

## ABINGDON TOWN COUNCIL

### Minutes of the County Hall Museum Management Committee at 7pm on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> June 2011 in the Committee Room of the Old Abbey House, Abingdon.

Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer	Chairman
Cllr Monica Lovatt	Vice Chairman
Cllr Jason Fiddaman	
Cllr Patrick Lonergan	
Cllr Hermann Matheson	
Cllr Helen Pighills	
Cllr Andrew Todd	
Mr Peter Clare	Co-opted, Abingdon Museum Friends

Also in attendance:

Mr Nigel Warner	Town Clerk
Ms Carol Anderson	Museums Services Manager, Oxfordshire County Council
Mrs Jane Bowen	Interpretation, Media & Display Officer
Dr Lauren Gilmour	Curator
Mrs Adela Thomas	Audience Development Officer

One member of the public.

#### 3 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from the Cllr Michael Badcock (Mayor of Abingdon), Cllr Marilyn Badcock (Co-opted representative, Vale of White Horse DC) and Cllr Sandy Lovatt (Leader of the Council).

#### 4 **Declarations of Interests**

Cllrs Julie Mayhew-Archer, Patrick Lonergan, Helen Pighills and Jason Fiddaman declared personal interests as Members of the Vale of White Horse District Council who provide grant aid towards the Museum.

#### 5 **Co-option of Committee Members**

**Resolved:**

That the following be co-opted as Members of the Committee:

- (i) Vale of White Horse District Council - Cllr Marilyn Badcock and
- (ii) Abingdon Museum Friends – Mr Peter Clare

#### 6 **Minutes**

**Resolved:** that the minutes of the Museum Management Committee held on 1<sup>st</sup> March and 16<sup>th</sup> May 2011 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

7 **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

8 **Improvement and Access Project – Project Board**

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

**Resolved** that the following be appointed to the Improvement and Access Project Board for the municipal year 2011/12:

Mrs Carol Anderson, Museum Services Manager, Oxfordshire County Council;  
Mr Grant Audley-Miller, Conservation Officer, Vale of White Horse DC;  
Mr Roy Browne, Chartered Engineer;  
Mr James Carter-Brown, Project Manager, Ridge and Partners LLP;  
Mr Nigel Cuning, Strategy Manager, Oxfordshire County Council;  
Mr Alan Drury, Architect;  
Dr Lauren Gilmour, Curator, Abingdon County Hall Museum;  
Mr Tony Hadland, former administrator, Vale and Downland Museum, building surveyor;  
Mrs Emily Leach, former Curator and Museum education specialist;  
Cllr Monica Lovatt, Vice-Chairman, County Museum Management Committee;  
Cllr Sandy Lovatt, Leader of the Town Council, Chairman F & GP Committee;  
Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer, Chairman, County Hall Museum Management Committee;  
Mr Neil Monaghan, former Head of Property Services, Oxfordshire County Council;  
Mr John Steane, former County Archaeologist; author and consultant archaeologist;  
Mr Nigel Warner, Town Clerk.

9 **Financial Report**

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

In response to a question from a Member, the Town Clerk agreed that he would ascertain the cost of the lift to the Sessions Hall, which had been part of the Council's original improvement plans, as compared with the cost of the platform lift serving the undercroft and the basement. Members noted that a lift to the Sessions Hall had previously been the Council's preferred option and had received the support of English Heritage's South East Regional Office. Due to the status of the building, the principal of installing a tower lift to the Sessions Hall had been referred to the English Heritage Advisory Committee, which advises the English Heritage Commissioners in London. This committee advised that permission for the new lift be refused in July 2009. Following that decision there had been further negotiations with English Heritage, Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) and the County and District Councils as major funding partners. English Heritage supported the remaining elements of the project, together with a lift to the undercroft and the basement. After due consideration the Council had decided to continue with the project as there were significant and vital improvements and renewals which needed to be made to the building if it was to continue to be used and open to the public. However, following the removal of the lift to the Sessions Hall, on the advice and with the support of the HLF, the "activity costs" of the project were increased to allow for visitors who could not access the Sessions Hall to undertake activities in the basement. A member noted that the change in heart from English Heritage resulted in significant extra work for the Council's architects and this had not been charged for.

