



Business Plan 2016 - 19

Vision

'The Beacon to be the heart of Wantage and a thriving community facility'

Key Objectives

- increase in revenue and a reduction in the overall operating deficit
- increase in occupancy with more people using the venue more often
- attract new audiences and users
- improve the customer experience to ensure repeat business
- raise awareness of the facility and improve communication

Introduction

The Beacon is a warm, friendly community facility in Wantage, close to the town centre. It provides a number of flexible spaces for hire over three floors. The venue includes three lettable rooms, staff offices and a small meeting room on the ground floor. There is also a light and welcoming coffee shop, which benefits from an outside seating area. On the first floor there is a large auditorium with a spacious kitchen and a bar area. The second floor is mostly office accommodation occupied by the town council, a store room used by the local food bank, a tech room housing all the equipment for the sound and light in the auditorium and a small meeting room/office. The venue underwent a rebrand in 2013/14 and is now working hard to grow the business further.

This business plan shows how we plan to achieve a reduction in the operational subsidy, an increase in the hours the rooms are occupied and an increase in revenue generated.

The business has been growing consistently for the last couple of years following some investment in both staffing and the building. The challenge now is to keep this momentum going and maximise the potential. This will be achieved by understanding our customers, delivering what is wanted, listening to comments and complaints, acting in a professional and efficient manner and above all else offering excellent customer service.

Understanding the potential customer base

The Beacon is an important local facility serving a population of just over 19,000 living in the immediate areas of Grove and Wantage, and several thousand more in the villages and towns beyond.

We have undertaken extensive research to be able to understand the customer base we have in Wantage so that our programmes can be tailored to appeal to our residents.

Appendix A details the findings from which the following conclusions can be drawn:

- the population of Wantage as a whole, is older than the national average
- the percentage of residents in Wantage who rate their health as 'very good' is higher than the national average, and the percentage of residents in Wantage who rate their health as 'very bad' is less than the national average. This suggests that the health of the residents of Wantage is generally better than in the average person in England
- Wantage has a higher percentage of people working in higher and intermediate managerial, administrative or professional jobs than the national average and a lower percentage of unemployment than the national average. Wantage has a higher rate of home ownership, either outright or via a mortgage than the national average. All of this information suggests that Wantage is a relatively affluent area
- Wantage has a lower level of residents with no qualifications and a high percentage of residents with a higher education qualification (level 4) than the national average, suggesting that the residents of Wantage are better educated than the average England citizen

Market segmentation (Appendix B)

Sport England's Active People survey shows that there is a higher proportion of employed or retired older people in the area. The market segmentation looks at typical types of people and makes suggestions about their preferences regarding how they spend their leisure time, where they shop and what they are likely to read. This survey highlights the marketing methods that are most likely to appeal to this demographic. Whilst not an exact science this type of information can be used to help devise activities and select the events that may be popular in Wantage.

It can be seen that the preferred method of communication is the internet, email, newspapers and face to face. As a result of this we need to ensure our website is up to date, accurate and easy to navigate. Our e-newsletters, which get mailed out regularly, have a higher opening rate than the national average so it is important to keep growing the mailing list and minimise the number wishing to unsubscribe. A small amount of budget needs to be set aside for advertising in local press and we need to ensure a presence in the town. A stall at the recent Wantage Festival (July 2016) saw us gain an additional 48 subscribers to our newsletter.

Information we have collated on how customers have heard about the Beacon (see page 9 for graph) correlates with the Active People survey assumptions.

1. Increase in occupancy with more people using the venue more often

To effectively increase the occupancy we need to have a clear understanding of the space we have available and how to fill it. Looking at the regular bookings we can identify the 'dead time' and investigate which new activities would work well at the times of day the rooms are available.

We have mapped how the rooms are occupied in an average week by our regular bookings and can now build a programme of our own in-house activities to fill the gaps.

