

Minutes of the County Hall Museum Management Committee held on Tuesday 14th May 2013 at 7pm in the Committee Room, Old Abbey House, Abingdon-on-Thames.

Present

Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer
Cllr Jason Fiddaman
Cllr Monica Lovatt
Cllr Andrew Todd

Chairman
Vice Chairman

In Attendance

Mrs Carol Anderson

Museum Services Manager Oxfordshire County Council

Mrs. Jane Bowen

Curator

Peter Clare

Co-opted

Mr Nigel Warner

Town Clerk (Clerk to the meeting)

M1 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Helen Pighills; Patrick Lonergan; Aidan Melville; Sandy Lovatt, Chairman Finance and General Purposes / Leader (ex-officio); and Cllr Samantha Bowring, Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames (ex-officio).

M2 **Declarations of Interest**

None

M3 **Co-opted Members**

It was proposed by Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer, seconded by Cllr Monica Lovatt and **resolved** that Peter Clare, Abingdon Museum Friends, be co-opted to the Committee for the municipal year 2013/14.

M4 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the County Hall Museum Management Committee held on 26th February 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

M5 **Matters Arising**

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

M6 **Financial Report**

Members received and considered the report of the Town Clerk in relation to the above, as circulated previously.

The Town Clerk reported that expenditure against the museum cost centres was significantly below budget for the year 2012/13. Whilst the final accounts had yet to be agreed, the amount of expenditure shown in the ledger against the main cost centre totalled £119,648 as against an original budget of £185, 558. However, it was understood that a significant proportion of this saving was related to the fact that the Museum was open to the public for nine rather than twelve months of the year.

In response to a question from a Member, who noted that there was a saving against budget of £7,293 against property / equipment, the Town Clerk stated that because the building and fit-out were within the defects period following practical completion, expenditure in this area was much lower as items were effectively covered under warranty. He also stated that this money would not automatically “roll over” to 2013/14 and therefore the saving would accrue to the Council’s general fund; however, £13,000 had been allowed for against property/equipment in 2013/14.

There was a saving of over £35,000 against salaries and wages again mainly because the Museum had been open for only nine of the twelve months of the year.

In terms of the Museum’s trading accounts, Members noted that shop sales had amounted to £5,935 which, even taking into account the shortened opening period of the Museum, were lower than budget. This was attributed to the general economic situation, whereby it was noticed that visitors, including school groups, were more reluctant to purchase items. This was also felt to be a reflection of the relatively small area in the sessions hall which was devoted to the shop. In contrast, Members noted that the income against roof visits amounted to £3,690 compared with an original budget of £2,000; this was significantly higher than budget, despite the roof not having been opened until July.

Resolved that the financial report be approved.

M7 **Reports of Curator**

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

The Curator reported that the Museum had been officially opened by HRH the Duke of Gloucester KG GCVO on 8th March 2013 and she extended her thanks to all those who had assisted and attended.

It was noted that visitor numbers since re-opening in July 2013 were now over 27,500 which represented a large increase in the position prior to re-opening.

Fundraising had continued, as reported under minute M8. Catalogues sold at a private view of Janet Boulton’s exhibition had raised £175. Members noted that there was a further event, “Midsummer Madrigals at the Museum” which was due to take place on the evening of 21st June 2013.

It was noted that the Museum had a strong volunteer programme with ten people who regularly volunteer and assist visitors to the roof or galleries as well as undertaking other behind the scenes tasks.

Members noted the programme of exhibitions which was planned for 2014, as previously approved, and considered the Curator’s proposals for exhibitions running through until 2016. A Member queried whether or not it would be possible to borrow and exhibit paintings at some of the exhibitions. The Curator confirmed that this would be possible, depending on ownership of the paintings; there were paintings at Standlake which were suitable for display.

Members did not consider that a display of the photographs from the 2013 Passion Play was suitable for an exhibition.

In relation to Abingdon focussed exhibitions, a Member stated that she would like to see the painting of the Market Cross which is in the Guildhall, included in exhibitions. A Member congratulated the Museum staff on the recent exhibition relating to Dalton Barracks and the work of Army personnel in Afghanistan and asked that consideration be given to an exhibition in relation to the Air Force at some future date. The Museum Services Manager mentioned that the County Council is currently putting together an exhibition in relation to abandoned airfields.

