

## Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council

### **Draft Minutes of the Guildhall Committee held on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2013 at 3.00pm in the Committee Room at the Old Abbey House, Abingdon-on-Thames.**

#### **Present:**

Cllr Iain Littlejohn	Chairman
Cllr Alison Rooke	Vice Chairman
Cllr Sandy Lovatt	Ex-officio, Leader of the Council
Cllr Katie Nobes	

#### In Attendance:

Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer	
Ms Johannah Aynsley	Guildhall Manager
Mr Steve Rich	Head of Service Delivery
Mr Nigel Warner	Town Clerk (Clerk to the meeting)

#### G69 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lesley Legge, Samantha Bowring (Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames), Marilyn Badcock and Ms Heather Brown (co-opted member).

#### G70 **Declaration of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### G71 **Minutes**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meeting of the Guildhall Committee held on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2013, as circulated with the agenda.

**Resolved:** *that the minutes of the meeting of the Guildhall Committee held on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2013 be approved and be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.*

#### G72 **Matters Arising**

In relation to Minute G60, the Guildhall Commercial Viability Assessment, the Town Clerk reported that it was intended that this would be published in the

public domain shortly, subject to the redaction of any parts which were considered to be commercially sensitive or otherwise confidential.

The Manager reported on progress which was being made in relation to the Guildhall section of the Town Portal.

### G73 **Manager's Report**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Guildhall Manager, as circulated with the agenda.

Members noted that the Guildhall had recently undergone and passed its annual boiler inspection and an inspection of the emergency lighting. All necessary matters had been addressed. Repair of the water leak in the Roysse Court Gardens was awaiting action by Thames Water.

Members noted that the Guildhall had now taken delivery of ten lightweight round tables and that these were more flexible and easier to move and to store compared with the existing tables. In relation to the old round tables, these were now surplus to requirements and it was **resolved** that authority be delegated to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Guildhall Manager to dispose of the old tables, if possible by selling them. It was further **resolved** that if a purchaser could be found for the old tables, then the income from the sale could be used to purchase further lightweight tables.

The Committee considered Guildhall bookings and occupancy. It was reported that the Guildhall had been quiet over the summer months, although a drop in bookings over the summer months was usual. The occupancy rate during the quarter was 14%, a drop of 2% compared with the previous quarter. The Guildhall Manager had maintained dialogue with regular bookers around the issues of relating to the planned major improvement works. The Manager reported on marketing and stated that new images and marketing materials had been produced to load onto the Guildhall Portal pages.

The Manager reported on Guildhall events. In relation to the comedy night, many positive comments had been received and attendance numbers had doubled since the launch of the comedy club in February 2013.

However, the events still did not run at a surplus once staffing and set up time had been taken into account. The Manager stated that the future of events should be discussed at a future meeting. The next Comedy Club night was scheduled for Friday 27<sup>th</sup> December, when a special Christmas show would be held. The Manager reported that the Vintage Fair on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> September 2013 was successful and attracted over 800 visitors. The Fair had taken place at the same time as Heritage Weekend and complemented the other events of the weekend very well.

The Manager outlined the work in relation to the bid for a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). Members noted that meetings of the Finance and General Purposes Committee and Town Council had been scheduled for 7<sup>th</sup> November. However, a meeting had been scheduled with HLF officers in London the following day and this meeting was likely to inform some of the recommendations coming forward to the Town Council. Consequently Members agreed that it would be prudent to postpone the Council meetings and subsequently the meetings of Finance and General Purposes Committee and the Town Council had been scheduled for 11<sup>th</sup> November 2013.

**Resolved:** *that the Guildhall Manager's report be approved.*

G74 **Guildhall Governance and Committee**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk, as circulated with the agenda.

It was noted that at the last meeting of the Committee it was minuted: “that the Chairman of the Committee, Cllr Iain Littlejohn, gave notice that he would be circulating to the Committee a proposal regarding the governance of the Guildhall and in particular the operation of the Guildhall Committee. This would be included on the agenda for the next meeting and he had been advised that would be within the delegated power of the Committee to resolve.”

The Committee considered the report in detail. It was noted that the proposal to change governance of the Guildhall was aimed at addressing a number of issues around the current structure. The report detailed the principles of the future operation as follows:

- The Committee would become a more traditional Council committee focused on steering development, scrutiny, financial control and making key decisions, in line with other Council committees;
- The Guildhall committee would fit into the normal operating cycle of the Council (4 meetings a year), would be formally minuted and would be open to the public;
- A number of working groups would be tasked by the Committee to manage the detailed work required to deliver the various specific activities relating to the Guildhall project;
- The ethos of the working groups was to be practical, detailed and “hands- on”;
- Working groups would have numerically small memberships;

- In accordance with Council practice the working groups would not be open to public;
- A short formal report would be presented by each working group to each Committee meeting detailing the group's actions and decisions but there would be no formal minutes for the groups. The report would outline progress against plan and any recommendations for key decisions. Each group would have a lead Council officer convening the meeting, drafting the report and undertaking/co-ordinating the actions but the reporting mechanism was intended to avoid additional bureaucratic costs;
- Working groups would meet regularly but frequency would vary by group.