**Resolved** that the report of the Town Clerk be approved.

10 **County Hall Museum Improvement & Access Project Briefing Document**

Members received and considered the Abingdon Past, Present and Future report of the Curator and her team as circulated with the agenda.

The Curator of the Museum, Dr Lauren Gilmour, and her colleagues presented the briefing document on the Abingdon County Hall Museum.

In relation to work on Audience Development, the Audience Development Officer stated that in relation to schools, one of the aims was to make the Museum an integral part of the learning process. Members welcomed the inclusion of secondary school pupils in museum activities. It was noted that the Council was looking to accommodate a number of uses in the basement, which had a capacity of 60 persons. The Education Room itself had a capacity of 30 persons and therefore if groups were larger it would be necessary to use the Sessions Hall.

In relation to progress on Interpretation, Media and Display (IMD), the IMD officer stated that there would be a permanent display of the history of Abingdon in the Sessions Gallery running from the Iron Age through to the end of the Twentieth Century. This would be complemented by temporary displays. In response to a query from a Member regarding the showcases on the stairs, the officer stated that these would be spread the length of the staircase from the ground floor to the second floor, and would tell the story of the County Hall itself. There would be a focus on providing authentic exhibits rather than copies in the showcases and also in display drawers. There would also be temporary exhibitions in the Sessions Gallery.

Members were pleased to note that the work of volunteers continued to be an essential part of the work of the Museum during the closed period and it was planned that volunteers would provide important support to the Museum when it re-opened.

The Curator introduced the section of her report relating to the future. She stated that her team was currently working on the business plan for the re-opened facility. She outlined some of the likely proposals coming forward in the business plan. It was proposed that in line with other museums, the Museum would close on a Monday and it would open from Tuesday to Sunday inclusive. In relation to Monday closing, this would give the opportunity to allow larger school groups to visit the Museum. There would be a proposal for limited evening opening to allow those who could not visit in the daytime to come to the Museum, and to attract different visitors.

With regard to education activities, the Curator stated that both local and national research has shown that there is usually a small charge made per child and there would be a proposal coming forward in this regard. There would also be some potential to hire facilities although the Town Clerk strongly emphasised that it would be necessary to opt to tax VAT where applicable on any new services being offered. Members emphasised that any developments in this regard should be considered together with the Guildhall as it was not the Council's intention to operate the County Hall facility in competition with the Guildhall. It was noted that with the proximity of the two buildings, the Guildhall would be an ideal location for school groups to take lunch.

The Chairman stated that the Council had been very clear that running costs of the Museum would increase after re-opening in the region of £60,000, although because monies had been precepted for the Capital Scheme in previous years this would not,

all things being equal, require any additional funding from the Town Council. In response another Member stated that it was the duty of the Council to keep the Museum and the building operating and the Council needed to continue with this work.

The Committee was asked to consider a request for loan from the Town Council for the new displays in the Abingdon County Hall Museum. It was noted whilst the word "loan" was being used, in fact the Museum is a section and a service of the Town Council, so the request was for the items to be located in a different building.

The items which it was requested should be loaned were as follows:

