

Minutes of the County Hall Museum Management Committee held on Tuesday 6th November 2012 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
Mr. Peter Clare

Chairman
Vice Chairman

Abingdon Museum Friends (co-opted)

In Attendance

Mr Nigel Warner
Mrs. Jane Bowen
Mrs. Adela Thomas

Town Clerk (Clerk to the meeting)
Curator
Audience Development Officer

M30 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Monica Lovatt (Mayor), Sandy Lovatt (Leader/ Chairman Finance and General Purposes Committee) and Aidan Melville.

M31 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

M32 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the County Hall Museum Management Committee held on 6th September 2012 be approved as a correct record.

M33 **Matters Arising**

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

M34 **Estimates 2013/14**

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

In drafting the estimates, the Town Clerk stated that he had attempted to rationalise the way in which the estimates were presented by reducing the number of nominal ledger lines. This had been achieved by merging a number of lines, and consolidating the budgets accordingly and had the effect of making the reports easier to read and the estimates more flexible and straightforward to administer.

Following completion of the capital works, the revenue position of the Museum was stable, with the overall net revenue cost of the service for 2013/14 projected at £179,143 compared with £180,558 in 2012/13 (original budget). There were no capital projects proposed for 2013/14.

In terms of income, it was noted that the Museum received a significant grant from the Vale of White Horse District Council amounting to £27,000 for 2012/13 (line 101/1021). The Town Clerk had written to the District Council emphasising that it is vital that this grant continued and he had outlined the improvements made to the

Museum which had been achieved in partnership with the District Council, the County Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund. The grant from the District Council had been assumed at the same level as for the current year.

The Town Clerk outlined some areas of risk in terms of expenditure. The cost of electricity and gas (code 101/4014) was provided for within the estimates but would not be known until the Museum had gone through its first winter. However it is anticipated that the costs in this area should still be lower than in the previous, unrefurbished Museum. In relation to property maintenance, the Town Council and English Heritage had specific responsibilities in relation to maintenance, each organisation responsible for different aspects of maintenance. A sum of £13,000 was provided for the next year's estimates in relation to the Council's duties. However, English Heritage budgets were under severe pressure and as a result, the Council would need to be extra vigilant to ensure that English Heritage fulfilled their responsibilities.

Finally, it was noted that the original intention was that the estimates be drafted and approved by the Council by the end of December 2012 in order to co-operate with the District Council's request that the precept be set by the end of the calendar year. However, there was some uncertainty regarding the council tax base, following the proposals for the localisation of support for council tax benefit and it was understood that the base would not be available until later in November possibly early December 2012. Consequently a recommendation would come forward to the Finance and General Purposes Committee that final estimates could not be agreed until the new year and therefore the Committee would have the opportunity to review these estimates again at its meeting in January 2013.

The Chairman, Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer, stated that the Museum was fortunate to have a good number of willing volunteers and asked the Committee whether it would consider paying the car parking expenses of volunteers. These would be relatively modest and a sum of £1,000 had been allowed within the budget for that purpose. The Committee **agreed** this in principle and asked that a scheme for payment of car park expenses for volunteers be brought forward to the next meeting.

It was **resolved**:

1. That the report of the Town Clerk be received and adopted;
2. That the revised estimates for 2012/13 and the draft base revenue estimates for 2013/14 be taken forward for approval to the January meeting of this Committee, following which they would be recommended as part of this Committee's budget, to the Finance and General Purposes Committee;
3. That no bid be made for capital and revenue projects for 2013/14.

M35 **Education and Learning**

Members received and considered the report of the Audience Development Officer in relation to the above, as circulated with the agenda.

Mrs Adela Thomas, the Audience Development Officer, presented her report for the period September-October 2012 to the Committee. She detailed how the programme was addressing the needs of key audience groups, including families, tourists, schools and community groups. She was pleased to report that the Museum

was attracting regular return visitors. It was important that the Museum attracted families and children but she was trying to balance the Museum being child friendly against making it “a playground”. She reported that a representative from the “Kids in Museums” group, Sue Neaves, had recently visited the Museum and her report had been very positive, in particular in relation to the work of the front of house staff in welcoming visitors to the Museum. The report could be found on the website www.kidsinmuseums.org.uk . The report gave special mention to Shirley Buckle, who had been working that day. Mrs Thomas stated that you did not have to be a child to engage in the child friendly activities and outlined the activities which were programmed for the October half-term, which included a “Creative Clay” day and “Billy Bun” trails of the Museum; the latter would be changed for each school holiday.

Mrs Thomas outlined the efforts being made in marketing the Museum, including articles on the website and in the “Town Crier”. School holiday activity programmes were mailed out to schools and the “What’s On” programme was available at the Museum and the Visitor Information Centre. Marketing also continued on social networking sites Facebook and Twitter.

Mrs Thomas outlined future planning for the Museum, drawing Members’ attention to activities in conjunction with the temporary exhibitions.