	Monday				Tuesday				Wednesday				Thursday				Friday				Saturday				Sunday			
	R	L	C	H	R	L	C	H	R	L	C	H	R	L	C	H	R	L	C	H	R	L	C	H	R	L	C	H
8.00am																												
9.00am																												
10.00am																												
11.00am																												
Midday																												
1.00pm																												
2.00pm																												
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Weekly **Monthly** R = Ridgeway, L = Lockinge, C = Challow, H= Hanney

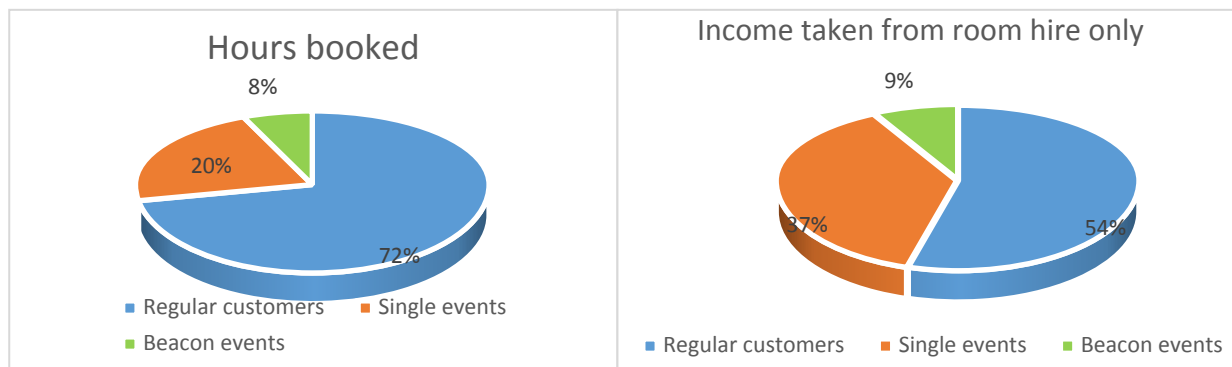
In addition to new regular activities we will be extending the range of larger events we offer, such as shows, fairs and concerts, which are predominantly weekend activities.

Many weekend slots are currently filled with one off parties and events so we need to ensure we are maximising the income from these events offering the bar and technical services in addition to the room hire. This has been shown to be better use of the space available than filling the weekend afternoons and evenings with regular hirers.

Operating hours

The total available bookable hours per year is 16,464, which is 1,372 a month.

