



## Agenda item: 10

### Summary

Report for:	<b>Housing and Community Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>
Date of meeting:	<b>Wednesday 23 November 2016</b>
Part:	<b>1</b>
If Part II, reason:	

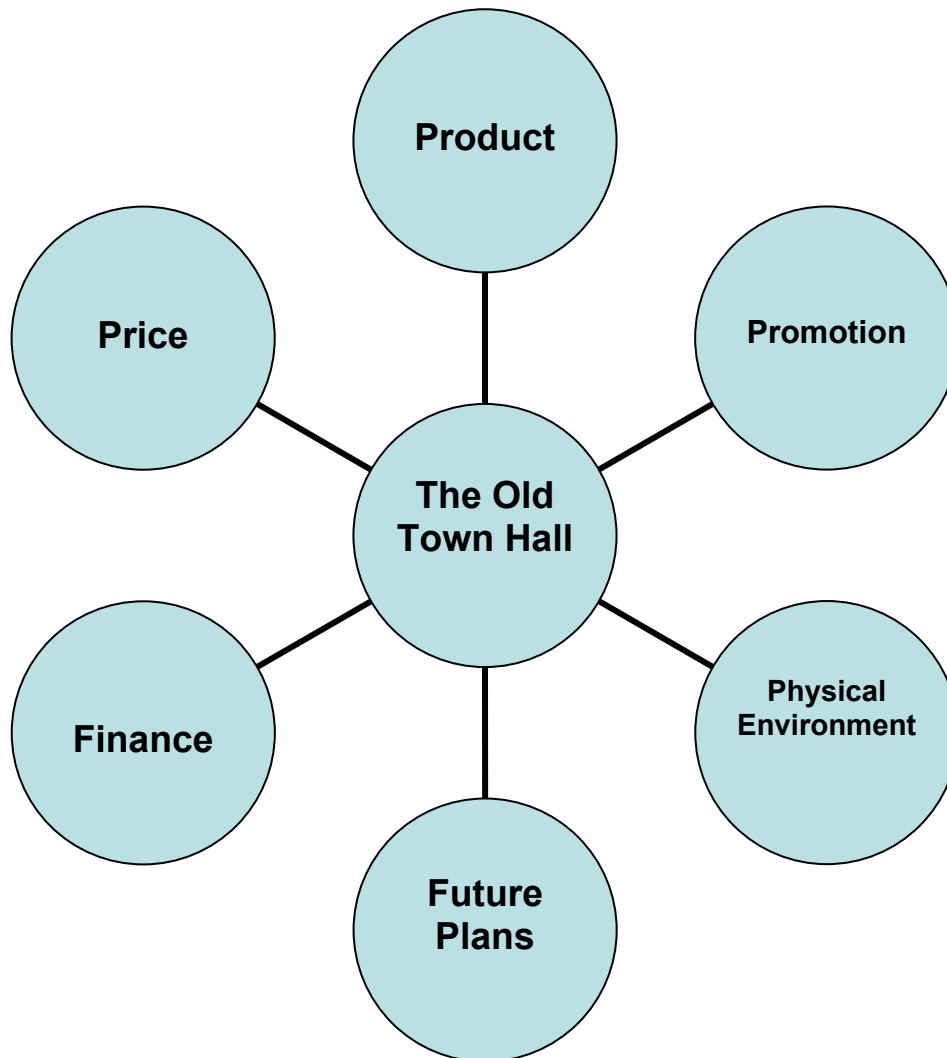
Title of report:	<b>Old Town Hall update</b>
Contact:	Cllr Neil Harden, Portfolio Holder for Residents and Regulatory Services Sara Railson, Arts Team Leader, Resident Services, Old Town Hall Ext 2093
Purpose of report:	The Old Town Hall - Update
Recommendations	1. Members Note the Report  2. Members agree the Future Plans outlined at the end of the report
Corporate objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A clean, safe and enjoyable environment</li> <li>• Building strong and vibrant communities</li> <li>• Ensuring economic growth and prosperity</li> <li>• Delivering an efficient and modern council</li> </ul>
Implications:	Financial:  The activities of the Old Town Hall fall within agreed budgets
'Value for money' implications	
Risk implications	n/a.
Community Impact Assessment	n/a
Health and safety Implications	The completion of the refurbishment has ensured accessibility throughout The Old Town Hall.
Consultees:	The Old Town Hall customers, staff Andrew Burton, marketing services
Background papers:	None
Historical background <i>(please give a brief</i>	The Old Town Hall update was last presented to members in November 2014, following completion of the Cellar Club and Gallery Café / Bar refurbishment. This report now bring

<i>background to this report to enable it to be considered in the right context).</i>	members up to date with the challenges and achievements of the past 24 months.
Glossary of acronyms and any other abbreviations used in this report:	