Members thanked Mrs Thomas for her report. A member asked whether there were any negative comments from visitors. Mrs Thomas stated that a recurring complaint was the lack of a lift to the Sessions Hall. Members asked that a brief written explanation as to why there was no lift should be available at the reception desk.

The Curator stated that whilst the Council was unable to charge for educational activities, donations had been received. Donations were given on a freewill basis, consequently with no prescribed amount. She estimated that the average was 75p per child for the holiday activities and roughly £20 from schools for each school visit.

Mrs Thomas stated that she was very happy to talk to Members at any time.

In response to a question from a member, the Town Clerk stated that the Council did not have a licence for the sale of alcohol within the Museum. Members requested that this item be placed on the next agenda.

Resolved: that the report of the Audience Development Officer be approved.

M36 Curatorial Report

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

The Curator, Mrs Jane Bowen, presented her report to the Committee. She stated that during its first four months of opening, the number of visitors to the Museum had totalled 14,500. Whilst it had been anticipated that visitor numbers would be very good immediately following the opening, this figure had exceeded expectations. The Museum had attracted much attention both nationally and locally and she was pleased to report that a photograph of the Museum will be the main feature on the front cover on the coming year’s Oxfordshire Museums Council leaflet. The Curator stated that the temporary exhibitions were an important part of the Museum’s activity and the first changeover was just about to happen with the Queen Victoria Diamond Jubilee exhibition being replaced by an exhibition featuring RAF Abingdon and Dalton Barracks. In relation to the latter, from late December the Museum would be

displaying photographs taken by Major Paul Smyth during his tour of duty in Helmand Province, Afghanistan.

In terms of income generation, it was reported that ticket sales to the roof during the summer months had been very good and the Curator suggested that the Committee may wish to consider developing the offer with summer activities. Volunteers had enabled the roof to open during the weekends during the summer and on a number of weekdays as well.

The Curator updated the Committee with progress on the Heritage Lottery Fund Project. She stated that work was progressing in relation to a donors' board. This would be constructed so that it could be easily changed so that further major donors could be added. However, there would need to be a minimum level of contribution in order to appear on the donors' board; she appreciated the sensitivities in this regard and she would report back to the Committee.

In relation to building maintenance, the Curator reported that there were some issues relating to English Heritage, who were currently conducting only minimal repair and maintenance to the Museum. However, she did report that all the windows had recently been cleaned and would be cleaned by English Heritage every six months. Prior to the redevelopment, the windows had been cleaned very infrequently due to the water ingress which took place. The Curator confirmed that English Heritage is responsible for periodic testing of the anchor points which are used by the window cleaners. Since writing her report, the Curator stated that Ett Veschini, who had previously been the Site Manager for Leadbitters, had been appointed to deal with "snagging" matters, and she was hopeful that this would mean that matters would progress quickly and smoothly.

The Curator outlined her thoughts in relation to forward planning. She had written to the Museum Accreditation Manager, requesting a delay to the anticipated invitation to resubmit for accreditation. This had been done on the basis that it was important for the Council to complete the HLF Project and had the benefit of a full year's visitor figures before committing to any forward plan. As part of the accreditation progress, the Council would need to adopt a three to five year forward plan and the Curator stated that an important principle of this plan should be to set targets within the financial and staffing resources which were available. Her report outlined a broad plan for the period from 2012-2015 and she stated that a priority would be to work closely with the Guildhall, for example to create new displays in the Guildhall.

The Curator reported that there had been some incidents with unaccompanied children playing with the lift and being disruptive, including riding up and down the steps on bicycles. Staff were aware of these incidents through the use of CCTV monitoring which meant that they could then be addressed.

The Curator raised the issue of the Christmas lights within the Museum. Whilst these were undoubtedly an attractive part of the Council's display, there was an issue due to the potential effect of light upon the exhibits. The Committee discussed this matter and felt that this impact could be ameliorated through the lights switching on at 4pm in time for the hours of darkness. The Town Clerk stated that it was the Council's established practice that Christmas lights within its buildings switch off at 10pm each night. A member pointed out that these were low energy LED lights. The Curator stated that with the lights operating on the basis of six hours per day, she was content that this would significantly lessen the risks of any damage to the exhibits and this satisfied her concerns.

It was **resolved** that: the report of the Curator be approved.

M37 Abingdon County Hall Museum Collections

The Committee received and considered the report of the Collections Officer as circulated with the agenda.

The Curator took the Committee through the report of the Collections Officer. She outlined the essential work which was taking place in relation to documentation of collections. Progress had been made in consolidating exhibition materials and objects stored at the Old Abbey House to allow items to be transported from the Museum Resource Centre in Standlake back to Abingdon. The report outlined the work of the officer in undertaking collections care which had included setting up the conservation calendar on the computer, performing routine weekly gallery observation walks and environmental monitoring. A “gallery observation” journal for staff members had been introduced to report any observation of object movement, damage, change or any other incidents in relation to objects.