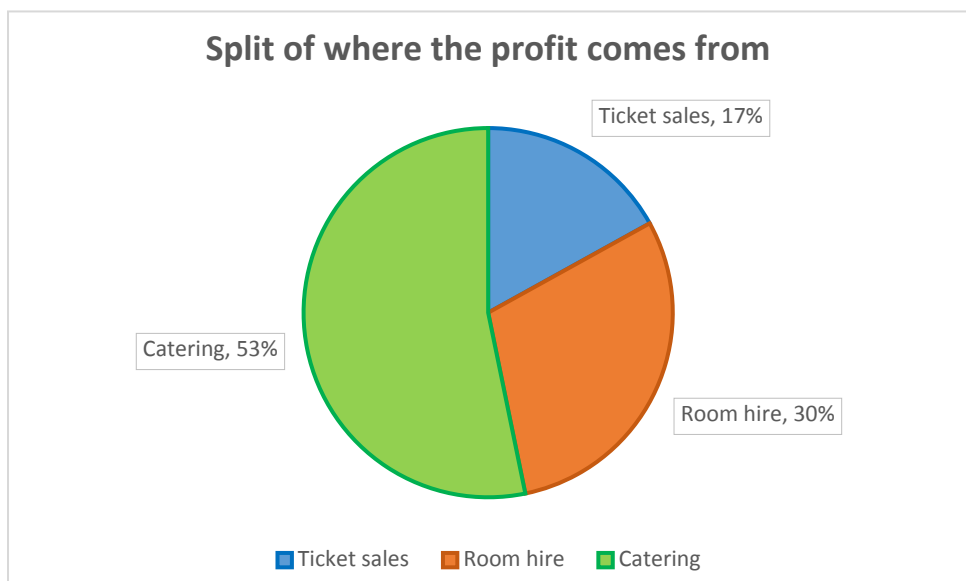
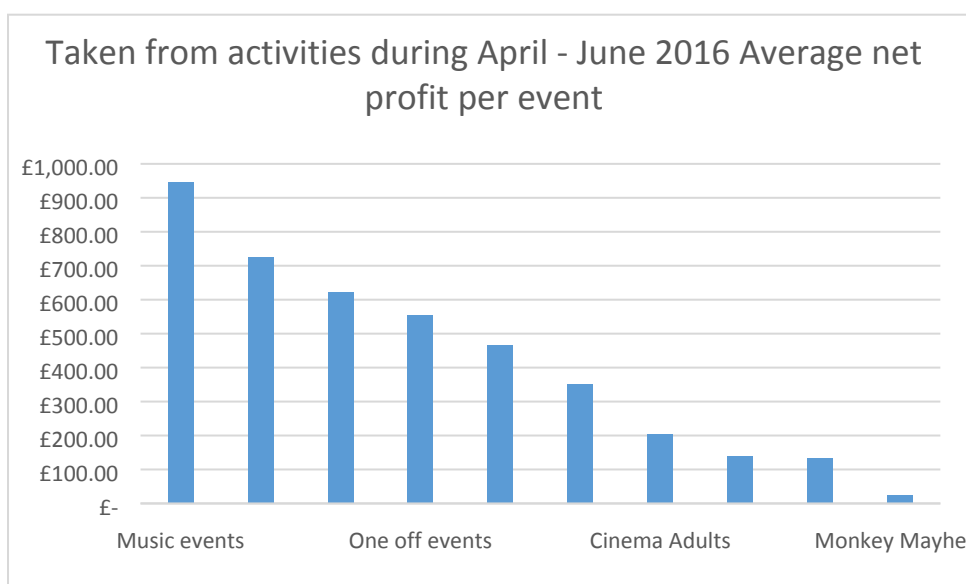
The target for 2015/16 was set at 480 hours a month, which we exceeded with a monthly average of 506, and for 2016/17 a target has been set at 535 hours per month. By 2019/20 we expect to have increased this to 550 hours which is a figure that is considered the industry standard for this type of venue.



When looking at the comparison between the hours booked and the income received we see that the regular hirers take up nearly three quarters of our hours booked but they only provide little over half the income.

From this it is clear that we should be focusing on increasing the one off bookings such as music events, theatre productions, children's shows and parties where income can be made not just on the room hire but from the catering and bar.

Wedding receptions can be seen in the example below to generate a high income, but in previous years we have only been booked for the ceremony, which generates a very low room hire rate. As a result of this we are not renewing the wedding licence as it has not proved viable. However if we have a request for the reception only we will be more than happy to accommodate this.



Introducing conference packages to appeal to the business market is a new area that needs developing and will fill the quieter times of the day.

Our in house Beacon events, which include Monkey Mayhem, life drawing and cinema, need to be promoted more to gain higher attendance and new activities introduced, such as running our own classes and children’s holiday activities, provided they can be shown to be profitable.

2. Increase in revenue and a reduction in the overall operating deficit

We will achieve this by reviewing our prices and looking at ways of increasing the spend on each booking, whether it is by offering professional technical support to theatre companies, charging for additional services or increasing the secondary spend in the bar and coffee shop.

Additional savings will be made to the building’s running costs by working on more energy saving projects that make the facility greener whilst reducing costs.

Recent investment means that the venue is now suitably staffed to enable the business to grow and the improvements to the sound, lighting and general ambience of the facility make it more attractive to hirers. Groups and organisations that had previously left and gone elsewhere are being attracted back, and partnerships with local organisations are being developed.

