

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council

Draft Minutes of the Guildhall Committee held on Tuesday 3rd June 2014 at 5.30pm in the Roysse Room, Guildhall, Abingdon-on-Thames.

Present:

Cllr Iain Littlejohn	Chairman
Cllr Alison Rooke	Vice-Chairman
Cllr Marilyn Badcock	
Cllr Lesley Legge	
Cllr Katie Nobes	
Cllr Angela Lawrence	Mayor, ex-officio
Cllr Sandy Lovatt	Leader, ex-officio

In Attendance:

Cllr Michael Badcock	
Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer	
Ms Johannah Aynsley	Guildhall Manager
Mrs Jane Bowen	Museum Curator
Mr David Boyd	Architect
Ms Heather Brown	Co-opted Member
Mr Dan Lewendowski	Architect
Mr Peter Turvey	Cost and quantity surveyor
Mr Nigel Warner	Town Clerk (Clerk to the meeting)

3 Members of the Public

G1 **Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

G2 **Declaration of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

G3 **Co-options to the Committee**

It was noted that in 2013/14 the Committee had co-opted Heather Brown, the Choose Abingdon Partnership Manager, on to the Committee. The Town Clerk reported that Ms Brown had been co-opted in a personal capacity and had served as a co-opted member in her own time. However in November 2013 the Town Council had become the responsible body for the Partnership and consequently the Partnership Manager had become an employee of the

Council. In these circumstances it was no longer necessary or appropriate to co-opt Ms Brown as a member of the Committee.

G4 **Minutes**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meeting of the Guildhall Committee held on 6th March 2014.

Resolved: *that the minutes of the meeting of the Guildhall Committee held on 6th March 2014 be approved and be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.*

G5 **Matters Arising**

Minute G102: Manager's report A Member noted that the minutes stated: *"in relation to the ladies' cloakrooms adjacent to the Abbey Room, there was nowhere to hang a coat or handbag and she stated that a shelf and perhaps a peg on the door would be appreciated."* This request was re-iterated for action.

The Chairman, Cllr Iain Littlejohn, requested that the order of business of the meeting be varied to allow discussion of the proposed plans for phase 2 of the Guildhall Improvement Project to be considered before other business, followed immediately by the public participation session. The Committee were content with a change in the order of business.

G6 **Guildhall Working Groups: Phase 2 Building**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk in relation to the Guildhall Improvement Project Phase 2.

It was reported that at Member briefings held on 29th May and 2nd June 2014, Members considered the revised plans from the architects and costings from the quantity surveyor. Members appeared content that the plans as presented were a good basis on which to proceed but also considered that until they have received scrutiny by the Finance and General Purposes Committee on 10th June 2014 they would wish the matter to be considered in confidence.

Regarding the issue of confidentiality the Town Clerk confirmed that this was a matter which this Committee could determine regarding its business.

It was proposed by Cllr Iain Littlejohn, the Chairman of the Committee, that the matter should be taken in the open session.

A Member stated that she considered that the matter should be debated under the confidential agenda. She had attended the Phase 2 Building Group on 23rd May 2014 and following discussions there, the plans which had now been brought forward were different. She considered that these plans should have been considered further by that Group and that Members had not had an opportunity to review and discuss these new plans. The whole Council needed to have the opportunity to do this. She considered that the appropriate time for the plans to be made public was following their consideration by the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

In response to the changes to the Plans, the Chairman stated that these changes had been made following suggestions by the member herself. However she considered that the plans were now very different but there were good options in these plans.

A Member stated that she considered that this matter should be discussed in the open session. The detail in the costings which had been issued was not such that this needed to be confidential. All Councillors had had a chance to attend the two briefings held.

Another Member stated that she had sympathy with the argument to discuss these matters in confidential. Lots of different plans had been discussed and the Council was operating on a very tight schedule and she stated that some councillors felt rushed. Not all Councillors had been able to attend the various meetings and, in terms of the presentation, it was quite difficult to follow the plans; they would benefit from being placed in a “firmer order.”

