

**Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council**

**Draft Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee**

**Held on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2013**

**At 7 pm in the Committee Room at the Old Abbey House, Abingdon**

**Present:**

Cllr Sandy Lovatt	Chairman
Cllr Alison Rooke	Vice-Chairman
Cllr Marilyn Badcock	
Cllr Michael Badcock	Chairman Planning & Highways Committee
Cllr Samantha Bowring	Ex-officio, Mayor
Cllr Iain Littlejohn	Chairman Audit and Performance Sub-Committee
Cllr Monica Lovatt	
Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer	Chairman County Hall Museum Management Committee

**In Attendance**

Cllr Angela Lawrence	
Cllr Patrick Lonergan	
Cllr Lesley Legge	
Cllr Hermann Matheson	
Cllr Jan Morter	
Cllr Lorraine Oates	
Cllr Andrew Todd	
Mr Nigel Warner	Town Clerk (Clerk to the meeting)
Mrs Sandra Hill	Deputy Town Clerk
Mr Dan Lewandowski	Architect

8 Members of the public

**F33 Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from Cllr Helen Pighills. (Note: apologies for absence are only recorded in relation to Members of the Committee).

**F34 Declarations of Interest**

Cllr Michael Badcock declared a non-pecuniary interest in relation to the item "Matters Referred – Guildhall Committee 18<sup>th</sup> July 2013" as he is a member of an organisation which hires room in the Guildhall.

**F35 Public Participation**

The Chairman of the Committee, Cllr Sandy Lovatt, suspended Standing Orders to enable a member of the public to speak in relation to the item on the agenda relating to the Guildhall.

Dr Philip Kendrick addressed Members on behalf of himself and his wife, and Mr and Mrs Jack Atkinson, who are residents of nearby properties.

He made the following points. He stated that despite requests for detailed plans since April, he has only in the last two weeks been given access to architectural drawings of sufficient scale to read the detail from which measurements could be taken to see how the proposed cinema extension would affect properties in Abbey Close and Checker Walk. He expressed concern that the extension was substantially higher than had previously been understood and reiterated his concern that the architects' visualisation of the rear of the building was misleading. He considered that the dominance of the planned extension would be horrendous for neighbouring properties and was far more dominating than if it were constructed at ground floor level. There would be a loss of light suffered by properties and he considered that it would be wise to defer a decision on proceeding until the Council had received the report in this regard. He stated that it was with regret that if matters proceeded he would be engaging professional expertise to oppose the planning application because of the inappropriateness of its scale and character at the heart of the Abingdon conservation area. He asked that Members consider whether or not this application would stand up to detailed scrutiny in terms of planning law and public acceptability.

The Chairman thanked Dr Kendrick for his statement and then reinstated Standing Orders.

**F36 Matters Arising – Guildhall Committee**

The Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee, Cllr Sandy Lovatt, reminded Members that the recommendation of the Guildhall Committee was due to be discussed by the Council later that evening, and the matter had been brought before the Finance and General Purposes Committee as it would have financial implications. As this was a major item for the Council to consider he proposed, and the Committee agreed, that non-Committee Members would be allowed to speak but that, in accordance with the Standing Orders, only Members of the Committee would be able to vote. He also explained, particularly for the benefit of members of the public, that a number of the supporting papers in relation to this matter were confidential, for reasons of commercial sensitivity, and whilst the Council would have as much of its discussion in public, and would take any vote in public, the meeting may need to resolve into confidential session if there is detailed discussion regarding these matters. In the eventuality there was no confidential session.

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the Guildhall Committee of 18<sup>th</sup> July 2013 in order to consider the matter referred at minute G37 and the recommendation:

*That the Council approve the architectural plans and associated costings for the full Guildhall phase 2 scheme, as summarised in the report of the Town Clerk and the professional team., with the cinema located as in the previously approved plans (March 2013) and to apply for planning permission for that scheme.*

The Committee also considered the background papers for the Guildhall Committee meeting, which included plans and costing information as previously circulated, a confidential e-mail from the Council's quantity surveyor dated 31<sup>st</sup> July 2013 and the confidential appendix to the minutes of 18<sup>th</sup> July 2013.