## 1. Background

- 1.1 The Old Town Hall is a small scale receiving venue situated in the heart of the Old Town in Hemel Hempstead.
- 1.2 The venue comprises of the main house theatre with a seating capacity of 120 seats, The Cellar Club (refurbished in 2014) comprising of 65 seats and The Gallery Café Bar.
- 1.3 The Old Town Hall provides a professional arts programme of drama, dance, comedy, film, music, children's and family theatre as well as a regular turnover of visual arts exhibitions.
- 1.4 The Old Town Hall, seeks to uphold the High Performance delivery aspirations and reputation of Dacorum Borough Council through our professional arts programme and community engagement projects and initiatives.
- 1.5 We adhere strongly to a generally held set of principles that clearly outline our vision, commitment, aspiration and approach to service delivery. We 'sell' our service to the residents of and visitors to the Borough, concerning ourselves on a daily basis with the job of engaging our customers / clients with our arts programme and facilities hire offer and as a consequence our marketing strategy is one of the most important (and ever evolving) approaches we take.
- 1.6 At the OSC meeting in 2014 The Old Town Hall vision was - to be a beacon of excellence for the arts in Dacorum.
- 1.7 Our aims were equally succinct:
  - Increase audiences and other users of the building
  - Attract Sponsorship
  - Present a dynamic arts programme
- 1.8 This report, outlined below and adopting the style of a marketing matrix, sets out how we have fared against these objectives and whether we are upholding our vision for the venue.

## 1.9 The Old Town Hall – 2017 to 2020



### 1.10 Product

The key product of The Old Town Hall is the programme of events. It should represent what consumers want from the programme, should meet their expectation of quality and value for money. Should entertain, educate and challenge - it should work for them.

#### a. Product - The Old Town Hall - Arts Programme – Quantitative (No. of events)

Below are attendance figures for audiences at The Old Town Hall for the past 4 years. These figures relate only to those events and performances which are directly programmed and funded by the Old Town Hall / Dacorum Borough Council

Full year – Pre-refurbishment 2013/14	82 live arts events *
Refurbishment year 2014/15	120 live arts events **
Full year – post refurbishment 2015/16	171 live arts events
Current year 2016/17	170 live arts events ***

\* Due to a 'slide' in the refurbishment timetable – the arts programme (which is booked some months in advance) was purposefully 'light' to accommodate the building works. As these works did not happen, it was simply too late to book a more robust arts programme.

\*\* The re-scheduled works (April – September 2014) necessitated a slightly 'lighter' arts programme (a reduction of some 8 – 12 performances overall, but as we had anticipated this it did not impact as much on the final output.

The first full year of operation (2015/16) saw some changes in key personnel who helped the Old Town Hall reach a significantly higher level of output, which now sits at capacity given the level of budget, time and physical resources it takes to manage such a robust programme.

\*\*\* The number of arts events / performances booked as of 27.10.16.

**b. Product - The Old Town Hall - Arts Programme – Quantitative (Attendance)**

Financial Year	% of capacity
2013/14	62%
2014/15	63%
2015/16	67%
2016/17 (to date)	71%

Currently, our trend is upward and as can be seen is improving by approximately 4% for the last three years. Whilst this is good news; sustaining and surpassing previous year attendance is dependent on a number of varying factors discussed within other areas of this marketing mix.

**c. Product - The Old Town Hall - Private Hires – Quantitative**

The Old Town Hall is marketed as a venue for hire – it has 5 serviceable spaces:

- Main Theatre – for rehearsal, performance and conference meetings (capacity 120)
- Dressing Room for smaller, more private meetings (capacity 15)
- Gallery Café / Bar for meetings, social events (capacity 50)
- Attic meeting Office for smaller meetings (capacity 8)
- Cellar Club for parties, social events, meetings, conferences (capacity 60)

All these spaces are being marketed through our Hiring Package and they come with a variety of add-ons – catering, technical hire, Front of House staffing etc., all of which are costed and added onto the basic space hire for a fully professional hires experience.

### 1.11 Number of private hires hosted over the past 4 years

Full year – Pre-refurbishment 13/14	77 private hires *
Refurbishment year 2014/15	71 private hires **
Full year – post refurbishment 2015/16	129 private hires
Current year 2016/17 ( booked - as of 1.11.16)	147 private hires

\* Due to a 'slide' in the refurbishment timetable – the arts programme (which is booked some months in advance) was purposefully 'light' to accommodate the building works. As these works did not happen, it was simply too late to book a more robust arts programme.

\*\* The re-scheduled works (April – September 2014) necessitated a 'lighter' arts programme - we had anticipated as much. However, the unanticipated over-running of the works by some 6 weeks did play a factor in the reduction of arts events.

The significant uplift in hiring in the first full year of operation post refurbishment reflects the time and effort that venue staff put into attracting and securing not just regular hires but also one – off conferences, meetings and celebratory events. This trend has continued unabated into the current financial year.

### 1.12 Overall usage of the facility over the past 4 years (arts programme and private hires combined)

Full year – Pre-refurbishment 13/14	159 events
Refurbishment year 2014/15	191 events
Full year – post refurbishment 2015/16	300 events
Current year 2016/17 (as of 1.11.16)	317 events

We will end this year with around 150 private hires (perhaps more – but only slightly) which when combined with the number of arts events, demonstrates the 'full-throttle' approach to making The Old Town Hall a vibrant, busy and income-generating venue within it's size, scale and capacity.

In the Overview and Scrutiny Report of November 2014: The Old Town Hall report stated that:

*“Post refurbishment, it is anticipated that during our first full year of operation we will host between 230 and 250 events, as compared to the average event rate 130 – 150. This increase in events will not only be programmed arts events but also meetings, corporate events as well as celebratory occasions such as birthday parties and wedding / partnership receptions.”*

Clearly we have surpassed the original estimate for use of the building post-refurbishment. However, this level of productivity does raise questions about sustainability in terms of budget, time and physical resources. There is a finite amount of output and we have or are about to reach it within it current resources.