The budget has been re-profiled to accurately reflect expected expenditure and income targets have been set that are challenging but achievable. Regular monthly budget monitoring helps to ensure that we are on track to achieve the reduction in deficit and highlight areas for concern.

The room hire prices have been increased for 2016-17 for the first time in four years and additional charges for other services have been introduced. Ticket prices are also being reviewed and regular comparisons with similar venues are being made.

In future all ticket prices will reflect the individual costs of the event or activity to ensure a consistent mark-up which takes into account all the costs of providing the event, eg. the requirement of extra staff or the hiring in of equipment. We will also charge a commission to sell tickets for a third party.

	Actual	Predicted	Actual	Predicted	Predicted
	2014-15	2015-16	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Total Income	£156,440	£172,470	£201,210	£189,980	£211,054
Total Expenditure	£383,083	£381,176	£405,154	£388,761	£398,931
Operational Deficit	£226,643	£208,229	£203,944	£198,781	£187,877

Beacon Rate Card	Hanney	Challow	Lockinge	Ridgeway
April 2015 - March 2016	£14	£14	£23	£46
April 2016 - March 2017	£15	£15	£24	£48

Equipment and technical fees	
Public Address System (mobile)	£24.00 per day
Flip chart with paper and pens	£6.50 per day
Projector & Screen (downstairs)	£36.00 per day
16' X 9' Screen & Projector (Ridgeway only)	£75.00 per day
Wireless Conference System	£85.00 per day
Ridgeway technical surcharge (half day)	£45.00
Ridgeway technical surcharge (full day)	£65.00
Lighting pre-rig	£40.00
Technician (minimum 4 hours)	£20.00 per hour

	% of building	Actual cost per hour	Cost per room including the cost of the public areas			
			1 room in use	2 rooms in use	3 rooms in use	4 rooms in use
Total floor area	100.00%	£70.69				
Coffee shop	3.20%	£2.26				
Lockinge	7.69%	£5.44	£45.27	£25.36	£18.72	£15.40
Challow	3.63%	£2.57	£42.40	£22.49	£15.85	£12.53
Hanney	3.00%	£2.12	£41.95	£22.04	£15.40	£12.08
Sparsholt	9.70%	£0.68	£40.51	£20.60	£13.96	£10.64
Ridgeway	18.80%	£13.29	£53.12	£33.21	£26.57	£23.25
Bar	2.88%	£2.03				
Reception, toilets, stairway, kitchens and store rooms	56.35%	£39.83	£39.83	£19.92	£13.28	£9.96

Whilst these figures show that the room rate alone does not cover our costs unless all or nearly all the rooms are occupied, we can see from the earlier graph that it is the income from catering, in particular the bar, which makes the events profitable. It is therefore important to maximise the use of the bar at all events.

Improved monthly monitoring of income and expenditure and room usage is enabling us to start to reduce the operational deficit year on year as we gain a better insight into what works and what doesn't.

3. Attract new audiences and users

Historically The Beacon has predominantly been used by external organisations hiring rooms to run their activities in a similar way to a village hall, with the main source of our income being room rental.

Now the focus is on running our own events, putting on shows, having live music and hosting community events such as craft fairs and an annual beer festival, in addition to meeting the needs of our existing regular hirers.

By increasing the range of activities and events we will be able to attract different sectors of the community into the building and appeal to a wider audience. We will promote the coffee shop as a place anyone can come to meet friends, or use our free Wi-Fi and not just for customers waiting to attend other activities on site.

A key area we will be focussing on is the business market, looking at hosting conferences, business breakfasts and corporate events. By linking with the chamber of commerce and working with other local businesses we hope to be able to utilise more of the rooms during the weekdays.

We will use the success of the cinema to expand the offer further and set up film groups and offer specialist film nights for local enthusiasts.