The re-opening of the Museum had led to an increase in enquiries from people wishing to donate objects to the Museum and also requesting identifications. Recently, she had researched the collections for any information for objects relating to “Braggs’ Cycle Shop” in response to a request from the new owners of the property. The Collections Officer had been working with a volunteer, Jayne Russell, to undertake a documentations scanning project. The report also included the officer’s work in relation to the Museum’s “Facebook” page, which was part of the work to broaden the appeal of the Museum. She had undertaken work to assist the Curator in the temporary exhibition changeovers and had assisted the Audience Development Officer with the “Clay Tiles” event and would also be assisting the with “Your Paintings” project. She had assisted with the office move and staff training.

The report concluded by outlining some of the work priorities for the Collections Officer over the coming month. This included developing new procedures to manage the collection on public display, continuing with the audit and recant of the remaining portion of the collection still held at the Museum Resource Centre and the cataloguing and accessions of items into the Museum collection.

Resolved: that the report of the Collections Officer be approved.

M38 Abingdon Museum Friends

Mr. Peter Clare made a verbal report to the meeting regarding the activities of the Abingdon Museum Friends. The Friends were continuing to fundraise for the Improvement and Access Programme, and there were a number of events coming up. Two more fundraising events were planned for the spring: a repeat of the popular Fish & Chip Supper Quiz on Saturday 16th March 2013 and a Musical Event to be held in St. Helen’s Church with the Wantage Male Voice Choir on Saturday 20th April 2013.

Mr. Clare reported that the Friends were part of the British Association of Museum Friends (BAMF). The British Association of the Friends of Museums was aware of the successful restoration and reopening of the Museum. It had approached the Friends with a view to the Museum hosting the Annual Area Conference in September 2013. The date for the AGM was being suggested as 10th September 2013 with the AGM

itself in the Roysse Room, and a tour of the County Hall Museum. The Committee was pleased that the Museum was being recognized in this way, and the Chairman of the Committee, Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer, suggested that an article be drafted for the BAMF magazine.

Mr. Clare stated that one of his aims was to increase volunteering via the Friends. There were many roles which volunteers could fulfil. In addition to direct approach to individuals, suggestions to assist in recruitment included an advertisement in the "Town Crier," a leaflet outlining the different opportunities available and an open morning. It was felt that volunteers might be reluctant to commit to a weekly time but would be willing, if asked, to assist with roof openings for example, two or three times a year.

The Committee thanked Mr. Clare for his report.

M39 **Oxfordshire Museums Joint Museums Working Group**

It was noted that the above group met every quarter. The Chairman, Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer stated that this was a useful forum for all the Oxfordshire Museums to meet and exchange ideas, and it was her intention that future minutes of this group should be included on the agenda of the Committee.

M40 **Dates of meetings for 2012/13**

The Committee noted that the calendar of meetings included the following dates for meetings of the Committee:

Thursday 3rd January 2013
Tuesday 26th February.

M41 **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."

See also confidential appendix to the minutes for detail of confidential items relating to the matters detailed below.

M42 **Confidential appendix to minutes of 6th September 2012**

Resolved: that the confidential appendix to the minutes of the meeting of 6th September 2012 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

M43 **Staffing**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Curator in relation to the above. It was noted that an appointment had now been made in relation to the Museum and Facilities Assistant.

In relation to the general staff update, it was reported that a number of staff had assisted during a period of absence of a member of staff and this had resulted in a delay to some of the work planned by those staff. The Committee requested that their thanks be conveyed to the members of staff mentioned in the report who had covered during this period.

The Curator expressed her thanks to staff following a very busy period with the museum re-launch and the first three months of operation during which everyone was involved in the settling in process and creating new routines and processes for effective operational working. The Curator asked that her thanks and gratitude for the team's continuing help and support be noted.

The Curator reported that a training and feedback day for all Museum staff had taken place on Monday 22nd October. The day had included fire alarm and Health and Safety reminders and concluded with a visit to the MG Car Club. She stated that the Museum and car club staff planned to work more closely in future, taking advantage of joint procurement for some shop items and more knowledge of each other's opening hours and the offer available to visitors. Feedback from all members of staff has been both favourable and positive.

Heritage Day had been a success and the Duty Manager for that weekend, Françoise Jackson had reported:

Fantastic response over Heritage weekend with visitor numbers matching those experienced on the Museum's opening weekend. We also took in over £600, mostly through the sale of roof tickets. By way of this report I would like to extend thanks to front of house staff who all coped amazingly well with the higher than usual influx of visitors. Their professionalism and consummate customer service certainly made my role of Duty Manager run smoother that weekend!

Finally the Curator had expressed her gratitude to all the Friends of the Museum who had helped the Museum to staff the roof over the holiday period. Volunteers also came in every week to assist with projects and she was keen on recruiting more volunteers to help in the galleries, meeting visitors and helping visitors to understand the collections. She also hoped to have a number of "back of house" projects for volunteers.

Resolved: that the report be noted.

M44 **County Hall Museum Improvement and Access Project**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk in relation to the above. This included a recommendation to the Finance and General Purposes Committee as detailed in the confidential appendix.

Resolved: that the report be noted.

The meeting rose at 9.15 pm.