### 1.13 Qualitative feedback from hirers:

*'Thank you, it has been an absolute pleasure using your facility everyone has been so helpful and lovely. '*

Z M, Make A Move Dance Academy

*'We always have such a wonderful welcome from all the team, it's a great place to be!'*

M B, Managing Director, Electric Umbrella (July 2016)

#### **d. Product – Programme Development**

The Old Town Hall is always thinking of ways to extend our offer; to engage with an even wider audience, to build our audience numbers as well as to cement our reputation as a high performing arts venue with a quality programme. This means that we must be flexible and adapt to the demands made of us by audiences, funders, promoters and artists and most importantly as our position as a service provider for Dacorum Borough Council.

### 1.14 Programming Strands

#### **Write Here, Write Now – Scriptwriting Course**

This is a new initiative that capitalises on the skills set of our new marketing officer. A published writer, she has designed this course to engage local writers interested in seeing their work make the journey from page to performance.

The course was originally intended for 8 participants over a 6 session course. But in keeping with our current trend for demand to almost outstrip supply – we have bumped the numbers up to 12 participants per session. The 6 session course is now sold out.

#### **Children's Christmas Show**

We are in our second year of presenting multiple performances just before we close for the holidays. In 2015, we presented 10 sold out performances – this year we are hosting 9 shows and thus far have sold nearly 34% of tickets.

#### **Comedy Previews / WIP ( Works in Progress)**

The position and reputation of the Old Town Hall has made the venue something of a 'go to' place for comedy promoters. On a fairly regular basis we are asked if we can take some of the previews or WIP for some of the most well know comedy names in the country. The positive coverage we gain from this and the enhancement of our reputation to customers and promoters alike is very welcome. It normally results in an increase of adding to our mailing list or e-mail list.

#### **Arts Award**

What is Arts Award ? It is -

- a great way for children and young people to be inspired by and enjoy the arts
- offered at five levels, four accredited and one introductory award

- a framework for learning new skills and sharing them
- an opportunity to develop creativity and leadership skills
- a link between young people and creative arts professionals

The Old Town Hall is now 3 years into being an Arts Award Centre. We are accredited and appear on the national register for Arts Award support centres.

Over the past 3 years we have delivered schools Arts Award to 4 local schools and worked with local teachers to further their understanding of the initiative.

Recently, we devised and delivered 'Arts Award in a Day' – which was run as part of our Fun Palace event on Sunday 2nd October of this year.

We designed our own template for this, agreed by the Arts Award governing body and throughout our 'Fun' day over 40 young people completed the award and have recently received their Arts Award certificates.

## **The Health and Well-Being Agenda**

Gaining increasing importance and deservedly so is the commitment to Health and Well-Being. The Old Town Hall as an arts venue has always prided itself that the programme of activity on offer is of benefit due to the nature of the feeling of engaging in the arts has. There have been numerous articles written on the beneficial aspects of engagement with the arts – across all manner of challenges that people face.

Over the past few years, we have become increasingly more aware of our place in the local society to bring added benefit to members of community who suffer these personal challenges.

## **Let's Dance**

This initiative was created back in 2013 to encourage those over 55 years of age to enjoy the benefit of a mild movement / dance class. The success of this project has been extraordinary. From a simple weekly, one hour session, we have grown to now deliver two 1.5 hour sessions, both of which are completely sold out.

The group have participated in a number of activities outside of The Old Town Hall – the 2016 Big Dance project – where they performed in Hemel Town Centre with dance students from Kings Langley School. A Love Your Neighbourhood event in the summer of this year and The Tring Community Centre Open day in 2015.

In November 2016, the group will be joining residents of The Centre in the Park in the Hemel Hempstead for a joint session of the groups.

Testimonies from group participants are particularly poignant as group members speak of their sense of identity due to participating in the group as well as the obvious physical benefit. But importantly, members of the group talk about how Let's Dance has increased their confidence and lessened their feelings of isolation.

For just over a year – the Let's Dance project has been financially supported by Get Set Go Dacorum. This funding is likely to end in September 2017.

Through the relationship established with the Let's Dance facilitator – the Old Town Hall, again funded by Get Set Go Dacorum – presents movement classes (that suit ability) in the Emma Rothschild and Pond Close Residential Homes for the elderly, as well as the centre in the Park in Hemel Hempstead. Again, funding is likely to end for these projects in December 2016.

### **Electric Umbrella Music workshops**

Electric Umbrella is a music project for adults with learning disabilities which runs weekly sessions every Monday in the Cellar at The Old Town Hall. Up to 20 participants aged 18 plus with mixed abilities take part in the sessions led by professional musicians who offer the music experiences which also include touring and performance opportunities. The weekly music sessions, incorporate singing, playing instruments, song writing, recording and performance and the participants also eat lunch together creating a social and creative community.

'We are challenging the perception of people with learning disabilities by empowering and enriching lives through music.' Electric Umbrella

### **'Relaxed' Theatre Performances**

An initiative we introduced last year. Relaxed performances (usually for children theatre shows) are for young people identified as being on the autism spectrum or needing specific educational needs. Theatre lighting is dimmed, not in blackout; sound is more muted, with no unexpected loud noises and those who need to, can leave their seats as and when they please, and even talk or interact with the actors during the course of the show.

