235 **CORN EXCHANGE UPDATE – FAÇADE WORKS**

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

Members expressed their disapproval at the vandalism which had occurred at the Corn Exchange. The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that this had been reported in the Witney Gazette, highlighting the additional costs involved in rectifying the damage.

**RECOMMENDED:** that the report be noted.

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The meeting closed at 8pm

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Chairman