Members considered the proposed working groups in some detail. In relation to the Operational Management Working Group, the Committee emphasised that the intention of creating this group was not to become involved in day to day management of the Guildhall, for which the Council employed officers, but instead to consider broader operational issues and provide support and a "sounding board" for the Guildhall Manager when considering how the service should be developed. In relation to the Phase 2 Build Working Group, Members considered that this was an important group which, as the project progressed, have to meet frequently and that therefore there should be a system in place to allow for substitution if one of the Members were unable to attend.

It was noted that at present the Guildhall Committee comprised of five Members, whereas other standing committees consisted of seven. Members considered that the Committee would benefit from an increase in membership from five to seven. It was also noted that whilst the Guildhall Committee is a standing committee of the Council, it was the only committee whose Chairman was not an ex-officio Member of the Finance and General Purposes Committee. It was noted that at present the Chairman of the Committee attended Finance and General Purposes Committee in his capacity as Chairman of the Audit and Performance Sub-Committee. Some Members considered that with the Guildhall embarking on a major project, there was an argument that the Chairman of the Guildhall Committee should be an ex-officio member of Finance and General Purposes in their own right. However, it was recognised that this could affect the political balance of the Finance and General Purposes Committee and therefore there was an argument that this matter should rest until after the next ordinary Council elections.

It was noted that the proposals for the new governance model of the Guildhall was within the competence of the Committee membership to decide.

It was **resolved**:

1. That the report of the Town Clerk be noted and that the proposed governance structure as detailed in the report, including the establishment of working groups as detailed in the appendix to these minutes, be approved.
2. That the membership of the working groups be approved as detailed in the appendix to these minutes, noting that a number of places on the working groups would be advised directly to the Town Clerk by the respective political groups.
3. That the Standing Orders Working Party be requested to consider:
  - a. An increase in the membership of the Guildhall Committee from five to seven members.
  - b. Whether the Chairman of the Guildhall Committee should be appointed as an Ex-Officio member of the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

G75 **Date of Next Meeting and Calendar of Meetings**

With the adoption of the new model of governance, the calendar of meetings for the year was adjusted to take account of some meetings which would now be cancelled. Following the postponement of the November meeting to December, the dates of meetings were as follows:  
19<sup>th</sup> December; 16<sup>th</sup> January 2014; 6<sup>th</sup> March.

(Note: all meetings scheduled for 5.30pm on Thursdays).

G76 **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.*

G77 **Confidential Appendix to the Minutes of the Meeting of 12<sup>th</sup> September 2013**

The Committee received and considered the confidential appendix to the minutes of the meeting of the Guildhall Committee held on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2013.

**Resolved:** *that the Confidential Appendix to the minutes of the Guildhall Committee meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2013 be approved and be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.*

G78 **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising from the previous meeting which were not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

G79 **Guildhall Improvement Project Phase Two**

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

In relation to the bid to the HLF Enterprise Fund, the Committee agreed that a recommendation should be taken to the Finance and General Purposes Committee on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2013 that:

1. That the Council submit an application to the HLF for a grant under the Enterprise Fund Programme of up to £2 million.
2. That the Council agree to raise a sum of £1,500,000 towards the Guildhall Improvement Project Phase 2, this not including any grant from the HLF or the sum of £1 million already allocated from the Guildhall Capital Improvement sum.

It was noted that the Council intended to apply to the HLF in November 2013 and that the result of this application would be known in March 2014. When the result of the application was known, then the Council would need to make a decision on proceeding with the Project. See also confidential appendix relating to this matter.

G80 **Confidential Report of the Guildhall Manager**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Guildhall Manager.

The Committee considered the wheelchair lift in the main reception area. This was broken and required a new PCB board. Members noted the potential cost of repairing the lift and the fact that the lift was now old and was proving to be unreliable. In addition, with the impending Guildhall Improvement Programme it was likely that the lift would be rendered redundant. Members noted that the Council did have a fully functioning lift to the Abbey Hall, access from the south-east corner of the building which tended to be favoured by users and taking the above into account, it was **resolved** that the wheelchair lift not be repaired.

The Manager reported on weddings and functions held at the Guildhall and the finances of these functions. It was noted that there would be a Wedding Fayre at the Guildhall on 5<sup>th</sup> January 2014, organised by Guide for Brides UK.