### **M-mask Workshops**

The M-mask drama workshops have been running at the Old Town Hall since September of this year. The project is a wellbeing programme for young people aged 11-25 years who live in the borough of Dacorum. The programme is funded by Dacorum Borough Council and Hertfordshire Public Health as part of the Arts on Prescription initiative. The project uses Mask Theatre techniques to help those suffering from stress, anxiety, depression and other conditions affecting mental wellbeing and offers a creative outlet that has the potential to improve project participants' health and wellbeing.

M-mask looks to discover the potential of young imaginations, guiding the group in a creative, expressive process with professional support and facilitation. By running the project at The Old Town Hall this provides a space that brings young people together to form a creative community, establishing a safe, local, nurturing environment.

The participants also have an opportunity to complete a Bronze Arts Award, meaning that the young people have achieved a national qualification as a consequence of their involvement and will be encouraged to consider ways of applying new found skills into the wider community.



## **Hart Beeps**

Due to commence in late October 2016.

Original and highly interactive sessions for babies & young children. Hartbeeps is a developmental programme for babies and young children. Using the medium of specially created sound systems, sound effects, music and song, these sessions are original and highly interactive for mums and their babies.

Sessions are run throughout Hertfordshire and beyond. The Old Town Hall is excited to be a host venue for this franchise and seek to be an accredited centre for the initiative.

## **A Walk Down Memory Lane – special screenings for the elderly and sufferers of Dementia, Alzheimer’s and Parkinson’s disease**

An example of how one conversation is then realised into a full-blown project.

Working in conjunction with Age UK ( Dacorum), The Old Town Hall will present dementia friendly screenings of classic films. These films will be shown on the last Thursday of the month for 6 months as a trial period, starting in January 2017.

The idea of the project is that those in varying stages of Alzheimer’s, Dementia and Parkinson’s disease can enjoy a social visit to the cinema. Elderly people at risk of social isolation are also welcomed.

Through the partnership with Age UK ( Dacorum), clients from groups and sheltered housing schemes across Dacorum could benefit from an organised trip to the Old Town Hall.

**\*\*Update\*\***

## **Herts Inclusive Theatre – Drama groups**

We have been recently approached by Herts Inclusive Theatre (HIT) to host Saturday drama group sessions for young people – ages ranging from 5 – 12, childrens theatre and youth theatre form 12+ years . The sessions will be run by HIT with funding from Children in Need. These will be weekly sessions, commencing In January 2017 and to run initially for a year. The Old Town Hall will facilitate the venue hire and support staff – all costed.

### **1.15 Qualitative feedback:**

#### **Children’s Workshops & Events**

*‘Absolutely super! Really engaging for the children and fantastic value for 3 hours of quality fun’*

Parent (Storytelling workshops Feb 2016)

*“Today my family & I came to celebrate 100 years since the birth of Roald Dahl, to watch James & the Giant Peach. Listen to story telling & make fun crafts. It was such fun!! We look forward to coming back to the old town hall again.”*

(Roald Dahl Day Sept 2016)

*"Such a great day, well done @TheOldTownHall" (Fun Palace Oct 2016)*  
Twitter comment

## **Shows 2016**

*'amazing show with fantastic interactions'* Parent

*'wonderful evening, we'll spread the word'* Audience member

*'Thank you all for an incredible evening'* Pauline Quirke Academy

*"Thank you to the gorgeous audience yesterday night at our concert at The Old Town Hall. The sound in the theatre was impeccable"*

Filomena Campus – Theatralia

## **e. Product - The Catering Conundrum**

Background:

The Old Town Hall has throughout its history attempted to provide a catering / bar offer alongside its promoted programme. Whilst, we have always done so, the pressures and difference in standards of provision have been a challenge.

In our most recent history - First Service took up the contract to provide a café service to The Old Town Hall in September 2014. However, they decided to wrap up the operation in December 2015.

From January 2016, The Old Town Hall staff have been directly running, firstly a bar only operation, but since September 2016, a café / light bite service – this is on top of normal duties.

This 'light' service offer is dependent on casual staff to operate the actual opening hours but is totally reliant on day staff to facilitate the ordering of stock, the order and installation of hardware, where appropriate – the maintenance of machinery, organising staff shifts and rotas, filling in if they don't turn up; physical stocking up and preparation for events. It is an onerous and time consuming addition of duties for staff already working at capacity.

The irony of the matter is that we have achieved the same catering income target in 6 months of this current year as was achieved by the rental hire paid to the council by the external caterers for a full year.

However, this income now needs to be weighed against the cost of hardware hire, purchase of catering equipment, purchase of catering / bar stock and the staffing costs of the casual staff. With this taken into account, we have just about broken even.

<b>Catering Provider</b>	<b>Income to OTH / DBC</b>	<b>Other costs payable by OTH / DBC</b>
First Catering	£6,000 per annum (net)	None
Old Town Hall	£8,500 as of 31.10.16 (net)	Casual staff, catering equipment / stock

Given our analysis of spend to date and the knowledge of our up and coming programme of events between the current date and the end of this financial year; we believe our final net figure (vat being deducted) will be approximately £12k.

