

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council
Minutes of the Special Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting
on Monday 26th February 2018 at 7.00pm
in the Council Chamber, Guildhall, Abingdon-on-Thames.

Cllr Mike Badcock	Chairman
Cllr Dennis Garrett	Vice-Chairman and Chairman of Guildhall Committee
Cllr Alice Badcock	Chairman of Amenities & Recreation Committee
Cllr Samantha Bowring	
Cllr Margaret Crick	Chairman of Planning, Highways & Consultations
Cllr Vicky Jenkins	Chairman of Community Services Committee
Cllr Jan Morter	Mayor (ex-officio)

In Attendance

Mr Steve Rich	Head of Services/Assistant Town Clerk
Mr Nigel Warner	Town Clerk
Mrs Susan Whipp	Treasurer/Responsible Financial Officer (Clerk to the meeting)

7 members of the public

SECTION I (Open to the Public Including the Press)

F58 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllrs Monica Lovatt, Sandy Lovatt and Helen Pighills.

F59 **Declarations of interest**

None.

F60 **Minutes and matters arising**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 9th January 2018. Cllr Mike Badcock updated the committee on progress in relation to minute F47:

- (i) Regarding the bridge at Ock Valley Walk, the replacement bridge is due to be delivered on 23rd March 2018 and should be installed the following week.
- (ii) In relation to Abingdon BID, a letter addressed to levy payers from Mel Inness, Interim Chairman of the BID Advisory Board was forwarded to Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council on 26th February 2018. The letter stated that the management company, In Publications, have terminated their contract with Abingdon BID. At the time of the committee meeting

the Council had not received its official copy. Cllr Mike Badcock and some of the local traders will be meeting with the Chief Executive of Vale of White Horse District Council on Thursday 1st March 2018 to discuss the BID.

- (iii) The survey of the Abbey Hall has taken place and the feasibility report will be discussed later in the meeting.

Regarding minute F57, Cllr Mike Badcock reported that a Bun Throwing ceremony will take place on the afternoon of Saturday 10th November 2018 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War.

An error in the number of the minutes was identified and it was agreed that F52 Publicity would be re-numbered as F52a.

Resolved: that, subject to the amendment in numbering stated above, the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 9th January 2018 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

F61 Statements and Questions from the Public

- (i) Mrs Hester Hand

Mrs Hand readout the following statement:

Good evening

The Friends of Abingdon welcome the fact that a comprehensive set of information has been made publicly available for this meeting. The reports provide a great deal of food for thought and we recognise that you will have to study them carefully in the next few weeks before making informed decisions. We hope that our observations which follow will be helpful to you in this. The future of the Abbey Hall - and the historic Guildhall - is clearly a matter of great interest to the town, with a large number of residents having actively engaged in the recent discussions; the responses to the "Abingdon for All" consultation last September are also relevant here. People will be very pleased that you have reaffirmed your commitment to full consultation on the proposals as they emerge but given that there is a range of views about the best way forward, we hope that this will be a consultation on number of different options, rather than on any one option which the Council has already selected. There are great opportunities for the Council to build on the level of public engagement which now exists - in relation to this and other issues - at the Annual Parish

Meeting and the Community Led Plan meetings next month, and we feel sure that you will want to make the most of these.

The current suggestion is that any interim use of the Abbey Hall will be for a maximum of two years. In practice, we know that you recognise that there are significant uncertainties, both about the eventual outcomes and over the timing of any changes of function - especially given the complexity of decision-making when several councils are involved. You would presumably want any interim use - especially one which is bringing in revenue - to continue right up until the point a change of use is about to occur, so we trust that your decision-making will not be too heavily driven by the belief that it will only be for two years.

We note that the minimum option outlined by Ridge costs £176k and that this would be sufficient to bring the Abbey Hall back into operation, leaving any uplift to be done when the longer-term plan becomes clear. Several of the tasks mentioned are essentially maintenance of the building fabric - which will have to be done whatever use the building is put to – and doing this work now might prevent larger bills in the future. £176k is less than 15% of the original £1.2m allocated for the entire complex, so we imagine and hope that there will not be any difficulty in making this funding available.

Finally, we look forward to the outcome of your deliberations and, as always, would be happy to work with the Town Council to achieve a satisfactory result for the people of Abingdon.

Thank you.

Cllr Mike Badcock thanked Mrs Hand for her comments.

(ii) Dr Jim Halliday

Dr Halliday asked:

Please could the Leader prepare a written note for circulation at the start of the Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting of 26th February 2018, and subsequent inclusion in the committee minutes,

detailing the following information about the expenditure of the £1.2M capital sum assigned in 2011 for improvements to the Guildhall & Abbey Hall : For each of capital improvements works either contracted, or carried out to date, a brief description of the work, the cost, and the date the work was contracted/invoiced; and the balance of the £1.2M sum that remains to be spent.

Cllr Mike Badcock responded:

Thank you for your question. In the time available I am unable to give the full detail as requested in your question but I will write to you with a response in due course and this will be attached to the minutes.

