

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

WEDNESDAY 14 MARCH 2018

Estates Management Committee

Broadly speaking, this committee is concerned with the usage, maintenance and repair of council buildings and land not covered by other committees or authorities and covers the Corn Exchange, Langdale Hall, Burwell Hall, Madley Park Hall, Town Hall and Buttercross, West Witney Sports Club, the Cemetery Lodge, Tower Hill and Windrush Cemeteries and the closed churchyards within Witney.

The Corn Exchange

This building has been in regular use throughout the year, and with a wide range of activities taking place. Feedback from users has been very positive, and it is hoped that this year will see an even higher intake of bookings. In brief, here are some of the regular users:

Bingo, NHS Special Needs, Tea Dances, White Feather Spirit Group, over 30'S Disco, Windrush Flower Group, Spec Savers Community Morning, Ditto group, the Redeemed Christian Church (every Sunday), and Oxford Blood donors twice monthly.

Main events staged include wedding receptions, a wedding fayre, an antique teddy bear exhibition, a monthly craft fair, and fashion shows. We also have bookings for wedding receptions this summer.

Apart from working hard to improve the hall usage, we strive to maintain the building in good décor and repair and will soon see the addition of new curtains in the hall and gallery which it is hoped will improve the acoustics as well as the overall look. Additionally, it is hoped to install a satellite speaker system for the main hall to further improve the acoustics of the hall and its usability.

The Public Halls Officer and caretakers also work hard to maintain the attractive wooden floor, and follow a planned routine of regular polishing and buffing throughout the year to not only protect the surface, but to create a patina to enhance the overall look. The floor is very precious to us and hall users and thus we want to preserve and protect it as much as possible.

Finally, with the Langdale Hall coming back into use, it has been agreed that the spare storage capacity of this hall can be utilised to store chairs, tables and other equipment thus freeing up much needed space to the rear of the Corn Exchange.

Langdale Hall

You may have noticed that since last autumn there has been much activity in and around this hall, and until recently scaffolding erected. A few years ago it was assumed that this hall would be sold off to fund the refurbishment of the Corn Exchange, but this has not been the case and we are pleased to say that the hall has been modified and refurbished for use by ICE (Inclusive Care and Education Ltd). Interest in running the hall had previously been expressed by several other charities and local groups and discussions with several of these were entered into.

Of these, the ICE centre had been operating from a building in Carterton but had been given notice on their lease and were urgently looking for somewhere else they could run as a base for themselves and as a community hub.

Their proposal to the Town Council was successful and building work has been carried out to ensure the hall meets DDA and Energy Performance Certification compliance requirements. A lift and a sensory room are among the additions to the hall.

Burwell Hall

This hall continues to be used very regularly with very little input from the council. There have been some issues with regard to vandalism and youths climbing onto the roof, but since the application of anti-climb paint there has been little to report. The Hall is opened and closed by the Town Council and thus visited nearly every day by either the Public Halls Officer or one of the caretakers.

West Witney Sports Club

This is a council building administered by the Social Club and has been the centre of attention since many Health & Safety issues were identified. Over the last year the council has worked with the club to remedy/improve the situation, and most issues have been dealt with including the replacement of the old spiral staircase, the completion of documentation with regard to electrical circuits and fuses, and the installation of a new regulatory fire resistant ceiling in the main kitchen.

Recently we have had 'parkrun UK' express an interest and run a trial event - it is hoped this will prove to be a success and encourage further events to take place. It also opens the scope of increasing the usage of the clubhouse, something the new management team are keen to do.

With regard to the adjoining land, it has been noticed that vehicles have been driven over the grassed area and during this year work will be undertaken to create a bund to prevent unauthorised access. The club users will be encouraged to close and lock the gate to the site once a suitable arrangement between the clubs has been agreed.

Attention will be given to the lease of the site by all users, and it is intended to enter into discussions about the granting of such a lease as soon as it is practical to do so. It is hoped that in so doing longevity of leasehold would attract inward investment from grant funding via organisations like the Oxfordshire FA. The Council is aware that users have a long wish list of improved facilities wanted including a refurbished/new clubhouse, and ATP with floodlighting, improved drainage across the playing fields, and improved parking.

Cemeteries and Closed Churchyards

Over the past year there has been much to consider by the way of maintenance and repair. Once a cemetery has been declared 'full' it is closed to further burials (unless a plot has already been reserved), and the Town Council sometimes has to assume responsibility for maintenance. Over the past year this has included checking the condition and angle of lean of headstones, repairs to walls and similar where they have been damaged by vehicles, and the maintenance/removal of trees where they create a nuisance or other damage. Maintenance and repair work is carried out as soon

as possible after it has been reported to the Town Council, and expenditure been approved by the appropriate committees. General care such as grass cutting is carried out under contract.

Cllr Peter Dorward, Chairman – Estates Management Committee