Breakdown of other costs and impact on overall income for catering offer

	Hardware Equipment Costs	Stock Costs	Staffing Costs	Totals
April – Oct 2016	£2,335	£3,295	£3,500	£9,130
Nov to Dec 2016	£300	£300	£400	£1,000
Jan – March 2017	£100	£400	£300	£800
	<b>£2,735</b>	<b>£3,995</b>	<b>£4,200</b>	<b>£10,930</b>

If we achieve the estimated figure of £12,000 in this first full year of operation against the estimated cost of the enterprise, then we shall be slightly ahead of what was being earned through just rental to a third party. However, it must be noted that Old Town Hall management are not catering managers – the operational aspect of this part of the operation cannot be sustained indefinitely by day staff who are already working at capacity. The current casual staffs are managing the operational aspect of the café / bar only at the times that it is open to the public.

If we are to continue with this enterprise then we need to see an uplift in the budget to allow for the employment of a dedicated catering supervisor – who will order stock, ensure stock levels are maintained, rota staff, and undertake all the minutiae of administration and organisational details that the post requires.

By the turn of 2017, we must weigh carefully whether the in-house catering endeavour can continue to be supported by current staffing levels or whether the impact on capacity is such that we once again have to look at the external catering option and the challenges, as well as the opportunities that this invites.

The potential is there for the catering operation to be a further source of income for the Old Town Hall / Dacorum Borough Council but it needs several things:

- An experienced catering manager at a level and pay grade commensurate with the responsibilities.
- A robust catering plan or strategy that capitalises on the offers we have already introduced.
- Greater customer numbers – the Old Town Hall has something of an advantage over other café' and bars in the High Street in that a sold out show guarantees us customers to the café / bar. But in order to increase our catering income, we along with other High Street traders need an increase in High Street footfall. According to the latest notes from High Street traders footfall has dropped sharply since the end of summer.

## **2. Price**

- 2.1 The price of tickets or the price of hiring The Old Town Hall is a hugely important component of our marketing mix.
- 2.2 It is also a very important component of any marketing plan as adjusting the price of the tickets / venue hire has a big impact on the entire marketing strategy as well as greatly affecting the sales and demand of our product.
- 2.3 This is inherently a touchy area though, The Old Town Hall is an established arts venue, we are not 'breaking into the market'. With nearly 40 years experience – our customers new and old have almost a guarantee that the shows are of good quality and are affordable and that if hiring the venue, then we are courteous, professional and competitive.
- 2.4 The Old Town Hall pricing policy has shaped the perception of the venue and our offer. Our pricing policy is effective. Being both inclusive (having a very accessible entry level price of £2.50, for Children's Film as well as a number of sales promotions such as the £5 UpStaged offer for 16 – 25 year old drama bookers, currently running at 46 members) while at the higher end, customers show little to no resistance to paying a top price of up to £17 for events with sufficient market appeal (eg comedians such as Tom Stade)
- 2.5 We are aware that if we price events too high, we run the risk of the cost outweighing the benefit in customer's eyes, and they may value their money over our show.
- 2.6 We regularly look at local competitors to ensure that we remain competitive, but are not over-priced. When setting our ticket and hire prices, we are keenly aware of the perceived value of that ticket / hire cost.
- 2.7 Here are the important questions that we ask of ourselves when you are setting the ticket / hire price:
  - How much did it cost us to buy in the show or deliver the private hire?
  - What is the customers' perceived value or our ticket prices or event hires package?
  - Do we think that a slight price decrease could significantly increase our ticket sales or number of private hires?
  - Can our current pricing up with those of our competitors?
  - The Old Town Hall does represent value for money for our users. The opportunity to experience world class theatre, music, dance and children work on their doorstep is of huge value. Added to which an events hire package that gives complete and utter peace of mind because we have taken care of everything goes a long way to assuring our customers of the added value of our service.
- 2.8 In addition to the competitive pricing policy we also offer the following discounts:

### ***Dacorum Card***

The Old Town Hall has been offering Dacorum Card Discounts for well over a decade. Whilst uptake is limited, we still believe that it offers equality of access to the arts programme to our residents, especially those more financially

challenged than others. We still see the greatest % of take up for our children's theatre programme.

### ***UpStaged***

At the beginning of the Autumn season 2014, we introduced the UpStaged discount scheme. Specifically aimed at younger audiences (between 16 and 25 yrs.), we are attempting to encourage greater use of the facility and the programme by a younger demographic. The initiative is still in its infancy and take up is limited but a more robust marketing of the scheme will form part of our new marketing strategy. Other arts venues offering a similar scheme are Watford Palace, The Roundhouse, Camden, the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Theatre to name but a few.

## **3. Promotion**

- 3.1 Promoting who we are and what we done has always been a challenge – there are those who simply do not know what we do – there are those, for whom the Old Town Hall is their 'local' theatre and there are those for whom the venue is a dynamic leading arts venue in the south east. But for our customers to make that journey from I didn't know you were here, to being a fervent fan who books for most of the season is a long and for us, sometimes painful one.
- 3.2 Our main tools of promotion are

### **3.2.1 The Brochure**

We have recently 'cleaned' up our mailing list. A term used to describe assessing the booking pattern of customers and deleting those from the mailing list who have not booked for a certain period of time. We deleted customers who had not booked for an Old Town Hall show in the past two years. The benefit of this is twofold – you are no longer sending out information to people who for whatever reason are no longer interested in what we have to offer and secondly, we are no longer waiting postage on mailing. This then means that any saving made can be used to put into other marketing developing areas such as Facebook campaigns or wider distribution across Dacorum and beyond.