In the meantime, I can confirm:

- That in 2011 the Town Council received a sum of £1,200,000 from the District Council as a capital improvement sum.*
- That in 2012 the Council made improvements to the historic parts of the Guildhall through Phase 1 of the Guildhall Improvement Project. Costs amounting to £180,514 were funded from the capital improvement sum and comprised:*

<i>Building works</i>	<i>£149,807</i>
<i>Professional and project-related fees</i>	<i>£27,132</i>
<i>Other Related costs</i>	<i>£3,575</i>

- That at its meeting of 18th October 2017 the Council allocated the remaining part of the capital improvement sum, totalling £1,019,486, to the current Guildhall projects as approved at that meeting. I shall advise further in my written response regarding this.*

F62 **Special Parish Meeting of 15th January 2018 and Public Meeting of 22nd January 2018**

Cllr Mike Badcock expressed his disappointment over the treatment of the Mayor, Cllr Jan Morter, particularly at the meeting held on 15th January 2018. He thanked the Mayor for chairing the meetings. Cllr Morter stated that she had been saddened by some comments which had been made online and she urged the organisers of such forums to encourage their users to behave online as they should do in meetings.

Cllr Alice Badcock stated that councillors always aim to do good for the town but the behaviour of some residents makes her question why they try to do this.

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk which contained draft responses to the questions asked by local residents at the two meetings held on 15th January 2018 and 22nd January 2018.

Cllr Mike Badcock explained that the questions and draft responses will also be reported to the Guildhall Committee meeting to be held on Thursday 1st March 2018 and section 2 (b) access and protection of historic fabric of the Guildhall complex buildings would be considered by that committee as it was responsible for the Guildhall.

Cllr Mike Badcock talked through each question and the draft responses. Cllr Samantha Bowring asked those local residents who had asked questions would be receiving individual responses sent to them. Cllr Jan Morter explained that at the end of both meetings she had stated that responses will be available on the town council's website and she had requested that residents and community groups would be proactive in sharing these responses.

Cllr Alice Badcock asked if all confidential minutes are now in the public domain. The Town Clerk reported that this work has commenced but a formal resolution needs to be made at the next meeting of the Guildhall Committee to allow those minutes to be released.

It was **resolved that:**

the draft responses to the questions asked at the special parish meeting of 15th January 2018 and at the public meeting held on 22nd January 2018, in relation to section 2(a), The Abbey Hall, be approved.

F63 **Abbey Hall – Feasibility Report**

The committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk. The Town Clerk explained that at the time of writing the report he was still waiting for some further information from the surveyors, Ridge and Partners LLP, and so had not included the estimated cost of carrying out the minimum works as detailed in the surveyor's report. The report from Ridge and Partners LLP estimates the cost of these works as £176,000. The Town Clerk asked the committee to be aware that this figure could change.

Regarding the proposals from Regal Cinema Evesham, Cllr Alice Badcock reported that the cinema owners have circulated a leaflet to Abingdon residents stating that they planning to remain in the Abbey Buildings for at least one year. Cllr Badcock questioned whether this could mean that there would be a significant time gap before they were ready to use the Abbey Hall instead. The Town Clerk said he couldn't comment as he hadn't seen the leaflet but stated that perhaps they were planning on operating in both venues concurrently.

Cllr Mike Badcock informed the committee that Regal Cinema Evesham now have the report from Ridge and Partners LLP and the Council must wait to see if they now make a formal offer. Cllr Badcock also reminded the committee that the council must consider all alternative uses for the Abbey Hall in the short term.

Cllr Alice Badcock commented that whatever the agreed final outcome, it must

be cost effective or cost neutral; she would not wish to burden future generations with large council tax rises.

Cllr Vicky Jenkins reminded the committee that two other local venues, The Beacon in Wantage, and The Cornerstone in Didcot, are run by the district councils but don't cover their costs either.

Cllr Samantha Bowring said she disagreed with Cllr Alice Badcock and believes that services provided by the council are often at a cost and the Guildhall is a community service which will have a financial cost to the council. However, she does believe that it should be possible to reduce the running costs by improving efficiency, staffing etc., or by increasing income.

Cllr Mike Badcock stated he was open to considering all alternative short-term uses but was not prepared to subsidize a commercial operation.

Cllr Dennis Garrett reminded the committee that the Museum costs the council over £200,000 a year to run and similarly the Guildhall will have a cost. Cllr Garrett agreed that the council must not subsidize any commercial ventures.

The committee noted the report.

F64 **Publicity**

None.

F65 **Dates of meetings for 2017/18**

The Committee noted the date of the next meeting:

- 27th March 2018

F66 **Confidential Appendix to the Minutes**

Members received and considered the confidential appendix to the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 9th January 2018. It was noted that the recommendation that a bun throwing ceremony be held on Saturday 10th November 2018 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the end of the First World War had been approved by the Council at its meeting of 24th January 2018.

It was **resolved** that the confidential appendix to the minutes of the meeting held on 9th January 2018 be approved.

Cllr Mike Badcock stated his intention of setting up a working party to organise the Bun Throwing ceremony planned for 10th November 2018. Cllr Badcock proposed the working group members would be Cllrs Alice Badcock, Margaret

Crick and Mike Badcock, with input from other interested parties such as the Royal British Legion.

Cllr Samantha Bowring suggested that some other members would also be interested in being involved in the working party and Cllr Mike Badcock explained that he expected others to be involved as necessary.

It was **resolved** that the working party be set up.

The meeting rose at 7:55 pm.

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Chairman

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Date