- *Painting of Abingdon Market Cross\**
- *Painting of Blewitt's Coach\**
- *Model of GWR engine and coach – the Abingdon Bunk*
- *Sir John Mason – carved figure*
- *Attrebate gold stater (Iron Age coin)*
- *Etching of school from Roysse Room*
- *Small Silver Mace – Queen Elizabeth I*
- *Silver Seal 1605 – James I*
- *Lionel Bostock silver cup 1639 (one of a pair)*
- *Small Silver Mace – Charles I*
- *Silver tankard presented by Sir John Lenthall in 1658 when elected MP for*
- *Small Silver Mace – James II (1686)*
- *Large silver tankard (1700) with Talbot (dog) on lid. Donated by Martha, widow of Sir George Stonehouse MP for Abingdon and his second son Sir John who took over as MP after his father's death when the Mayor declared that 171 was greater than 279*
- *Bronze Gallon measure 1600 or Quart Measure 1601*
- *Sargeant at Mace Silver Badge 1721*
- *Selection of Wooden trenchers of 1556 and pewter plates c. 1725*
- *Silver Punchbowl 1760/1 presented by 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Abingdon (one of a pair)*
- *Leather fire bucket*
- *Monk's Map – if the conservation work has been completed and it can be displayed.*

In making this proposal the IMD officer stated that it was important that the Museum included real Abingdon items, hence the request for the loans. The items asterisked were items from the Preston Bequest which specified public exhibition and by lending these items to the Museum there would be increased public access to these collections. With regard to the seven items of silver, it was stated that these could be "rotated" with other items in the Council's collections.

Members discussed the request. In response to a question from a Member it was confirmed that it would be possible to obtain copies of the works of art. A member enquired whether items relating to Abingdon but in other collections were being considered for loan requests. The IMD officer confirmed that there was a long list of such items but unfortunately the Ashmolean Museum were not willing to lend the Council the "Abingdon Sword."

In relation to the Monks Map the Curator stated that an application had been made to the Pilgrim Trust in relation to the conservation of this item and it would be helpful to

await their report as to how this valuable artifact could be best preserved for the future.

It was stated that work to re-design the silver cabinet at the Guildhall could be progressed by Museum staff as part of both the County Hall and the Guildhall project so that items could be better displayed and interpreted by visitors to the Guildhall.

It was **recommended** to the Town Council that the above items be loaned Abingdon Museum, noting that this is a section of the Town Council.

The Curator stated that the business plan was in its draft stage with a number of staff having input into this plan. It was **agreed** that this would be circulated to member of the Committee for their comment, with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman reviewing this document with a view to bringing it to the September meeting of this Committee.

**Resolved** that the report drafted by the Curator and her team be approved by the Council.

#### 11 **Questions**

As this was the first meeting of the Committee under the new Council, an opportunity for questions had been included on the agenda but members felt that these had been adequately covered under other items. However, it was noted that the usual list of County Hall Museum Management Committee dates had not been included with the agenda papers and the Town Clerk stated that these would be included in the minutes of the meeting. The upcoming meetings of the County Hall Museum Management Committee are as follows:

Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2011; Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> November 2011; Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> January 2012 and Tuesday 28<sup>th</sup> February 2012.

It was noted that all meetings commenced at 7pm on Tuesdays.

It was noted that there was also usually an item for Abingdon Museum Friends who supported the Museum both financially and with volunteers. Mr Peter Clare, who was Treasurer of the Friends and was a co-opted member of the Committee, reported that the Friends had raised some funds towards the Improvement and Access Project but considered that raising the profile of the Museum was also an important part of their work. Recently they had a stall at the Dragon Boat Racing Day and there had also been an Open Gardens Day in Abingdon. It was noted that one garden had received 120 visitors with the average had been around 80.

Mr Clare was thanked for his report.

#### 12 **Open Day at the Museum Resource Centre, Standlake**

It was noted that the Oxfordshire County Council Museum Resource Centre will be having their annual Open Day on Sunday 9 October from 10am-4pm.

The Vice Chairman of the Museum Management Committee, Cllr Monica Lovatt, agreed to assist in organising transport should a number of members wish to visit the centre nearer the time. The Museum Services Officer stated that if the Abingdon Councillors were visiting at a specific time she would be in a position to organise a special tour for them.

#### 13 **Exclusion of the public, including the press**

**Resolved:**

That in accordance with section 1 (2) of the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 (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.

14 **Minutes**

**Resolved:** that the confidential minutes of the meeting of 1<sup>st</sup> March 2011 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

The meeting rose at 8.45 pm.