

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council

Draft Minutes of the County Hall Museum Management Committee held on Tuesday 25th November 2014 at 7pm in the Roysse Room, the Guildhall, Abingdon-on-Thames

Present

Cllr. Julie Mayhew-Archer	Chairman
Cllr Monica Lovatt	Vice-Chairman
Cllr Patrick Lonergan	
Cllr Helen Pighills	
Cllr Andrew Todd	
Mr Peter Clare	Abingdon Museum Friends (co-opted)

In Attendance

Mr Nigel Warner	Town Clerk (Clerk to the Meeting)
Mrs Jane Bowen	Curator

M25 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Angela Lawrence (ex-officio, Mayor), Cllr Sandy Lovatt (ex-officio Leader), and Cllr Jason Fiddaman.

M26 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

M27 Minutes

Resolved that the committee receive the minutes of 29th July 2014 as a correct record to be signed by the Chairman.

M28 Matters Arising

Members noted that the World War 1 themed event took place on Heritage Day, 13th September 2014. The Committee thanked all those involved for what was a successful event.

M29 Report of the Museum Officers

The Committee received and considered the report of the Museum Officers.

The Curator reported that attendances for the Museum continued to be good, with just over 24,000 people having visited the Museum in the year to date.

The Curator reported on the First World War Market Place event which took place on 13th September and it was estimated that there had been an attendance of between 5,000-6,000 people throughout the day from 10am until 4pm. The Chairman, Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer stated that it had been a good day. She and Cllr Helen Pighills had helped on the day with a number of Museum-related tasks and congratulated the Curator on the event.

The exhibition "Abingdon in the Great War" had opened on 4th August 2014, exactly 100 years to the day that war was declared. The Curator reported that the book that had been written by Bob Frampton, which accompanied the exhibition, had already sold over 120 copies and it was anticipated that the book will sell out. Members may wish to consider publishing a second edition in 2016/7. She anticipated that the book would cover its costs and make a surplus of around £400.

The Committee noted that a grant of £2,500 from the Museum Development Service had been awarded to the Museum and this had enabled the Museum to seek advice from two experts in relation to revenue raising matters. Members noted that the Museum had joined forces with museums in Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Oxfordshire to make a joint application to the Arts Council England for a resilience grant. This grant would focus on the benefits of joint working between these museums, especially in the areas of joint procurement, design and development of stock shop and retail advice to help maximise income for the museums. Members were pleased to note this matter as the grant would benefit Abingdon Museum with specialist advice and financial assistance to help design new lines for the shop. The result of the grant application would be known in March 2015. It was also noted that it was planned to apply for an HLF World War One grant to finance the framing and display of some of the Museum's collection of WW1 posters with a view to displaying them in 2016. This would coincide with the 100th anniversary of the introduction of conscription in January 2016. Members approved these grant applications.

The Committee considered the proposed exhibition programme which covered the period to November 2016. The Curator outlined the potential for an exhibition of works by John Piper and asked the Committee whether they would wish her to look to plan an exhibition in this regard. She stated that the John Piper work was of general interest but lacked a specific local connection. The Committee considered that the John Piper exhibition should be pursued.

It was noted that the museum collections currently not on display at the Museum continued to be stored at the Museum Resource Centre at Standlake at a cost of £6,000 per year. It was considered that this was not ideal and the Committee noted that the Council was looking at the potential for storage in Abingdon itself.

The Committee considered the proposed 2015/16 Budget. The net budget for 2015/16 was proposed at £167,112 compared with the original budget for the current year amounting to £148,850. However it was noted that this compared favourably with the budget which was originally anticipated in the November 2011 business plan for the re-opened Museum, which amounted to £234,200.

The Curator's report detailed the main variances between original and revised budget for 2014/15 as well as the estimates for 2015/16. It was noted that the main change related to code 401/101, salaries and wages, where there was an increase from £121,146 to £138,476, this being a result of the Museum Service Review recommendations. Whilst this was an increase, it was again noted that the original business plan showed an expenditure against salaries and wages in the re-opened Museum of £147,000. Another major area of increase amounted to agency services from Oxfordshire County Council where the budget line was showing an increase from £10,250 to £15,670, this budget covering a contribution to the maintenance and development of the Modes Catalogue, maintenance of the accessions register, conservation and care of collections / audit and the storage of collections. This compared with actual expenditure in the previous financial year of £16,289.

In considering the budget, Members noted that staffing costs were higher than prior to the redevelopment because two floors of the Museum were now staffed by Museum Assistants rather than just the Sessions Hall. The Committee also noted that the Museum does benefit from the work of volunteers. Cllr Monica Lovatt thanked the Curator and her staff for the hard work which they had put in to driving up Museum attendance. She also considered the exhibitions to be imaginative and interesting. Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer stated that the staff at the Museum had worked very hard and undertake a good deal of work within the budget. Cllr Andrew Todd felt that the Museum brought much to the town and represented good value for money.

