

Minutes of the County Hall Museum Management Committee held on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> February 2013 at 7pm in the Committee Room, Old Abbey House, Abingdon-on-Thames.

**Present**

Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer  
Cllr Jason Fiddaman  
Cllr Patrick Lonergan  
Cllr Hermann Matheson  
Cllr Helen Pighills  
Cllr Andrew Todd

Chairman  
Vice Chairman

**In Attendance**

Mrs Carol Anderson  
  
Mrs. Jane Bowen  
Mr Nigel Warner

Museum Services Manager Oxfordshire County  
Council  
Curator  
Town Clerk (Clerk to the meeting)

M59 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Monica Lovatt (Mayor of Abingdon), Cllr Sandy Lovatt (Leader of the Council), Cllr Aidan Melville and Mr Peter Clare (co-opted).

M60 **Declarations of Interest**

None

M61 **Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the County Hall Museum Management Committee held on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

M62 **Matters Arising**

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

M63 **Financial Report**

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

The Town Clerk confirmed that, in accordance with the Committee's previous resolution, a sum had been included within the estimates to allow for the payment of car parking expenses to volunteers; a sum of £1,000 had been set against existing budget line 101/4008.

**Resolved** that the above report be adopted and approved.

M64 **Reports of Museum Officers**

The Committee received and considered the reports of the Curator; the Audience Development Officer and the Collections Officer, as circulated with the agenda.

The Museum Curator, Mrs Jane Bowen, talked the Committee through the various reports. In relation to the Curatorial report, it was confirmed that total visitor numbers since the re-opening on 7<sup>th</sup> July 2012 had now exceeded 21,000 and this included over 1,000 visitors during the half-term week when there had been a number of activities in the Museum.

Members debated the proposed increase in the price of roof tickets. The Committee noted that roof tickets were very good value at £2.00 for adults, £1.00 for concessions and 50p for children aged 6-16 years. English Heritage members were offered a 50% discount on the above ticket prices.

The proposal from the Curator was a small increase in the roof ticket price for 2013 from 50p to £1.00 for the child ticket. She stated that this increase would make it viable to use an employee to staff the roof if volunteers were not available.

In debating this matter, Members were reluctant to increase the price of the child ticket but understood the rationale. There was debate regarding introducing a family ticket but having due regard to the prices being proposed and the need to supervise children, Members did not feel that this idea should be taken forward.

In relation to the discount given to English Heritage, Members were concerned that English Heritage had not brought any significant funding to the recent improvement project for the Museum. The Curator explained that as English Heritage acted as guardians for the building it would often be the case that English Heritage members would not have to pay any fee, and therefore the 50% had been negotiated by her with English Heritage.

It was proposed by Cllr Andrew Todd, seconded by Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer and **resolved** that the roof ticket prices for 2013 be set at: £2.00 for adults, £1.00 for concessions (students and pensioners) and £1.00 for children aged 6-16 years. It was further **resolved** that English Heritage members receive a 50% discount on all these prices.

The Curator reported on building snagging and additional work. In particular, additional ventilation works were taking place in the basement.

There was a discussion whether the Committee would wish to increase the size of the shop. Analysis which had been undertaken showed that shop takings were lower than would otherwise be expected in relation to visitor numbers. However, the County Museums Officer, Mrs Carol Anderson, stated that the shop takings were reasonable and that spend per visitor was not as high as it was a few years ago due to the difficult economic situation. In addition, often local repeat visitors did not spend much in the shop.

A number of views were expressed regarding the way forward for the shop. A Member stated that in many museums it was necessary to walk through the shop on exiting the museum but this was not possible in this building. Another Member emphasised that whilst it would be good to increase shop turnover he did not wish this to be at the expense of museum exhibition space. He suggested that when the Guildhall was redeveloped there may be an opportunity to sell some items in that building.

The Curator suggested that it may be possible to have a small selection of shop items in the attic space and Members **resolved** that this be trialled and a report come back to a future meeting of this Committee regarding this matter.