Following the debate, the matter was put to the vote and it was **resolved** by 5 votes in favour and 2 abstentions that the matter should be considered in the open session of the meeting.

The architects then proceeded to present the plans to the meeting. These are attached to these minutes.

(The Town Clerk was absent from the presentation from 6.18pm for approximately 10 minutes on an urgent work-related matter).

Following the presentation, the Committee debated the plans and the following points were made:

- The Council now had a revised core scheme with options within it.
- There was a query regarding the journey for a person in a wheelchair. Under the previous plans they could come into the building from the Bridge Street entrance and be able to go access all areas, going from the old side of the building to the new side, but under the new plans this was no longer possible and the route from one side of the building

to the other would be much more circuitous. Members were aware of the difficulties currently faced by members of the public, for instance at Mayor making. It was also considered that adoption of the new plans would mean that if such access was to be achieved in the future it would require major alterations. However a Member pointed out that if the lift were to be installed, there would remain the same amount of wheelchair access to the various rooms, but on moving from, say, the Roysse Room to the Bear Room, the person would have to exit the building via Bridge Street and then go round to the Abbey Close entrance. It was also pointed out as to how often someone actually needs to go through from rooms from one side to the other; the majority of hirings are contained on one side of the building. A Member stated that with regard to access, arrangements were not as good as the previous scheme, but this was the compromise which had to be made; nonetheless, the plans would represent a vast improvement on current arrangements. Members considered that the proposed lift should be installed.

- On considering the various options outlined, Members considered that options 2 (enhancement of lower ground floor to form bar and café area and convert 2nd floor areas) and option 3 (opening up of the historic face of the Bear Room) and 4 (enclosed link through existing service area) should be pursued, noting that the cost range estimate for this work was £3,500,000 to £4,000,000. Members considered that the inclusion of option 2 in the Project would make the scheme more commercially viable.
- Members considered that if the options above were pursued, then should funding become available at a later date it would be possible to pursue option 1, which was to convert the stage area to screen 2. It was also noted that if option 1 was not adopted then the second screen would be in the main Abbey Hall, which would benefit from retractable seating and a retractable screen.
- Members considered that funding may be available for some of the specific options, for instance improving access to the historic rooms.
- In taking matters forward, Members stated that the scheme needed to be discussed through the Phase 2 Building Working Group. Dates of meeting should be agreed well ahead and the Council should be exercise care when setting deadlines.
- A Member stated that consideration should be given to an external lift at the south-east corner of the Council Chamber (by the external steps).
- A Member stated that he had attended the Comedy Club on 30th May had had noted that it had been very well-attended and there may come a time when it outgrows the Roysse Room. In that case the stage area might be a potential venue.
- It was confirmed that under the new plans there would be the loss of some space in the Abbey Hall, principally by the doors by the acoustic

lobby, but there would still be a capacity of 150 covers for “sit down” functions.

- Members considered that it was important that all areas of the Guildhall have appropriate loop systems for those with hearing impairments.
- Planning permission would be applied for at the appropriate stage.

It was **recommended** to the Council, via the Finance and General Purposes Committee:

- (1) That the Council approve the architectural plans and associated costings for the Guildhall phase 2 scheme (the revised core scheme), as detailed in the plans attached to these minutes and the costing document dated June 2014, as the basis to proceed.
- (2) The Committee further recommended that the core scheme include an external lift for DDA access to historic rooms and the work outlined in options 2 (enhancement of lower ground floor to form bar and café area and convert 2nd floor areas) and option 3 (opening up of the historic face of the Bear Room) and 4 (enclosed link through existing service area), noting that the cost range estimate for this work is £3,500,000 to £4,000,000. In considering these options it was noted that different parts of the proposed scheme were subject to different potential funding streams and the completion of the scheme in its totality, as outlined above, would be subject to successful funding applications.
- (3) That an additional sum of £25,000 be released from the Council’s pooled property fund for professional fees to enable the plans to be further developed, authority to incur expenditure from this budget to be delegated to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of both Guildhall as spending Committee and Finance and General Purposes as finance committee. It was further recommended that as sums are released, all Members be informed of the allocation of these sums.