Cllr Iain Littlejohn, as Chairman of the Guildhall Committee, introduced the item and stated that the Council and its architects had made good progress in relation to the Guildhall Improvement Scheme. There was a high level of public support for the project and plans had been worked up to a level at which planning permission could be applied for. However, now that the Council had detailed plans, they were in discussions regarding a major funding bid and it was considered prudent that some flexibility be introduced into the programme to enable the submission of planning permission to be deferred to allow for input from the potential funder. Consequently, he proposed an amendment to the recommendation of the Guildhall Committee, which was subsequently seconded, that the recommendation read:

- i. To approve the architectural plans and associated costings for the full Guildhall phase 2 scheme, both the "core" scheme and the "enhanced" scheme, as summarised in the report of the Town Clerk and the professional team, and also as defined in the e-mail from the Council's quantity surveyor dated 31<sup>st</sup> July 2013, copies of which were circulated to all Members, with the cinema located as in the previously approved plans (March 2013) and*
- ii. To delegate authority to the Guildhall Committee to apply for planning permission for either the core scheme or the enhanced scheme, the decision in this regard being subject to advice regarding a potential funding application, the advice of the local planning authority and the Council's own professional team.*

In debating this matter a number of points were made.

A Member stated that he considered it was incongruous to pass this matter back to the Guildhall Committee, it should be determined by the Council. Another Member felt that the matter was being rushed and that it was not necessary to apply for planning permission in order to achieve funding. A Member stated that before giving her full support to the scheme she would wish to see the architects' images of the new cinema build as viewed from the

back gardens of the affected properties. She had visited the gardens and had been surprised by the dominance of the current building.

On being put to the vote there were seven votes in favour of the amendment with one against and one abstention.

The recommendation of the Guildhall Committee was then amended in line with the above, and became part of the substantive motion which was then debated by Members.

The Chairman of the Guildhall Committee, Cllr Iain Littlejohn, stated that he recognised that there was an impact on neighbouring properties. However, the Council had to balance this against the great benefits which would accrue from the proposals which would enable the Guildhall to be improved and revitalised as a thriving community facility and would greatly reduce the cost to the Council Tax payer. Another Member reminded Councillors about the high level of public support for the project. The surveys returned the public engagement exercise showed that 94% of those questioned were supportive of the proposals.

A Member stated that residents' comments that the impact of the scheme would be "horrendous" were subjective and he trusted the planning officers at the District Council to make the correct judgement in this regard.

A Member suggested that the recommendation should now be taken in its two parts; however no formal proposal in this regard was made.

A Member stated that the Council should look at the possibilities of reducing the cinema in height and moving it further away from neighbouring properties. She also asked that a number of other matters be taken into consideration. She considered that cleaning the stonework of the building was essential and should be costed into the project. She queried the provision for public art.

A Member stated that this matter should be subject to final determination by the Town Council rather than being referred to the Guildhall Committee. However this was countered by another Member who felt that the Council had the correct amount of information in order to decide on the policy and principle of the planning application being submitted and the finer detail and timing should then be delegated to the Guildhall Committee in accordance with the recommendation. On being put to the vote it was recommended, by seven votes in favour with two abstentions:

- i. To approve the architectural plans and associated costings for the full Guildhall phase 2 scheme, both the "core" scheme and the "enhanced" scheme, as summarised in the report of the Town Clerk and the professional team, and also as defined in the e-mail from the Council's quantity surveyor dated 31<sup>st</sup> July 2013, copies of which were circulated to all Members, with the cinema located as in the previously approved plans (March 2013) and*

*ii. To delegate authority to the Guildhall Committee to apply for planning permission for either the core scheme or the enhanced scheme, the decision in this regard being subject to advice regarding a potential funding application, the advice of the local planning authority and the Council's own professional team.*

## **SECTION II (Excluding the public and the press)**

### **F37 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 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.

### **F38 Matters Referred**

There were no matters referred from the Guildhall Committee from 18<sup>th</sup> July 2013 which needed to be discussed in confidential session.

### **F39 Property Matters**

The Town Clerk updated the Committee in relation to progress on the property matters which were discussed by the Committee at its special meetings of 24<sup>th</sup> June and 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2013.

### **F40 Hosting and Support Costs for Abingdon-on-Thames Portal**

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

The Chairman of the Communications Sub-Committee, Cllr Marilyn Badcock, spoke to this item and recommended that the course of action as detailed in the report and in the confidential appendix to the minutes be followed. Members approved the recommendation.

The meeting rose at 8.03 pm.