The Manager also reported on the catering arrangements at the Guildhall. The Guildhall was operating in partnership with Truly Scrumptious Catering. However hirers retained the option of bringing in their preferred caterer, subject to those caterers possessing the relevant hygiene certificates and holding adequate insurance.

The report outlined the staffing budget for the year to date and the trialling of a new staffing rota system.

The report detailed a change to terms and conditions of booking the Guildhall which would give greater clarity to what was being agreed to being provided as part of bookings.

Members considered the Sunday opening of the Guildhall. In the latter years of the Vale's operation of the Guildhall, the facility had been closed on a Sunday. During the Town Council's operation of the Guildhall, Sunday bookings had been taken. However, there had not been a great demand for bookings and opening the Guildhall on a Sunday was not commercially viable.

Following discussion it was **resolved** that the Guildhall be closed on Sundays. However, if there were enquiries regarding Sunday bookings, these would be considered on a case by case basis and authority would be delegated to the Guildhall Management to take such bookings as long as they were financially viable for the service.

See also confidential appendix.

**Resolved:** that the Guildhall Manager's report be approved.

G81 **Royse Court Improvement Project**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Head of Service Delivery in relation to the above. Members noted that the work on Royse Court was well underway with all the major demolition work completed and the re-roofing 95% complete. There had been some additional works required which could not have been foreseen at the planning stage of undertaking work to an old Grade 2 Listed Building. However, despite these works being required, Members were pleased to note that the project remained within budget.

**Resolved:** that the report of the Head of Service Delivery be approved.

The meeting rose at 5.30 pm.



## **Membership and Terms of reference of the Guildhall Working Groups**

### 1: Operational Management Working Group

- Membership: Cllr Katie Nobes, one other Member (nomination from Liberal Democrat Group), Guildhall Manager and Choose Abingdon Manager. Other officers to attend as necessary. Lead officer/ Clerk: Guildhall Manager.

- Primary purpose: to support the Manager in the day-to-day operation of the Guildhall up until completion of the phase 2 build project

- Key considerations: delivery within annual budget, maintaining existing customers, website, communications to community, staffing issues, relations with community groups, service levels, pricing and packages, management information, piloting events (as a learning process), introduction of visitor information/ Town Council reception services to Guildhall, plans for staffing and service offering during build period which will be 12-15 month period when partial opening is likely to be possible, although no decision can be made at this stage.

- Other observations: core operational accountability remains with Guildhall Manager. The Group should have a supportive/coaching feel, should be a sounding board and feedback mechanism for the Guildhall Manager, and should help guide the Guildhall Manager on how to balance competing priorities of commercial operation and broader Council responsibilities.

- Deliverables: Manager's Report; to operate within agreed budget.

- Logistics: meet at least monthly for a formal review. There would also be informal meetings for the group to consider specific issues.

- Timings: ongoing until phase 2 development nearing completion. Current estimate late 2015/ early2016.

## 2: Property Working Group

Membership: As per existing Roysse Court group: Cllr Lesley Legge, Cllr Katie Nobes, Head of Service Delivery and Ridge Project Administrator. Other officers to attend as necessary. Lead officer/ Clerk: Head of Service Delivery.

Primary purpose: To maintain the physical premises for areas of the building not impacted by the phase 2 development, particularly the delivery of the Council's move into the Roysse Court Offices.

- Key considerations: physical build of Roysse Court offices, decoration and landlord's maintenance and property obligations to the County Registration Office, business continuity for the Guildhall and during build period, office decoration and fixtures and fittings, repairs and maintenance of rest of Guildhall up until phase 2 project (prioritise to urgent repairs only), logistics around move of activities from Old Abbey House to Roysse Court, move of technology, move of Information Office to Guildhall, interim arrangements for muniment room and Museum storage, publication of new location to community.

- Other observations: Consideration should be given to moving this activity to the Finance and General Purposes Committee following completion of the Roysse Court Project.

- Deliverables: property report, completion of Roysse Court project on time and on budget, Council operations transferred to Roysse Court.

- Logistics: activity driven by officers and professional advisors from Ridge and Partners, at least monthly meetings to review progress of project plan, provide member input and take day-to-day decisions.

- Timings: scheduled for completion January 2014.

## 3: Charitable Status Working Group

Membership: Group already appointed (minute G54 of the September Guildhall Committee meeting): Cllrs Marilyn Badcock, Angela Lawrence, Lesley Legge, Patrick Lonergan and Sandy Lovatt; Guildhall Manager, Town Clerk and external Legal advisor (as necessary). Lead officer/ Clerk: Town Clerk.

- Primary purpose: Whilst the Council has previously considered the potential for establishing a charity, this group will further investigate the establishment of a charity and how it would operate with the Council and make a recommendation on whether to proceed to establish a charity. If the Council decides to proceed then this group would also be responsible for establishing the charity.