The brochure is by no means 'dead' –it is still an effective tool for the marketing of our services – but it must adapt and change to meet the demands of a changing market. Publicity print is not what it once was and we, like all our competitors must continuously look to ensure that we are utilising all the advances in modern technology and social media and that, as far as is practicable, using the most effective and efficient means of communication to tell our customers new and retained about what we do and when we do it.

### **3.2.2 The Website**

The Marketing audit that was undertaken in 2014 clearly identified the website a 'weakness' that needed to be addressed. The new website [www.oldtownhall.co.uk](http://www.oldtownhall.co.uk) was unveiled in late August of this year, inevitably there were a few bumps in the road but the website is now fully functioning.

Prior to the website redesign, the format was static – in that it could only really be viewed on a PC or laptop. Trying to look at our website on a mobile

platform was a slightly aggravating waste of time. In a day and age where most people are 'living' via their mobile devices (smart phones and tablets) it was frustrating for us to have an opportunity for not just publicising events but more importantly for buying tickets being wasted.

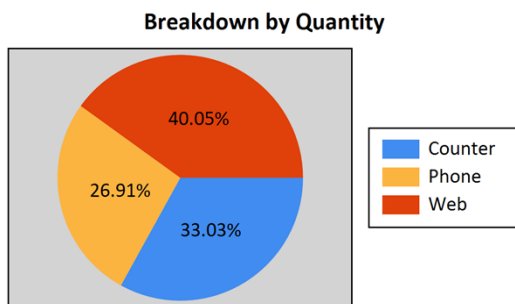
However this has now been addressed and the website is now not only more aesthetically pleasing and modern but also very responsive on mobile devices, allowing our customers to book immediately for any show.

Meaningful data is difficult at the moment given that we need a fully operational financial quarter in which to do some real comparison – but early indications are good.

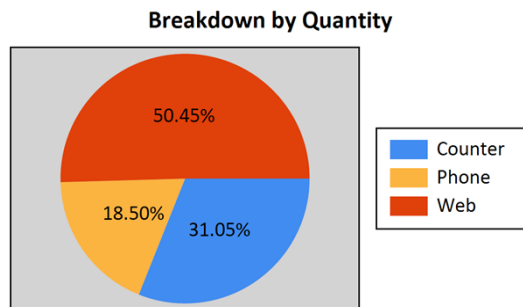
It is still too early to give any real data but early indications show that the percentage of sales we are making online are outstripping the sales made by personal callers to the box office. As can be seen in the detail below – a comparison of September 2015 against September of this year shows an uplift in ticket sales via the web of just over 10% in that one month.

### 3.2.3 Ticket sales by channel i.e. via the Web, over the counter, by phone

**September 2015**



**September 2016**



If this trend continues then it will have some bearing on how we best deploy our staff resource across the venue and service.

### 3.2.4 Direct e-mails

We have been sending direct emails regarding Old Town Hall events for some time, but only recently (with the addition of the new marketing officer) have we begun to really monitor the effectiveness of using this communication strand. Further research on the return on investment will be made when we have more quantifiable data.

Using Sign.Up.To ( "software and services for email marketing that means business")

Based in the UK and looking at UK based metrics for the effectiveness of e-marketing, according to their data, the Open Rate and Click rate (a customer opens the email and clicks through to the website) for Events – Music / Theatre / Club are as follows:

Industry	Open	Click
Events – Music / Theatre / Club	19.91%	3.10%

The Old Town Hall does not have a year's worth of data yet, but figures for September compare well:

Industry	Open	Click
The Old Town Hall	37.36%	1.19%

We are now running Return on Investment (ROI) reports for every e-mailing campaign we undertake. This highlights how many of our customers are opening our emails and whether they move forward to book a ticket. It will show us how effective a campaign has been and how better to target our e-communications. Our Digital Marketing Strategy will look at this in more detail.

### 3.2.5 Social Media

*Just been amazed and a little unnerved watching The Haunting of Exham Priory [@TheOldTownHall](#). Brilliant evening. Audience member Oct 2016*

*Lovely show today at the [@TheOldTownHall](#) in [#hemelhempstead](#) thank you to everyone there! [@GreenlightTheat](#) [#albeevector](#)  
Greenlight Theatre Company Oct 16*

*Went to see [#TheManWhoWouldbeKing](#) last night [@TheOldTownHall](#) Brilliant adaption by a very brilliant [@dawnstate](#) See it if you get the chance!  
Audience member Oct 16*

### 3.2.6 Press – Print

Monthly press releases are sent to six local weekly papers, five magazines covering arts and entertainment in the local area and five local radio stations. Some press releases are sent to specific publications where relevant, for example Unicorn Magazine for Folk music and Family Herts magazine for children's theatre. The Marketing and Publicity Officer has developed an excellent working relationship with the Hemel Gazette's arts correspondent and achieves coverage in this paper on a weekly basis. The Marketing and Publicity Officer regularly organises interviews with BBC Radio 3 Counties and upcoming artists and performers who are due to appear at The Old Town Hall.