G7 **Public Participation**

Dr Philip Kenrick addressed the meeting.

Dr Kenrick noted that the matter of the external appearance of the building was not addressed under the new plans. He welcomed the possibility of regular film screenings as detailed in the Manager’s report at minute G9. In this regard the Manager reported that the operator who she had been speaking with was favouring the Roysse Room, Council Chamber and Abbey Gardens over the Abbey Hall.

Members of the public left the meeting at this point, as did the Council’s professional advisors, Mr David Boyd, Mr Dan Lewendowski and Mr Peter Turvey, it being 7.00pm.

G8 Guildhall Working Groups: Phase 2 Building

The Committee further considered the report of the Town Clerk in relation to the above and the matter of the professional advice which was required to take the project forward.

It was **recommended to the Finance and General Purposes Committee** that an additional sum of £25,000 be released from the Council's pooled property fund for professional fees to enable the plans to be further developed, authority to incur expenditure from this budget to be delegated to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of both Guildhall as spending Committee and Finance and General Purposes as Finance committee. It was further **recommended to the Finance and General Purposes Committee** that as sums are released, all Members be informed of the allocation of these sums.

G9 Guildhall working groups: Operational Management

The Committee received and considered the report of the Guildhall Manager in relation to the above.

The report detailed the meetings of the Working Group since the last Guildhall Committee meeting. Building occupancy was higher in March 2014, and the Science Festival organised by ATOM had been very well-attended.

(Cllr Katie Nobes left the meeting during discussion of this item, it being 7.15pm).

The move of the Information Centre to the Guildhall had proceeded smoothly and arrangements were being made for the relocation of the Munament Room to the Guildhall Strongroom. The Town Archivist will be housed in the lower foyer of the Guildhall in a space which would be "screened off" from the public. There remained some furniture which needs to be rearranged and provision of a computer with wireless capability is required.

The report also detailed progress being made in relation to Guildhall marketing and communications. In this regard a meeting which had been held on 13th May to which representatives from 60 local clubs, societies or organisations had been invited to share a free glass of wine or non-alcoholic beverage, have a tour of the Guildhall and discuss the offers or facilities available to prospective hirers from the non-profit sector. Along with the traditional community discount package there was also the offer of a free two hour booking in one of the spaces in the Guildhall, at a time and date of their choice. The Manager reported that only two groups responded to the invitation and the event had as yet yielded no sales. In reviewing this matter the working group meeting had considered whether this meant that the not-for

profit groups that were invited already have affordable and regular meeting places and the Council may be trying to fill a gap that is not there. It was also considered that by offering groups with regular meeting places the chance to use the Guildhall we may be negatively impacting on the income generation of smaller venue hire facilities and community halls in and around the area. It was agreed that following the planned improvements the Guildhall will have something unique and contemporary to offer thereby providing a different and improved service that will not potentially adversely affect other community-based venues.

In relation to building matters it was reported, as previously agreed, a meeting was held with the Mayor, the Museum Curator, Cllr M Lovatt, Guildhall Manager and Head of Service Delivery to discuss which items would be relocated from Abbey House to the Guildhall Mayors Parlour. There was a practical difficulty as it was not possible to fit all the items currently in the two Parlours in to the one Parlour. It was decided that the high backed carved wooden chairs, the writing desk and the bureau would relocate. Art works, treasures and twinning trinkets were discussed and a selection of items and art works agreed to be on display. There was an issue regarding what to do with items which cannot be accommodated in the Parlour or in other rooms and whether these should be placed in storage or sold. A report will come back to this Committee in this regard. A final layout for the Mayors Parlour at the Guildhall has been agreed.

With regard to the Group's view that the large wooden dresser from the ground floor of the Old Abbey House be relocated to the landing outside the Abbey Room, Members asked that this be reconsidered as only two years ago a cabinet had been removed from this landing in order to de-clutter this space.