In relation to the proposed exhibition in relation to the County Hall, the Chairman, Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer, asked that investigations be made as to whether Peter Gale's book on the history of the County Hall, which it was understood had now sold out, could be re-printed. A Member stated that she had understood from Mr Gale that this could be undertaken at a modest cost.

Members **approved** the proposals for future exhibitions as detailed in the Curator's report, subject to the above.

Following on from discussions in relation to the Museum shop which had been raised under the Finance report, the Curator stated that in order to increase takings she required more shelf space. She also commented that at present, school groups do not tend to bring money with them. A Member asked whether or not shop goods were publicised on the website. It was reported that they did appear on the new Portal but that they were not marketed on a large scale via the website and it was not possible to purchase shop goods online.

Members were updated in relation to work on the Museum's collections and storage and also schools and family events. In relation to storage, it was noted that it was hoped that long term storage for the collections may be possible within the Guildhall development where costs could be kept down and items would be more visible and accessible to the Council. It was noted that there remained some uncertainty in relation to this matter and also the timing of the vacation of the storage at the Old Abbey House. The Curator reported that English Heritage had taken on responsibility for some bulky items of stone and old doors which they had insisted be retained following the redevelopment.

Further to the section of the report in relation to facilities and building snagging, the Curator reported that English Heritage had now stated that they would not pay for portable appliance testing of small items; however they had confirmed that they would be responsible for the building's fire alarms.

It was noted that the formal inspection of the fit out work at the end of the 12 month defect period was planned for 28th May and one of the main areas of concern related to the vibration caused by the drawers under the cases.

Members noted the training undertaken by staff.

The Curator outlined some of the issues in relation to Museum accreditation for which it was anticipated an invitation to reapply should be received in May 2013. The likely deadline for the application was November 2013. She presented to the meeting an information folder which any Member would be welcome to borrow. The Museum Services Manager, Oxfordshire County Council, stated that museum accreditation was now undertaken by the Arts Council and accreditation was being operated to new standards.

The Curator stated that an essential part of the accreditation was to produce a forward plan for a four or five year period. In response to a question from a Member, she confirmed that there was a basic framework which could be adopted for such a plan and in looking towards the production towards a forward plan; Members would wish to give some thought to where they saw the Museum heading in the coming years. A Member expressed the view that the forward plan should consider issues in relation to access, including a lift to the upper floors to the Museum; more joint working with the Guildhall; work with local retailers; and work with local schools.

The Chairman proposed that a small working group be established in order to take matters forward and this should commence with a “brain storming session”. Councillors Julie Mayhew-Archer, Jason Fiddaman and Andrew Todd volunteered to be part of this group and it was also suggested that Mrs Sheila Hills (Chairman of The Museum Friends), Cllr Iain Littlejohn (Chairman of the Guildhall Committee) and Mrs Heather Brown (Manager, Choose Abingdon Partnership) should be invited to this meeting. A provisional date for the meeting was set as 6.00pm on Tuesday 18th June.

Resolved: that the report from the Curator be adopted and approved.

M8 Abingdon Museum Friends

The Committee received and considered a report from Abingdon Museum Friends as circulated prior to the meeting.

Mr Clare reported that fundraising had continued with two large donations totalling £17,150 having been received following the January fundraising party. A lecture on Maps of Oxfordshire by John Leighfield had raised £220, the concert given by the Wantage Male Voice Choir had raised £722 and the recent fish and chip supper had been successful in raising £325. Another supper was due to take place on Saturday 5th October 2013 and as the previous supper had sold out anyone who wished to attend was advised to obtain tickets as soon as possible.

Members thanked the Museum Friends for their report and their continued efforts in raising funds for the Museum.

Resolved: that the report be noted and they be thanked for their continuing efforts in relation to the Museum.

M9 Dates of meetings for 2013/14

The Committee noted that the dates of the Committee meetings for 2013/14 were as follows:

Tuesday 3rd September 2013;
Tuesday 19th November 2013;
Tuesday 25th February 2014.

M10 **Exclusion of the Press and the Public**

The Chairman moved and it was **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.”

M11 **Confidential appendix to minutes**

Resolved: that the confidential appendix to the minutes of the meeting of 26th February 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

M12 **Matters Arising**

See confidential appendix to minutes.

M13 **County Hall Museum Improvement and Access Project**

See confidential appendix to minutes.

Resolved: that the confidential report of the Town Clerk and of the Curator in relation to the above be approved.

The meeting rose at 9.00 pm.