The Old Town Hall's events are listed on over twenty arts, entertainment and local information free web listings sites, for the purpose of generating traffic towards The Old Town Hall's website. Since the recent decline in print publications, it is more important than ever before to ensure that The Old Town Hall utilises such online marketing methods. Event listings are also sent to local bloggers, who feature The Old Town Hall events in their e-newsletters and tweets.

## 4. Physical Environment

4.1 The Old Town Hall is a Grade II listed building. A Victorian building that with all things elderly brings some unwelcome 'friends'. The building is being used for a purpose for which it was not designed. It also has to compete in a modern market place of other customer built venues. That said it has a distinct charm

and is enjoyed as much for its architectural quirks as some of the events that happen within its walls.

4.2 However, the Old Town Hall is a building that requires a constant and consistent approach to her upkeep and maintenance.

4.3 We are currently awaiting details from Building Services regarding the timetable for works in summer 2017 which will address the following issues:

4.4 Main Foyer Stair Riser – both the stair riser and the disabled lift are nearing 15 years old and they clearly labour under the use placed on them. The stair riser is very is not working consistently and is prone to breaking down.

4.5 Main Foyer – Disabled Lift. The machinery is now antiquated in terms of what exist today. The lift can only take one occupant every 10 minutes – so for events where number of our customers are in wheelchairs – this is non workable.

4.6 This lift is being used more extensively but the size and weight of more modern wheelchairs, especially those with motors mean that the lift is struggling to cope with the demand. We have already had instances of the lift stopping between floors as the motor is over-worked. Annual maintenance and remedial action is no longer the answer – hence the approval to install new customised lifts that are of more modern design and manufacture, which means they will be more robust in the face of increased use in the future.

4.7 The roof toward the High Street is in need of repair as more persistent rainfall means that the damage to the fabric of the building is becoming more pronounced with each passing season.

4.8 Repairs and improvements to the Mezzanine floor above the dressing room. Currently used as a storage space, but is now no longer fit for purpose. When the floor was installed it would meet the building regulations of the day, however, it is now no longer compliant and will need to be improved. Once the work has taken place, we have another effective space to be used for either storage, or even office accommodation.

## 5. Finance

Year	Arts Service Provision	Total Net Expenditure
2012/13	Old Town Hall	£428,200
2013/14	Old Town Hall	£400,000
2014/15	Old Town Hall	£408,000
2015/16	Old Town Hall	£414,000
2016/17*	Old Town Hall	£404,000

### 5.1 Financial challenges going forward:

The overall cost of the Old Town Hall is increasing incrementally due to the following factors:

An increase in the fuel charges, an increase in the living wage which immediately increases our casual staffing costs. (The same 4 hour shift cost more this year than it did last year) but the budget is static. An increase in the



cost of the arts programme - though each deal is negotiated, to ensure that we maintain a quality programme, we have to pay a little more for some events.

However, our income target for the programme has overachieved for the past 2 years, and has been raised again. A solid performance with our income goes to reduce the amount of subsidy on the arts programme (which currently stands at 0.24p per head of the population of Dacorum, so far for 2016/17).

2015/16 – Programme costs = £60k budget but actual cost £80k  
Ticket Income Target = £46k budget (net) but actual income £65k net

The arts programme (171 live arts events in 2015/16) cost £15k net, a subsidy of 0.10p per head of the population.

## **5.2 Sponsorship**

The Old Town Hall is committed to attracting a level of external sponsorship /project funding from outside agencies. Within the 2015/16 financial year we would seek to attract a minimum of 5% of the total arts programme budget as inward investment.

In 2015/16 we achieved an inward investment from other sources of £7,670 (12% of arts programme budget)

In 2016/17 we will achieve an inward investment from other sources of £6,140 to date (10% of arts programme budget)

This exceeds our target of 5% of the arts programming budget for the year as stated in the 2014 Overview and Scrutiny report of 2014.

## **5.3 Future Plans**

Moving forward we are currently looking to develop both our marketing and our activity priority areas for April 2017 through to March 2020. Outlined below are the objectives we have set ourselves over the next three years. Our aim is that once these have been achieved, adopted or implemented, our overall offer to the community will be strengthened, we will be able to further capitalise on our success and in the longer term develop future audiences / participants and users of The Old Town Hall.

## **5.4 Short-term / Mid-term Objectives**

### **5.4.1 Develop an Old Town Hall Digital Marketing Strategy**

The Digital opportunity - "Arts organisations that are skilled in digital marketing will (all things being equal) see more people through their doors than ones that rely on a brochureware website and email newsletters" MTM London (a strategy and research consultancy)

Identified strength: The Old Town Hall has the wherewithal and commitment to make the most of this marketing stream. Staying up to date with industry trends.

Identified opportunity: If we get the balance right we'll be staying relevant with competitors; leading in some areas of digital marketing and more importantly communicating with our customers more efficiently and effectively.

Strategy: Research and deliver a robust Digital marketing Strategy for the Old Town hall.

Target busy under 35 year olds with a cheap, convenient, yet good quality night out.

Promote with a Facebook advert and Dotmailer to comedy bookers and business contacts.

How to monitor: Analytics, clicks through to website, open rates on emails, return on investment reports – all of which will be reflected in an upward trend in ticket sales.

Timeline: 2018

#### **5.4.2 Dacorum Borough Council Screensavers**

Identified weakness: The Old Town Hall has less of a presence in Hemel's main shopping areas than before, following the removal of three poster boards.