To increase the income after costs from the bar new opening hours need to be considered, having it open whenever there is an event in the Ridgeway, and creating our own events such as quiz nights and games nights.

4. Improve the customer experience to ensure repeat business

The key to success in this area is having the right staff and enough of them at busy times. The staff need to create the right atmosphere, represent the council's vision and values, be customer focussed and have customer care at the core of everything they do.

We will build a bank of casual staff in addition to the permanent staff to give us the flexibility to take additional bookings and to cover holidays and sickness.

By offering exceptional customer service and tailoring each booking to meet the needs of the customer we will be able to increase return visits. Having an in-house technician who is available to meet with the customers and fully understand their needs will increase the number of theatre companies wanting to use the facility.

Another area that will increase the repeat bookings is to improve the look and feel of the building, both externally and internally.

Over the last two years many improvements to the lighting and sound system have been made. New signage inside and outside the building and improvements to the reception desk have made the venue more appealing to customers. The coffee shop has been repainted, a new coffee machine installed and a new outside seating area completed. By giving the coffee shop its own entrance we hope to attract new customers and by having a ramp access is easier.

The next steps are to improve the outside area in front of the building, the grass area outside the Lockinge and the canopy above the main entrance, which will be replaced as part of the future capital improvements.

The bar overheads have been reduced, with high wastage draught being replaced with new fridges, offering a selection of bottled beers. More comfortable seating has been put into the bar area and the carpet will be replaced with wooden flooring. New wallpaper and fresh paint will complete the new look.

As The Beacon becomes busier more customers are starting to book further in advance and we need to be proactive in taking repeat bookings whenever an event is a success. A good example of this was with The Zoots whose show was a sell-out, the team have already booked them for the

same weekend next year. Regular annual events, such as the pantomime and the beer festival will grow as more people know that they are a permanent fixture.

The graph below shows us that we are already working well at getting repeat business and increased satisfaction as the top three ways in which customers know about us are from coming into the facility, attending previous events or getting a personal recommendation from a friend. These areas alone make up forty per cent of the total.

5. Raise awareness and improve communication

To effectively market The Beacon we need to know what our customers want and how they feel about what we are providing, so gaining regular feedback is vital.



We are going to produce a seasonal brochure giving full details of all our events and also offering our regular hirers advertising space to promote their activities, as the more successful they are, the busier we are. It is important to ensure that we are communicating what is on clearly and concisely and that we produce and distribute all promotional material far enough in advance to reach the desired audience.

Whilst face to face is currently our most effective form of communication we need to work on spreading the word further afield and making better use of forms of communication such as social media, local publications and more of a presence in the town and surrounding villages.

To raise awareness of the coffee shop more promotion is needed which we will do via our Facebook page, which currently only lists events but has not been used for wider promotion of the facility as a whole.

The marketing plan looks in more detail at which events are succeeding and which are not. It also looks at ways people would like to hear about our activities and the types of events they would be interested in attending.

For full details of The Beacon marketing plan see **Appendix C**

Conclusion

Increased monitoring of everything we do is enabling us to have a better understanding of what our customers want, which activities are popular and where the gaps in provision are. Taking a pragmatic approach and not being risk averse is enabling us to try different things and learning from this. An example of this was the opera events which were surprisingly well received and continue to have a good attendance. Whilst we don't offer the grandeur of some larger venues the sector of our community that opera appeals to like having it on their doorstep with no need to travel great distances.

Equally we have learnt that the younger audience we thought would be attracted to the open mic nights prefer the atmosphere of a pub and therefore we have stopped trying to compete with this.

By listening to our customers, trying new things, learning from our experiences and adapting the plan as we go forward we think that the Beacon will be a success and a venue the whole community can be proud of.

Annual action plan

The team at The Beacon are part of the council's participation team and as such their aims and objectives are included in the Participation Team action plan which covers all aspects of the participation team's work. (**Appendix D**)