In relation to the paintings it was noted that there were issues with the environment in which these were being displayed. It was noted that a number of the paintings had now been taken for conservation and this was welcomed by the Committee. However concern was expressed regarding the damage to the Coat of Arms and it was hoped that improved arrangements would avoid such problems in the future.

The Committee also asked that proposals be brought forward for other paintings which were not currently being conserved/ cleaned, to be similarly conserved/ cleaned, and that this work be funded from the Council's treasures budget. Members asked in particular that the paintings in the Council Chamber be looked at with a view to conservation.

Members asked that the matter of the location of the Past Mayor's photographs be considered. These would need to be relocated from the Old Abbey House. There was a discussion as to whether or not the Roysse Room would be an appropriate location for the photographs, it being pointed out that previously photographs of the Former Chairmen of the District Council had been displayed there. The Manager was requested to speak with the Curator and come forward with a proposal in this regard.

Resolved: that the report be approved.

The Committee received and considered the report of the Museum Curator specifically in relation to the Guildhall paintings. The Committee thanked the Curator for her report which outlined the issues very clearly. The Committee **recommended** that the suggestions in the report be agreed and **referred the matter to the Finance and General Purposes Committee, for onwards referral then to the Town Council.**

The Committee requested that a copy of the Monks' Map is placed along the corridor from the Council Chamber to the Abbey Room, as previously agreed.

G10 **Guildhall Working Groups: Fundraising**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Guildhall Manager in relation to the above.

Resolved: that the report be approved.

G11 **Guildhall working groups: Charitable Status**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk in relation to the above.

Resolved: that the report be approved.

G12 **Guildhall Working Groups: Property (Royse Court)**

It was reported that the office move had proceeded smoothly and to budget. There remained some matters to complete and a report would come to the next meeting to detail matters.

G13 **Date of next meeting and calendar of meetings**

It was noted that the approved calendar of meetings for the Guildhall Committee was as follows:

Thursday 4th September 2014; Thursday 11th December 2014; Thursday 26th February 2015.

Meetings would take place at 5.30pm in the Guildhall.

Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer, the Museum Curator and a member of the public left the meeting at this point, it being 7.42 pm.

G14 **Exclusion of the Public Including the Press**

The Chairman moved and it was **resolved:**

That in accordance with section 1 (2) of the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1060 (as extended by Section 100 of the Local Government Act 1972), the public (including the press) be excluded from the meeting because of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

G15 **Confidential Appendix to the Minutes of the Meeting of 3rd March 2014**

The Committee received and considered the confidential appendix to the minutes of the meeting of the Guildhall Committee held on 3rd March 2014.

Resolved: *that the Confidential Appendix to the minutes of the Guildhall Committee meeting held on 3rd March 2014 be approved and be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.*

G16 **Matters Arising**

None.

G17 **Guildhall Working Groups: Future Operations/ Commercial**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk in relation to the above, this report being a non-confidential report.

In the confidential section the Committee considered a confidential report from the Council's cinema advisor regarding potential options and operators for a cinema. The Town Clerk stated that there are matters within this report which were commercially sensitive the disclosure of which would prove prejudicial to the Councils' financial position if these matters were fully disclosed. However following the consideration of the report by the Committee it was anticipated that a redacted version of the report will be issued.

Members noted the need for additional advice on the cinema issues and the need to keep these costs under review. A Member stated that it was important that the correct professional advice was obtained. The Chairman, Cllr Iain Littlejohn, commented that the day rate for the professional advisor was very reasonable.

There was a general discussion regarding the way in which the Working Groups operate. A number of Members considered that as the Groups did not produce formal minutes it was difficult to keep up to date with their work,

even though a report came forward to the following Guildhall Committee. There were also issues in relation to short notice of meetings and scheduling of dates of meetings.