Identified opportunity: Free internal advertising to hundreds of Council staff

Strategy: Advertise Old Town Hall events on Dacorum Borough Council screensavers. Target DBC staff with specific events and offers.

How to monitor: Spektrix discount code

Timeline: Run offer for "Christmas Gothic", playing at the OTH in Dec 2016

#### **5.4.3 Meal deals**

Identified strength: Many restaurants and business within close proximity of The Old Town Hall offers potential for pre-show dining.

Identified opportunity: Curry and Comedy deal with local Indian restaurant.

Strategy: target busy under 35 year olds with a cheap, convenient, yet good quality night out. Marketing and Publicity Officer to set up meeting with local Indian restaurant to discuss a fixed price menu which would be advertised in conjunction with all comedy events (Screaming Blue Murder and big acts in main theatre). Promote with a Facebook advert and Dotmailer to comedy bookers and business contacts.

How to monitor: Facebook advert impressions and click throughs. Follow up with restaurant.

Timeline: Trial throughout January – March 2017

#### **5.4.4 Advertising events to businesses within Dacorum**

Identified strength: There are a significant number of businesses based in Hemel Hempstead.

Identified opportunity: Free advertising within large local organisations using staff intranets.

Strategy: Marketing and Publicity Officer to produce a database of large local businesses. Then get in touch with relevant member of staff at company. For example social secretary/member of staff responsible for updating the intranet. Marketing and Publicity Officer to liaise with Gary Stringer (Dacorum Look No Further) and obtain contact details for key people at local companies.

How to monitor: Target certain places with promotion codes.

Timeline: to be confirmed

#### **5.4.5 The Old Town Hall to act as a Ticket Agent for other local organisations**

Identified strength: Powerful leading edge ticketing system (Spektrix)

Identified opportunity: Potential for additional revenue, build relationships with other organisations in the community. Linking up with other organisations may broaden The Old Town Hall's audience base.

Strategy: Marketing & Publicity Officer to research possible organisations in and around Dacorum who may benefit from professional box office software. For example, Hemel Hempstead Football club and amateur dramatics societies. There may also be departments within Dacorum Borough Council that could benefit from using the software.

How to monitor: Spektrix reporting

Timeline: Aim to have at least two organisations on board by the end of 2017

#### **5.4.6 Sponsorship for the Old Town Hall Gallery / Screaming Blue Murder or Family events at The Old Town Hall.**

Identified strength: Exposure for local business, and income generation for the venue

Identified opportunity: Opportunity to build mutually beneficial relationships with local business

Strategy: Marketing and Publicity Officer and Arts Team Leader to identify and approach CEO's, Managing Directors of large local businesses with a view to securing a mutually beneficial sponsorship relationship. Old Town Hall staff to liaise with Dacorum Ambassador Place Manager and obtain contact details for key people at local companies.

How to monitor: Amount of sponsorship secured

Timeline: to be confirmed

#### **5.4.7 Increased Social Media Interaction**

Identified strength: Increased use and confidence of social media platforms

Identified opportunity: Free and immediate method of customer interaction

Strategy: Introduction of Arts team leader blog on new Old Town Hall website. Research and development of idea of v-blogging ( filmed, recorded blog to be shown on-line)

Use of Instagram for 'Backstage features about the Old Town Hall); increased use of paid FaceBook adverts aimed at reaching a targeted demographic.

How to monitor: Twitter and facebook analytics to see how many people are engaged or 'liking' the pages or blog commentaries

Timeline: 2017/2018

#### **5.4.8 Raise profile of OTH through more targeted press work**

Identified strength: Efficient press work.

Identified opportunity: Opportunities to raise profile of OTH's events using a more proactive approach to press and PR.

Strategy: When in post, Marketing & Audience Development Officer to develop a press plan integrated within a marketing plan for each event (or series of events) within each forthcoming OTH season. The press plan will include targeting specific titles, journalists and editors with a specialism in the relevant art form or genre. Post holder to develop these relationships over time and to maintain and develop a database to document this work.

How to monitor: For each event (or series of events) within each OTH season, keep notes of what preview and review coverage was secured. Set up Google Alerts to help monitor this coverage.

Timeline: From February 2017 then on-going.

#### **5.4.9 Nurture loyal bookers**

Identified strength: High quality, diverse programme with the capacity to appeal to target audiences.

Identified opportunity: Spektrix can help with audience development – especially when used in conjunction with a segmentation tool such as Culture Segments.

Strategy: Marketing and Audience Development Office to use Spektrix to analyse the OTH's most frequently attending customers, tag them then offer them incentives to attend even more frequently, try out new art forms and introduce new people to OTH

How to monitor: Report on the tagged audience cohort using Spektrix reporting

Timeline: From February 2017. Review for years 2017/18 and 2018/19

## **6. Conclusion**

- 6.1 The Old Town Hall is currently enjoying a good level of critical and commercial success and is a buoyant and vibrant home for the arts in Dacorum. But we are ever mindful of changing local, regional and national priorities and how these could have both a continuing positive or a consequently negative impact on the venue.
- 6.2 The mind-set of the theatre staff is to continue to think creatively and strategically about the service and about our offer to ensure that local people continue to enjoy their Old Town Hall for generations to come.