

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council

Draft Minutes of the Guildhall Committee held on Thursday 16th May 2013 at 5.30pm in the Committee Room at the Old Abbey House, Abingdon-on-Thames

Present:

Cllr Iain Littlejohn	Chairman
Cllr Alison Rooke	Vice Chairman
Cllr Marilyn Badcock	
Cllr Lesley Legge	
Cllr Sandy Lovatt	Leader of the Council
Cllr Katie Nobes	

In attendance:

Ms Johannah Aynsley	Guildhall Manager
Mr Nigel Warner	Town Clerk (Clerk to the meeting)

8 members of the public.

G1 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Samantha Bowring, Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames.

G2 **Declarations of Interest**

None

G3 **Co-opted Members**

It was proposed by Cllr Iain Littlejohn and seconded by Cllr Alison Rooke and **resolved** that Heather Brown be co-opted onto the Committee for the municipal year 2013/14. It was noted that Ms Brown's co-option onto the Committee was in a personal capacity.

G4 **Minutes**

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting of the Guildhall Committee held on 4th April 2013 be approved and be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

G5 **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising from the previous meeting which were not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

G6 **Manager's Report**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Guildhall Manager as previously circulated.

Members were pleased that the kitchen facility had been refurbished and noted that the grease trap and plumbing to the sink were due to be relocated. Members asked that the adequacy of the grease trap be checked as it was understood that this had caused problems in the past.

Members noted the work which had taken place by the sound engineers in relation to the acoustics of the Abbey Hall. In particular, investigations had taken place on 27th April 2013 whilst the Amy Winehouse Tribute Band was on stage. The band had used the limiter which had been set at 90 decibels but a number of customers walked out complaining that they could not hear the music properly and there were frequent requests asking for the sound to be turned up. Later in the evening the sound engineers turned the sound up to 100 decibels and then 110 decibels for a short period. As a result, complaints were received from neighbours regarding the sound levels and a formal notice was served by the local Environmental Health department. Unfortunately it appeared that the acoustics of the Abbey Hall were working for neither the customer nor the neighbours and consequently the Guildhall would not be hosting any similar events in the Abbey Hall. The Abba tribute night which was due to take place shortly was being relocated to the Roysse Room. As the size of the Roysse Room was so much smaller this did not make these events viable and therefore no further events would be booked until after the Phase Two improvements. The Manager reported that she has spoken with neighbours who had been very approachable and she stated her intention to work positively together in addressing this problem.

There had been some complaints that bottles were being placed into wheelie bins at the end of the evening, thus disturbing neighbours. However, the Manager assured the meeting that this noise had not emanated from the Guildhall, who put their waste out the following morning, and was likely to have emanated from other licensed premises. Neighbours had complained about the collection of trade waste prior to 7.00am. The Town Clerk stated that enquiries would be made to Biffa whether they could vary their collection round; however this was a matter which was beyond the control of the Guildhall.

The Manager reported on the various marketing initiatives which were being undertaken. She had recently met with Captain Richard Crane from Dalton Barracks and was looking to work with the military community.

The Manager's report detailed a number of building improvements which had taken place and reported on a steady increase in room bookings. She was particularly pleased to report that an increase in the number of wedding receptions which were taking place following ceremonies in the Guildhall.

Resolved: that the report be noted and approved.

G7 **Guildhall Development Project**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk in relation to the above which was tabled at the meeting and is attached to these minutes.

The report gave an initial summary of the results of the public engagement in relation to the Guildhall Phase Two development plans. The Town Clerk noted that a number of residents were present at the meeting and explained that a full report on the results of the public engagement would come to a future meeting. Over 200 questionnaires had been completed and overall these had been very supportive of the development project. The Council had also received nine letters in relation to the project, these being from neighbouring properties. In summary, whilst generally the residents supported the overall principle of the development, a number of concerns were expressed in relation to the proposals. Copies of the letters were on file and were available for all Members to inspect.

At this point the Chairman proposed, and the meeting agreed, to suspend Standing Orders in order to enable members of the public who were present at the meeting to put forward their views.

Mr Philip Kendrick of 7 Abbey Close stated that he was enthusiastic about the development plans in particular the work to the front of the building would transform the look of the building from Abbey Close. However, he was concerned with the proposals to build the extension at the back of the property, which would house the cinema. This would dominate neighbouring properties and adversely affect them through the loss of light. It would be better to put the cinema at ground level although he recognised that this would lead to a loss of car parking spaces. He stated that the fire escape / stage access on the corner of the property required more thought. He welcomed the discussion in relation to the acoustics of the building and stated that he had also understood that it was expensive to put the cinema on stilts at first floor level.

Dr Jim Halliday of 9 Abbey Close stated that he had outlined a number of concerns and suggestions in his letter. He hoped that the Council would ensure that issues of sustainability were considered in the design. He expressed concern regarding accuracy of the plans and the model, and stated that neither the plans nor the model reflect the fact that the garden of the property which is immediately to the east of the Abbey Hall is one metre lower than the adjacent access way. In looking at the design he asked that the “out of hours use” which was often of an anti-social nature should be carefully considered, this including the staircase at the end of the building. Residents were very keen to work with the Council in going forward. He asked that in looking at the noise issues in relation to the Guildhall, consideration should be given not only to volume but also to tone; for instance base noise at lower volume can cause nuisance.

At this point the Chairman, Cllr Iain Littlejohn, thanked the residents for their comments and reinstated Standing Orders.

He stated that following the public engagement, the Council would be reviewing the plans with their architects and following full consideration a response would be sent out to the residents who had written in to the Council. The Council would continue to liaise with local residents. A Member requested that all future communication also be sent to residents of Thames Street.

A Member posed the question as whether there was a short term solution to the noise problems in relation to the Abbey Hall. The Chairman responded that the acoustic survey was primarily investigating the more strategic, longer term solutions to noise. An initial thought is the vents at the top of the Abbey Hall were not functional and unfortunately were acting, in effect, as amplifiers of the noise and loudspeakers into the street. The architects

would be asked to consider any short term solutions as long as these did not involve substantial work which would then be aborted in the redevelopment.

In relation to fundraising, it was noted that an expert had been engaged to undertake some initial research work in relation to sources of funding for the Guildhall project and their report was due to be received shortly. It was **resolved** that authority be delegated to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee to commission further work from Mansell Bouquet Limited from the Guildhall marketing budget, as necessary.

Resolved: that the report be noted and approved.

G8 **Date of next meeting and calendar of meetings**

It was noted that the calendar of meetings for the year had been agreed and that all meetings were scheduled for Thursdays. The meeting dates were confirmed as:

13th June 2013; 11th July; 29th August; 12th September; 17th October; 21st November; 19th December; 16th January 2014; 27th February; 6th March; 10th April.

Members noted that last year the times of meetings had varied and this sometimes caused confusion. Consequently, it was resolved that in future all meetings of the Guildhall Committee would commence at 5.30pm.

The members of the public left the meeting at this point, it being 6.27pm.

G9 **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.

G10 **Confidential appendix to the meeting of 4th April 2013**

Resolved: that the confidential appendix to the minutes of the meeting of the Guildhall Committee held on 4th April 2013 be agreed and be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

G11 **Manager's Report**

The Committee received and considered the confidential section of the report of the Guildhall Manager, this section of the report relating to confidential staffing matters. A summary of

discussions and the resolution of the Committee is included in the confidential appendix to these minutes.

Resolved: that the Manager's report be noted and approved.

G12 **Property Matters**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk in relation to the above. A discussion and resolution to these confidential matters are contained within the confidential appendix. The report was noted and approved.

The meeting rose at 7.20 pm.