- Key considerations: type of charity, degree of control the Council can reasonably exercise, trustee composition, whether and how to engage non-Council trustees,

charity objectives, handling conflicts of interest, service level agreement with Council, financial mechanisms between charity and Council, terms of any lease (including conditions under which any lease would be revoked) , employment of staff, how to engage third parties for external services, VAT, business rate and funding impact assessments.

- Other observations: composition of group aimed to be mix of Members to ensure balanced conversation, aim of group is to establish whether a charity is desirable and, if so, the best way for it. It would then make recommendations accordingly but it is not empowered to make the decision. In making a recommendation to precede the group would be required to determine the appropriate scheme, model and structure for a charity, examine the business case and take account of fund-raising and commercial sourcing activities. A recommendation on the timetable for establishing charity would also be required.

- Deliverables: Charitable status progress report, recommendation on schedule for preferred type of potential charity (establish any non-negotiables), determine how Council would work with a charity of this type, evaluation of practicalities of establishing preferred model of charity, recommendation with advantages and disadvantages for whether to set up charity and if so in what form. The group's recommendations will be considered by the Guildhall Committee, with a recommendation then going to the Finance and General Purposes Committee and finally, to the Town Council.

- Logistics: likely to require three or four meetings to agree specific deliverables.

- Timings: aim for recommendation to come to full Council in the spring of 2014.

#### 4: Fund-raising Working Group

- Existing Members: Cllrs Sandy Lovatt and Julie Mayhew-Archer; Guildhall Manager, Town Clerk and external funding advisor (as required). Lead officer/ Clerk: Guildhall Manager.

- Primary purpose: To secure external funding target and also to establish and start to work with a volunteer community either through charity or a friends of the Guildhall group, depending on the Council's decision on the latter. Note that whilst this group may inform and make its views known on the charitable status issue, the group examining this matter per se is the Charitable Status Working Group.

- Key considerations: HLF bid, Military Covenant bid, Arts Council, Friends of Guildhall, local fundraising, individuals, and volunteer engagement.

- Other observations: interdependence with charitable status work group. This will be very hands on group with Members chosen to help open doors and front bids, short term bid to vale and occ to fund fundraising efforts.

- Deliverables: Fund-raising status report, Funding bids, volunteer strategy.
- Logistics: frequent meetings generally built around specific bids.
- Timings: HLF phase 1 submission mid November with HLF decision due in March/April 2014.

#### 5: Phase 2 Build Working Group

Members: Cllr Marilyn Badcock, Cllr Alison Rooke, Town Clerk, Head of Service Delivery, professional advisors (including Architect, Project Manager and Quantity/cost Surveyor (as required)). Substitutes can be arranged if one of the Councillors is unable to attend. Lead officer/ Clerk: Town Clerk.

- Primary purpose: to manage the detailed activities relating to the design, planning and building of the physical building and fit out aspects of phase 2.
- Key considerations: Planning consent, detailed design, project planning, procurement, build management, fit out, snagging, relationship with neighbours.
- Other observations: The Working Group will be involved in much detail. Whilst major decisions with design or financial implications will be taken by full Committee, there will need to be wide but careful delegation to the Group so that decisions can be made quickly in order to avoid programme problems and additional costs. The group will be requested to consider professional appointments beyond RIBA stage D. The group will need to consider how to project manage detail of construction.
- Deliverables: planning application, planning consent, procurement of ongoing professional support, project plan, RIBA level G architectural plans, building specification, building tender.
- Logistics: fortnightly meetings.
- Timings: precise timings will be driven by funding stream, but approximately 3 months to secure planning consent, 3 months to select contractor, 3 months to plan build, 15-18 month build period (of which the complete closure of the building is likely to be necessary for at least 3 months).

## 6: Future Operations/Commercial Working Group

- Membership: Cllrs Iain Littlejohn, Sandy Lovatt and Alison Rooke; Guildhall Manager, Town Clerk. Professional advisors to attend as necessary, such as business/ cinema advisors, Project Manager. Other officers to attend as necessary. Lead officer/ Clerk: Guildhall Manager.
  
- Primary purpose: To design and establish the commercial operating model for the new facility post- build.
  
- Key considerations: operating model, business planning, commercial and creative partnerships, pricing strategy (proposed principle is slightly below full commercial pricing to recognise community ownership but not heavily subsidised pricing), systems and processes, staffing (including requirements for volunteers), transition model from current to future operation, communications/marketing.
- Other observations: interdependent with Operational Management Working Group and Charitable Status Working Group. The group will need to be prepared to be involved in much detail.
  
- Deliverables: commercial readiness report, target operating model, pricing strategy, rfi for potential commercial and creative partners, staffing plan.
  
- Logistics: fortnightly meetings.
  
- Timings: driven by fundraising agenda, immediate next step is to work on target operating model and to conduct rfi for potential commercial and creative partners.