

PUBLIC HALLS COMMITTEE OF THE WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL

**Held on Monday 15th July 2013
at 6pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Witney**

Present

Councillor: T J Morris (Chairman)

Councillors:	Mrs J C Baker	P J Doward
	Mrs B J Churchill	D S Enright
	RFN Curry	J S King

Officers:	Town Clerk	Facilities Manager
	Democratic Services Officer	Deputy Town Clerk

H316 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

H317 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

H318 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED:

- i) that the Minutes of the meeting held on 3rd June 2013 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.
- ii) that the Minutes of the Special Public Halls meeting held on 2nd July 2013 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

In considering the minutes at (ii) Cllr R Curry re-iterated that the Council did not have a definitive idea of what functions the front of the Corn Exchange would fulfil, but it was important to get it open.

H319 **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the previous meetings held on 3rd June and 2nd July 2013.

H320 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

There were four members of the public present but none wished to address the Committee.

H321 **OPERATIONAL REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Facilities Manager, as circulated with the agenda.

Halls Usage Figures and Comparisons - The Facilities Manager reported that there was positive news on the hall usage figures as they had increased although occupancy rates were still only at 37 – 43%. This was despite the reduction in hire rates and other measures taken to encourage bookings. Burwell Hall, however, was the exception with a usage rate of 78.5%. A member commented that this was indeed good news. He noted that in May the town centre hall had not performed as well as the other halls out of the town centre.

Another member asked if there had been any improvements in bookings for the Langdale Hall. The Facilities Manager replied that there had been improvements and the hall had taken on new groups e.g. bingo and martial arts. The dance floor was a positive aspect of the hall – it was used three times per week- but it was also a negative aspect as it was too large a space for many groups. People using Burwell Hall were those that were very local to the area, and the Langdale Hall attracted a different sort of customer. The Chairman agreed that the Burwell Hall was very well used.

Opus 12 Software Project - A member asked if the software had been budgeted for. The Town Clerk reminded members that the Council had budgeted for asset management software, and Opus 12 was able to manage all compliance issues for a fraction of that budgeted. She stated that there was no additional cost other than what had been budgeted for, and no additional staffing costs as the Facilities Supervisor was inputting the data whilst on site at weekends.

A member asked for the exact cost of the software and the Facilities Manager replied that it had cost £395 and that it was recognised by the HSE.

RECOMMENDED: that the report be noted.

322. **HEALTH AND SAFETY**

The Facilities Manager gave a verbal update on the health and safety audit and advised that it had not identified any issues with the halls. A member asked if the Corn Exchange was still included in health and safety checks and it was confirmed that it was checked at least once a week.

A member asked if Madley Park Hall was the Town Council's responsibility and the Facilities Manager confirmed that the responsibility was as a landlord but that the trustees had responsibilities too.

RECOMMENDED: that the verbal update be noted.

323. **CORN EXCHANGE**

The Chairman of the Advisory Board gave a verbal progress report.

He stated that the Advisory Group was waiting for a Quantity Surveyor to be appointed. No further progress could be made until this had been done, and therefore this needed to be expedited. The Town Clerk reported that this was in hand.

RECOMMENDED: that the verbal progress report be noted.

324. **FINANCIAL REPORT**

Members received and considered the report of the Deputy Town Clerk as previously circulated with the agenda. The RFO reported that she had produced the financial report on a large spread sheet which she hoped members would find easier to understand.

The RFO highlighted from her report the refund for the Non-Domestic Rates in respect of the Corn Exchange following the successful appeal to the Valuation Office Agency. She also cautioned members to be aware that if even a part of the Corn Exchange was to re-open, the Council would again be liable for rates in the region of £5,000. However if the building was to be run by a Charitable Trust, this could result in a reduction.

A member enquired if the agreement had been finalised with the Madley Park Hall Trustees. The Chairman commented that he needed to meet with the Trustees; some amendments had been made to the lease and a meeting was needed to finalise it. The Town Clerk reminded members that there was currently a tenancy at will in place with the Trust. The member was concerned about the financial situation and was worried that there was no legal agreement, although he now understood what was happening.

A member reminded other members that the Langdale Hall was costing £2,060 per week to keep open. He noted that the Burwell Hall was also costing a significant amount of money. He said that in effect the users were getting a subsidy and he wondered if the Committee could be presented with a list of users of the hall and what each "subsidy" worked out at. He did not think that commercial operations should be effectively getting this subsidy. The Chairman responded that commercial hire rates had been introduced but the rates had to be competitive to attract business. The Facilities Manager confirmed that there were different tiers of hire rates and the most local organisations paid the lowest rates, and were therefore getting the best "subsidy".

The Chairman agreed that he thought it would be beneficial to have a breakdown of the users of the halls. The Facilities Manager reported that the users changed on a weekly basis but it would be possible to categorise the users and provide a report on how much they paid.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that the report be noted
2. that a report on users, charges and subsidies be brought to the next meeting.

325. **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RESOLVED: that the Press and Public be excluded from the Meeting in accordance with Section 1 of the Local Government Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

326. **LANGDALE HALL**

The Committee received and considered a confidential verbal report from the Town Clerk on the current and future situation of the Langdale Hall. She highlighted the potential funding required for the Corn Exchange project. She reminded members that it was current Council policy to rationalise its town centre halls into one, although the disposal had been stalled pending the reopening of the Corn Exchange. The Council needed to demonstrate matched funding in its pending application to the Heritage Lottery Fund and she urged the members to agree to marketing the Langdale Hall for sale sooner rather than later.

The Committee discussed the issue at some length.

RESOLVED:

- 1) that the verbal report be noted
- 2) that the Council seeks professional advice on a valuation and on potential different ways of developing the site.

The meeting closed at 6.50pm.

Chairman.