The Town Clerk was asked to comment on matters. He stated that he understood Members concerns but as there were six Working Groups he considered that producing formal sets of minutes for each meeting, if they were meeting regularly, would represent a significant increase in the workload in supporting meetings. There was already an issue regarding the democratic workload and if more time was spent on servicing meetings there would be less time spent on actually doing what the meetings wanted. However he stated that it would be good practice for a note to be produced recording decisions and recommendations for each meeting, on the basis of bullet points, but that this should be kept short, if possible to one side of A4.

The Chairman, Cllr Iain Littlejohn, stated that if all working groups meetings were scheduled for, say, Fridays, then this would enable all interested members to attend and it would be easier to schedule meetings if they were at the same time each week. Members were ambivalent to the idea that they should attend a meeting every Friday as this could be an onerous commitment on top of other commitments but the principle of meetings being on a regular day was accepted.

The Chairman also suggested that a monthly briefing could be organised, on a Friday, to keep Committee Members up to date with what was happening and this found favour with Members. The Committee **resolved** accordingly.

It was **resolved**:

1. To approve the report “Abingdon Guildhall Redevelopment” by Mayfield Arts and Media dated May 2014 and to adopt the report as the basis for the further development move towards providing cinema at the Guildhall.
2. To delegate authority to the Future Operations Working Group to explore the matters detailed in the report, in accordance with the terms of reference of the Working Group.
3. Subject to release of funding additional funding by the Finance and General Purposes Committee to develop the plans for the Guildhall Improvement Programme Phase 2, to delegate authority to the Future Operations Working Group to commission further advice in relation to the cinema and associated business plans and issues regarding the Guildhall Improvement Programme Phase 2.

4. To adopt the recommendations on page 45 of the report (headed next steps), for action and development by the relevant working group so that the Committee can develop the Project further.
5. To authorise the Chairman of the Guildhall Committee, Mr Inglis (Mayfield Arts) and the Town Clerk to meet with the two operators identified in the report (and in the confidential appendix to these minutes) to report back to the Guildhall Committee through the Future Operations Working Group.
6. With regard to the recommendations, to specifically delegate authority to the Future Operations Working Group to invite expressions of interest from cinema operators, advertising as appropriate within the budget at (3) above.

(Cllr Lesley Legge left the meeting following discussion of this item, it being 8.06pm)

G18 Guildhall Working Groups: Operational management and Fundraising

Members received and considered the confidential report of the Guildhall Manager, relating to the above. The report did not have any recommendations for approval and there is no confidential appendix to these minutes.

Members noted the proposals coming forward to a mobile cinema, with perhaps an open air performance in the Abbey Grounds. In her report the Guildhall Manager stated that at time of writing her report she was awaiting costings from a mobile cinema provider and would bring this to the Committee meeting. The aim was to have a regular series of film screenings in the Guildhall in the run up to the proposed works thereby maintaining public interest and engagement. It was noted that there would be a cost attached to this. A handout was distributed which is attached as a confidential appendix.

Members welcomed the proposals and were very keen on this idea but queried the resourcing required and the timing. The Town Clerk stated that he had no office resource which he could devote to this although he was content if the matter could be accommodated by the Guildhall section as it was a Guildhall initiative and that would in case keep clarity of responsibility. The Guildhall Manager stated that she understood that most of the work would be undertaken by the contractor.

There was a view expressed that a September event was too soon for this year and should be planned for next year to give enough time for the event to be programmed into the Guildhall's work schedule.

Members approved the principal of a mobile cinema operation and requested that a report come forward regarding how this would work and what financial commitment would be required, including which budget it would come from.

For a September event a paper would need to come to the Town Council meeting in June.

A Member requested an update on progress on the lease of the Old Magistrates Court to Abingdon Music Centre. The Town Clerk reported that a company had visited to look at sound proofing and he was awaiting their comments. The Chairman of the Committee, Cllr Iain Littlejohn, stated that he had requested the Manager to look at ways in which the matter could be managed without building works and a report would be coming back when all the information and any further proposals would come forward.

Resolved: that the report be noted.

The meeting rose at 8.25pm.