In developing the appeal of the Museum and its income streams, the Committee considered that the Council should consider obtaining a premises licence for the building, which would include an alcohol licence and such entertainments that would be commensurate with suitable activities. It was therefore proposed by Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer, seconded by Cllr Monica Lovatt, and **resolved** that a premises licence be applied for in relation to the County Hall Museum and that further consideration in relation to the details of the proposed licence should be considered at the next meeting of the County Hall Museum Management Committee.

Resolved

1. that the Report be approved, together with the recommendations contained therein;
2. that the revised budget estimates for 2014/15 and the budget estimates for 2015/16 be referred to the Finance and General Purposes Committee with a recommendation that these be approved.

M30 Abingdon Museum Friends

Peter Clare reported the following:

Talks – The talk by the Rev. Ian Browne on the 2nd October 2014 “Reinterpreting Abingdon’s lost Abbey” held jointly with the Friends of Abingdon in the Unicorn Theatre was a sell out. It was hoped to organise a similar talk in 2015. The next talk to be held on the 4th December was due to be on “Christmas Customs,” the speaker being Christine Bloxham. This meeting would include usual pre-Christmas refreshments.

Finance – At our next AGM in April the Committee would propose that an increase in subscriptions: Single from £8 to £10 and Family from £12 to £15. The last increase was in 2010. Apart from meeting rising costs this would allow the Friends us to increase the support to the Museum. The Friends also had set up a system for members to pay subscriptions by Standing Order.

Resolved: that the report be noted and that the Friends be thanked for their continued and much appreciated support for the Museum.

M31 Date of next meetings

It was noted that the next meeting was due to take place at 7pm on Tuesday 3rd February 2015 at the Guildhall.

M32 Exclusion of the Press and Public

The Chairman moved and it was **resolved that**

“In accordance with the 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 press) be excluded from the meeting because of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

M33 Confidential appendix to minutes

The Committee received and considered the confidential appendix to the minutes of the County Hall Museum Management Committee of 29th July 2014.

Resolved: that the Committee approve the confidential appendix to the minutes of the above meeting as a correct record and that they are signed by the Chairman.

M34 Confidential Report of the Museum Curator

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Museum Curator in relation to the above.

The Committee considered a number of property matters which are minuted as a confidential appendix to these minutes.

The Committee undertook a detailed review of the Museum Service Review which had been undertaken by Chris Rolley Associates during September / October 2014 as directed by the Audit and Performance Sub-Committee. The report was considered in confidential session due to staffing implications. However, those items which related to non-staffing matters are minuted within these minutes.

It was noted that the review had concluded: “the County Hall Museum service currently being provided, and the organisation and processes inherent, are generally fit for purpose and do give best value.”

It was noted that within the review at paragraph 3.5, it stated that consideration should be given to opening between Christmas and New Year. The Committee considered that opening arrangements for 2014 had already been made but this was a matter which could be considered for 2015/16. The view of the Committee was that an insufficient case had been made to justify opening and that this would add to the costs of running the Museum. It was noted that staff already work a number of Bank Holidays which other staff do not work and that present Museum staff are contractually obliged to take annual leave between Christmas and New Year. This led into a discussion in relation to the Museum closing on a Monday. The Committee appreciated that this was Market Day but also noted that Monday was generally the day of the week that museums nationally, with the exception of a minority of museums who open seven days a week, tended to close. The Committee considered that there was no case for changing current arrangements for this regards. In relation to the issue of opening between Christmas and New Year it was noted that Chris Rolley Associates had stated that the Committee

should consider the option of a questionnaire survey of public opinion which could be undertaken by the Museum during 2015 to gauge public feeling to this matter.

In relation to the Museum review it was noted that whilst the prime recommendation should come from this Committee, the matter was also being referred to the following Committees:

1. Audit & Performance Sub-Committee: this Sub-Committee is the Committee which commissions the reviews;
2. Personnel Sub-Committee: this Sub-Committee would look at the staffing implications with a view to ensuring these were consistent with overall Council policy;
3. Finance & General Purposes Committee: this Committee is the parent Committee for the above two Sub-Committees and would also have due regard to financial implications. It would be the recommendation of the Finance & General Purposes Committee which would go forward to the Town Council meeting of 28th January 2015.

It was proposed by Cllr Julie Mayhew-Archer and seconded by Cllr Monica Lovatt and **resolved** that:

1. the confidential report of the Museum Curator be approved, together with the recommendation therein;

and **recommended to the Town Council via the Finance and General Purposes Committee:**

2. that the report of Chris Rolley Associates in relation to the Museum Service Review be approved including the recommendations therein. It was noted that a number of recommendations had staffing and property implications but that it was appropriate that the following should be minuted in the public record.
 - (i) Council should review the training budget available for Museum staff to ensure this is sufficient to meet on-going training needs and the budget is dedicated for purpose (paragraph 4.7).
 - (ii) That the service review of the Council's Democratic services should look at what opportunities exist for including all aspects of the Council's heritage services within the sphere of responsibility of a single Committee, including in relation to all budgetary matters (paragraph 5.5).

It was **resolved:**

- (iii) The Museum should review its external and internal signage specifically in relation to charged access to the roof (paragraph 3.3.4).

See also confidential appendix to the minutes.

The meeting rose at 9.30pm