

ABINGDON-ON-THAMES TOWN COUNCIL

COUNTY HALL MUSEUM MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

THURSDAY 8th OCTOBER 2020

Agenda item 7: Report of the Operations Officer

1 Museum Progress Following Reopening

- 1.1 Members will be aware that the Museum reopened to the public on Saturday 5th September 2020, in the first phase of reopening to the Museum.
- 1.2 During August, the Museum staff prepared the Museum for reopening, creating a one-way route around the Sessions gallery using signage and banners. Acrylic screens were installed around the reception desk and hand sanitising stations fitted at the top and bottom of the stairs to the first floor. Your Officers took advice on air flow control through the Gallery and concluded that the use of air cleaning technology was necessary to comply with Government Covid safety standards. Your Officers had the 'React-Air Expanse Virus Neutraliser' installed by Oxford Refrigeration and Air Conditioning in time for opening on 4th September 2020. New glass case notice boards have been fixed to the stable doors of the Museum to be visible when the museum is open. This allows more information to be displayed about site safety and offers the potential to advertise community and Town Council events in a prominent public position.
- 1.3 Abingdon Museum Friends have kindly offered £1000 towards the cost of making the museum safe to reopen.
- 1.4 Front of house staff underwent training in a practise week of sessions. Councillors, Town Council staff, Friends and family supported the front of house team by booking timed entry tickets through Eventbrite, then visiting the new look Sessions Gallery. Extremely helpful comments and suggestions were taken into consideration by your Officers who made adjustments, where possible, to information signs and guidance to visitors. We were able to understand how visitors interpreted the route and social distancing could be managed, in doing so confidence was bolstered in staff and generally a sense of readiness preceded the opening day.
- 1.5 Daily numbers since the opening weekend are steadily increasing as visitors become familiar with the booking system. The museum is a part of the national 'Track and Trace' programme which states visitor data must be held by the Museum for 21 days following the visit. From 25th September 2020 it was law to

display a Government issued QR code for public buildings at the entrance. Visitors are directed to download the NHS Covid 19 app and scan the QR symbol on entry, this logs a visit and personal data with the NHS app and automatically engages the 'Track and Trace' requirement. Your Officers noted that some visitors may not be 'tech-savvy', as such, the existing procedures at the Museum will be continued.

2 The Bob Frampton Prize

- 2.1 This year's Bob Frampton competition went ahead despite lockdown and although the entry numbers were down we did receive a number of entries. Bob Frampton and Mayor Cllr Charlie Birks congratulated Ruth Hunter, Chloe Johnson and Alice Le Tanter-Gioanni as this year's winners of the Bob Frampton Prize, via the Town Council website, as Covid restrictions would not enable a personal prize giving. They were all equally different and original entries that thoughtfully reflect on the serious issues the prize addresses and can be viewed on the Town Council website <https://www.abingdon.gov.uk/abingdon-news/abingdon-county-hall-museum/bob-frampton-prize-2020-winners>.

3 Digital Development at Abingdon Museum

- 3.1 The theme of digital experiences at the Museum became necessary during lockdown and operating with new restrictions, but it is evident that developing virtual and digital platforms for education, accessing the collection and delivering educational talks, seminars and lectures is a coherent future plan for audience development. Your Officers have commissioned a 3D virtual model of the Museum across all floors which show elements of the collection in detail and can present photos, audio and video information. Progress on this is underway as the scanning has taken place, preview model can be viewed here <https://v21artspace.com/abingdon-county-hall-museum> password can be found in your Agenda email. Your Officers will add detail and develop the final appearance of the model which will be hosted on an independent platform, accessed through the Museum section of the Town Council website.
- 3.2 We are exploring grant and funding options to equip the museum with professional streaming kit necessary to deliver presentations in both live and pre-recorded formats. This will form phase two of the digital project. We are projecting that educational workshops can resume swiftly once the Museum is equipped by using 'Teams Live Event' to conduct educational sessions from the Museum directly into school classrooms, allowing for the normal interaction between our staff and the class, albeit remotely.
- 3.3 The 'Museum Crafting Crew' Facebook page was established during lockdown and successfully carried out eight virtual children's craft events broadcast on

'Facebook Live'. We intend to keep this routine for children's events until the restrictions of Covid 19 safety requirements are lifted. Indeed, it is the opinion of your Officers that this method of event delivery operates in parallel to physical events when they resume.

