

MEETING OF THE PUBLIC HALLS SUB-COMMITTEE
Of the AMENITIES COMMITTEE

Held on 31 October 2016
at 6.00pm in the Gallery Room, Corn Exchange, Witney

Present

Councillor: Cllr P J Dorward (Chair)

Councillors:	S E Bartington	H W Chirgwin
	C Brown	C E Reynolds
	B J Churchill	T J Morris

Non-Committee Members: H B Eaglestone

Officers:	Town Clerk	RFO
	Facilities Manager	Democratic Services Officer
	Facilities Administrator	Works Contracts Supervisor

Also present: 3 members of the public

H596 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

H597 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllrs B J Churchill declared an interest in agenda items relating to the Corn Exchange as she was a trustee on the Corn Exchange Witney Trust. Cllr H W Chirgwin declared an interest in any discussion relating to Madley Park Hall as he was a trustee.

H598 **MINUTES**

- a) **RESOLVED:** that the minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2016 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman;
- b) **MATTERS ARISING:** there were no matter arising from the minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2016.

H599 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The Committee adjourned in line with standing order 42 so that Mr Andrew Thomas could address the meeting about the Corn Exchange.

H600 **FINANCIAL REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the RFO as circulated with the agenda. It was suggested that the Committee would be prudent to put in a budget for the Corn Exchange for the rest of the year, by vireing the remaining grant set aside for the Corn Exchange Witney Trust. A member queried the business rate charge on the Langdale Hall. The RFO explained that the Council had received 6 months rate free as a consequence of it being empty but that period was now at an end.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that the report be noted.
2. that Members agreed to make a virement from the grant funding set aside in respect of the CEWT to cover the running of the Corn Exchange for 2016 – 17
3. that a budget be put in place for the running of the Corn Exchange and basic costs for the Langdale Hall in 2017/18
4. that a grant be included in the budget for 2017-18/18-19/19-20 for the Corn Exchange/Langdale Hall to cover the possibility of a trust or other organisation taking over the running of either/both.

H601 **OPERATIONAL REPORT – CORN EXCHANGE**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Facilities Manager as circulated with the agenda, in which she had highlighted a number of operational issues.

There were still snagging issues outstanding after 17 months, despite several requests and shutdowns to allow these to be rectified.

There would be a cost to deal with the emergency lighting.

As the Town Council did not have long term service contracts due to restrictions put in place by the Trust, the hall was costing more to maintain than it should, although the Facilities Manager stressed that it was being looked after in the correct manner.

The Committee discussed the possibility of CCTV being installed. As it was not certain whether it would be better to cover the whole building room by room or just certain areas such as the lobby, it was felt that quotes should be sought for both. There was potential to utilise some of the old system from the Langdale Hall, but the Works Contracts Supervisor cautioned that this would be a false economy as it was already dated and was quite possible that the requisite parts to fit it into the Corn Exchange would not be available. It would have a very limited life span.

A member queried if there was any of the retention money left. The Town Clerk confirmed that there was about £17,000. He proposed that the Council should retain this money and utilise it to do the outstanding work itself. This was permitted under the terms of the contract. The Committee felt this would be a good idea.

The Facilities Manager had included a “wish list” in her report. This was composed of items that people had given as reasons why they did not want to book the hall, such as wi-fi.

The Chairman asked what had happened about the curtains. The Town Clerk recalled that quotes had been obtained but the sale proceeds from the Langdale Hall was to provide funding for items such as this. Curtains would therefore need to be put into the next years budget.

A member asked if the wi-fi could be transferred from the Langdale Hall. The Facilities Manager explained that the Corn Exchange did not have a phone line for broadband, only for red care so this would need to be installed.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that the update on snagging be noted and the remaining retention money be retained and used to complete these issues;
2. that long term contracts for maintenance be considered as part of budget setting;
3. that quotes are sought for a sympathetically mounted CCTV system, with advice being sought from the police;
4. that the wish list is considered as part of agenda item 8, but the additional emergency lighting should be installed at a cost of £505.

H602 PUBLIC HALLS USAGE DATA

The Committee received and considered the report of the Facilities Administrator. Bookings were down on last year, although the maintenance shutdown at Burwell Hall might have been a contributing factor.

A member commented that she had tried to book Madley Park Hall and that seemed to be operating at capacity. The Facilities Administrator reported that a lot of people were put off booking by not being able to book the hall at an hourly rate. They did not always want 4 hours. A member reported that Madley Park ran at capacity due to a strong community interest and an excellent manager. A member commented that Madley Park Hall had picked up a lot of bookings when the Corn Exchange had closed and those people were now settled and would not be looking to move back.

The Facilities Administrator was keeping a record of reasons why people did not book the halls and this report would come back to the Committee.

Another main reason for people not booking the hall was that there was no proper kitchen.

A member commented that the halls were paid for by the tax payer and if prices were putting people off this was counter intuitive. If changing to an hourly rate was the solution then he would be happy to consider this at the next meeting.

The RFO added that members may wish to increase the amount available via grant funding to support community groups with the cost.

The Facilities Manager did not think price was the issue, but rather that the building lacked an identity.

RECOMMENDED: that the report be noted.

H603 CORN EXCHANGE

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk concerning the future running of the Corn Exchange, with which she had provided a copy of the Feasibility Study carried out in 2013.

The possibility of doing a further survey was discussed but it was felt that this would be a backwards step. In considering the comment regarding the need for an identify, the Town Clerk reminded Members that the Council agreed a mission statement in 2012:

“To provide an affordable, accessible, multi-purpose flexible Community and Arts Centre for Witney and West Oxfordshire that will have a reputation for excellence. “

Furthermore, the closure of the Langdale Hall and refurbishment of the Corn Exchange was to provide a multipurpose space for hire, which could be adapted to meet the hirers needs.

A member commented that the things that were missing from the hall were things that the Trust had been going to fulfil. Unfortunately a year had been wasted discussing a lease. He thought that although the Council had not agreed a lease, it could still involve the Trust. It could still apply for grants on the Council’s behalf. Another member disagreed, saying that the Trust would not have access to grants without a lease for the building.

There followed a debate about how to move forward. It was agreed that there would be no harm in arranging an exploratory meeting with the Trust to discuss how trustees might be involved. An invitation would also be extended to any other interested parties to come forward.

Members returned to discussing the wish list from agenda item 7. It was agreed that wi-fi and a larger boiler to provide water for tea and coffee were priority items and quotes should be sought. However, the boiler should be sited in the small front kitchen rather than the main kitchen so as not to conflict with any future configuration should the Council opt to install one. Funding would come out of general reserves.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that the report be noted;
2. that Cllrs Dorward, Bartington, Morris and Churchill and the Town Clerk meet with the trustees at the earliest convenience to discuss ways of moving forward;
3. that the installation of wi-fi and a larger boiler for the small kitchen be investigated and a report brought to the next meeting. This would be funded from general reserves.

H604 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS & PUBLIC**

RESOLVED: that in accordance with section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, and as extended by Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public, including the press, be excluded from the meeting because of the confidential nature of the following business to be transacted.

H605 **LANGDALE HALL**

The Committee received and considered a confidential verbal update from the Town Clerk.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted and options that did not involve immediate financial expenditure should be followed up by arranging meetings with the respective interested parties.

The meeting closed at 7.32pm.

Chairman