In relation to the official opening of the Museum by HRH The Duke of Gloucester, which was due to take place this coming Friday 8<sup>th</sup> March 2013, the Curator reported that arrangements were progressing smoothly. Following a walk round with representatives of the Duke's office and his personal police officer, the numbers allowed into the Museum had been reduced to only 60 and this had meant that the guests were split between the Guildhall and the County Hall. Most of those in the Museum consisted of the major project funders and representatives of those who delivered the project, including the builders, contractors and design team. Those guests who were in the Guildhall would have the opportunity to see the Duke arrive before adjourning for coffee and then returning to see the unveiling of the official opening plaque. The Curator stated that the Deputy Mayor, Cllr Andrew Todd, had kindly agreed to host the guests in the Guildhall.

The Chairman of the Committee thanked the Curator for her work in making the arrangements for the opening and stated that this was the Council's opportunity to thank all those who had been involved in the project. In response to a question from a Member, the Town Clerk confirmed that following discussions with the Lord Lieutenant's office, this was not a civic event. HRH the Duke of Gloucester and the Lord Lieutenant would not be wearing in their ceremonial uniforms and therefore it would not be appropriate for the Council to robe.

Members considered the report of the Audience Development Officer and were pleased to hear of the continuing success of the Council's education and family activities programme. In taking matters forward, Members asked that continuing consideration be given to the elderly and groups with disabilities. The Curator reported that recently a group with partially sighted members had toured the Museum and had undertaken a "touch tour" of the various objects. She also reported that a group of students with learning disabilities from Abingdon and Witney College had visited the Museum. A Member reminded the Committee that the new Town Council portal would have capacity to exhibit some of the Museum's collections online. The Curator stated that this would link in with existing systems on the "E-Hive" website. The County Museums Officer stated that it was also possible to undertake a heritage search through the County Council website.

In relation to future resourcing of education and family activities, this was dealt with under the confidential agenda as this had staffing implications.

The Committee considered the report of the Collections Officer and noted the work she was undertaking in relation to these matters. In relation to the review of the collections database, the County Museums Officer reported that the Museum service had released funding to enable the Collections Officer to undertake a review of the Oxfordshire database, specifically in relation to items that have a definite Abingdon provenance but have not been collected by Abingdon Museum itself. Once this work had been undertaken, a report would come to the Committee regarding how these items should be dealt with.

The Town Clerk stated that the work being which had been undertaken in relation to the collections was important work so that the town could move forward and ensure that its rich heritage was protected for future generations.

In response to a question regarding volunteers, the Curator reported that over the past few months four volunteers had been recruited in a number of roles. One was specifically concentrating on Abingdon and the First World War.

Members thanked the Curator for her report and asked that their thanks also be passed on to the Audience Development Officer, Adela Thomas and the Collections Officer, Françoise Jackson, for their reports.

**Resolved:** that the report from the Museum Officers be adopted and approved.

M65 **Abingdon Museum Friends**

The Committee received and considered a report from Abingdon Museum Friends. Mr Peter Clare, the Treasurer of the Friends, was unable to attend the meeting and so the report was read out by the Town Clerk.

The Friends Appeal had increased by about £6,500 since the last meeting, which included a sum of £5,000 expected from a charitable trust. In addition it was likely that there would be a further £3,000 to come from the Museum Friends Accumulated Account.

A new edition of the newsletter had been published in January and had been distributed to members of the Museum Management Committee.

There were a number of upcoming events. The Fish & Chip Supper Quiz was now sold out. Wantage Male Voice Choir was giving a concert in St Helen's Church on Saturday 20<sup>th</sup> April and tickets were now on sale.

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

M66 **Oxfordshire Museums Joint Museums Working Group**

The Chairman of the Committee, Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer, reported that the Oxfordshire Museums Joint Working Group would be meeting in Abingdon on Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> September 2013. It was also noted that the previous day the National Museum Friends Conference was also to be based in Abingdon. Due to numbers of those attending, most of the conference business would take place in the Guildhall but the Museum would also be a focus for the delegates.

M67 **Dates of meetings for 2012/13**

The Committee noted a provisional date of the next meeting of the Committee. Subsequent to the meeting it was found that there was a need to reschedule the meeting as part of the Council's overall calendar for 2013/14.

M68 **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.”

M69 **Confidential appendix to minutes**

**Resolved:** that the confidential appendix to the minutes of the meeting of 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

M70 **County Hall Museum Improvement and Access Project**

Members received and considered the confidential reports of the Museum Curator Town Clerk in relation to the above.

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

**Recommended:** that the report of the Curator be noted and the matter be referred to the Finance and General Purposes Committee in relation to staffing implications.

The meeting rose at 8.55 pm.