- 3.4 We recorded the total number of views to date as, Make and Mend 73 views, Minibeast Safari 110 views, Monster Mash 248 views, Pets on Parade 118 views, Spinning around 205 views, String Art 720 views, Up in the air over 1000 views, Weave away 123 views.
- 3.5 The Museum took part in this year's Heritage Open Day (HOD) on Saturday 19th September. The theme was 'Hidden Nature at Abingdon Museum' starting at 10.30am and concluded at 3.00pm. Five individually streamed live video tours were carried out during the half hour cleaning periods between ticket slots. For this event we deployed Facebook Live which was an effective method of delivery although your Officers are exploring the possibility of using YouTube Live for other events to widen the audience available.
- 3.6 Five tours included brief talks on 'MGB' by Bob Frampton, 'The Islamic Glass' by Elin Bornemann, 'Abingdon's Archaeology' by Roger Thomas, 'Roof Views' tour by David Lloyd, 'The Crossley Engines' by Ruth Weinberg, 'Drawing Class on the Roof' by David Melling, and 'The Abingdon Ichthyosaur' by Jeff Wallis. The tours were conducted by Dan Sancisi and Valeria Cambule using an iPhone. Though effective it was evident investing in professional equipment was necessary to enhance the audience viewing experience.
- 3.7 Each tour attracted viewer numbers as follows; Gallery tour 1112 views, roof tour 203 views, Crossley engines 212 views, David Melling 191 views including viewers from North America and Europe, Jeff Wallis attic tour 60 views.
- 3.8 Gareth Howell, who with Rick Stevens, have previously presented a series of lectures and handling sessions about the Great War are continuing their series on WW2, the title of the next being '1940: Going it alone'. As a physical event is most unlikely at this time, we are exploring the options on a Teams Live event for which tickets could be sold to access the link to view live or after the event for a limited period. A proposed date for the event is Wednesday 11th November 2020.

4 Social Media and the Museum Blog

- 4.1 An effective social media campaign is established in weekly operation and delivered regularly by Museum staff, particularly by Valeria Cambule. Elin Bornemann has been the driving force behind the new Museum Blog section of

the website and continues to make regular entries. Other museum staff and volunteers have also contributed to the blogs.

5 Retail, Visitors, Donations and Roof report

- 5.1 Since reopening we have received 223 visitors in total. Current limitations on visitor numbers due to Covid safety compliance allow up to 60 visitors per day. This is based upon ticket availability of 10 units per 30-minute session. At six sessions per day the maximum visitor number per week is 360 visitors. Compared with the average of 457 weekly visitors during 2019 – 2020, at best the Museum can achieve 18,360 per annum, down 27% on last year.
- 5.2 Shop sales since reopening are £95.03 averaging to £2.35 per visitor.
- 5.3 The total donations received since reopening are £13 averaging to £0.17 per visitor.
- 5.4 The roof reopening is planned to commence in phase two reopening. As the roof traditionally closes from October to April, it is hoped that by 1st April 2021 it will be possible to open normally.
- 5.5 The café has remained closed since lockdown.

6 Marketing

- 6.1 We have resumed paid advertising in OX, Pick and Abingdon Town magazines in order to inform the public of our new opening structure, the current temporary exhibition and criteria for a safe visitor experience. The adverts come with an enhanced social media package delivered through Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. These can interface with our existing social media posts and potentially boost our follower base.

7 Building Matters

- 7.1 The Operations Officer contracted a minor repair of an air vent on the steps of the arcade which has solved the problem of water ingress to the air ventilation system connecting to the WC's in the basement. A new fan was installed in readiness for the return of staff.
- 7.2 English Heritage continue to service their planned maintenance schedule of the building and progress continues towards clarifying responsibilities for unallocated maintenance areas.

7.3 Legionella testing was carried out before the return of staff into the building and testing continues on a regular basis in line with water safety guidelines.

8 **Decisions**

8.1 Members are requested to approve this report.

Dan Sancisi
Operations Officer
25th September 2020