

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council

Draft Minutes of the County Hall Museum Management Committee held on Thursday 19th May 2016 at 2.00 pm in the Bear Room, Roysse Court, Abingdon-on-Thames

Present

Cllr Monica Lovatt	Chairman
Cllr Dennis Garrett	Vice-Chairman
Cllr Samantha Bowring	
Cllr Margaret Crick	
Cllr Brian Hedley	
Cllr Angela Lawrence	
Cllr Patrick Lonergan	
Cllr Mike Badcock	Chairman of F&GP/Leader/ (ex officio)
Mr Peter Clare	Co-opted (Abingdon Museum Friends)

In Attendance

Ms Susan Whipp	Head of Museum Service/Treasurer/Responsible Financial Officer
Mr Matthew Stevens	Museum Manager
Mr Dan Sancisi	Museum Operations Officer
Ms Elin Bornemann	Museum Collections Officer (Clerk to the Meeting)

5 Apologies for Absence

None.

6 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

7 Co-opted Members

Previously the Committee has co-opted a representative from the Abingdon Museum Friends to serve on the Committee. The Chairman Monica Lovatt

proposed, Cllr Patrick Lonergan seconded and it was **resolved** that Mr Peter Clare from the Abingdon Museum Friends be co-opted to serve on the Committee.

8 Minutes

Resolved that the Committee receive the minutes of 2nd February 2016 as a correct record to be signed by the Chairman.

9 Matters arising

Minute 38: Report of the Museum Officers:

Cllr Margaret Crick enquired whether the work on the weather vane is now officially completed. The Museum Manager reported that English Heritage have not yet sent an official report, but that the work was completed.

The Chairman Monica Lovatt expressed the thanks of the Committee to the Museum Manager for organising the reception for Friends and Councillors on 6th May at the museum.

10 Public Participation

No representations or questions from the public have been put forward.

11 Report of the Museum Officers

The Committee received and considered the report of the Museum Officers as circulated with the agenda.

Events and family activities

The museum had enjoyed a strong run of events with over 120 seats sold for Gareth Howell's talk on The War of the Roses on February, which was the museum's first event held at the Amey Theatre. Rick Stevens delivered another popular WWI ordnance workshop which was reported on in the local press.

The family activities had been well attended, and in order to cope with the high demand the museum's volunteer activity team had been expanded to include

Jo Asquith and Jennifer Doran. Jennifer also joined the education team as a workshop leader alongside Judi Mail.

The Museums at Night event on Saturday, 14 May 2016 was a success. The live music performances in the gallery and on the rooftop were well received as were the performances by local musicians in the café. The museum received lots of positive feedback. The event was attended by about 370 people. A member asked if the event had made a profit for the museum. The Museum Manager replied that despite the income from the roof tickets, once the staff costs are factored in there would not be a profit. The Chairman pointed out that the event was a good marketing opportunity for the museum.

Marketing

The 2016 What's On brochure had been a success to far, with programmes distributed around town by volunteers Janet Douglas and Trevor Jenkins. A high proportion of the town centre shops had agreed to display the programmes thanks to Janet's encouragement and persistence. The programme was also distributed to the wider Oxfordshire community through Direct-Publicity who have praised the programme for its appropriate design and the speed at which they require replacement copies. However, in order to sustain the wider distribution of the programme the museum would be reducing its zone distribution to Oxford hotspots (Ashmolean, Covered Market etc.) and 60 centres in south Oxfordshire.

Exhibitions

The current Bun Throwing exhibition had been well received with both tourists and local visitors. The exhibition included the board panels from the 2012 Bun Throwing exhibition, however the display had been improved through the kind donation of the Museum Friends to fund a license from British Pathe of a film of the Queen's visit to Abingdon in 1956. The museum was very grateful to the Friends for their support. Another element was a home-made Bun Throwing interactive, a cost-effective design by the museum to engage younger audiences, which had proved very popular. Additionally Valeria Cambule, a student at York University, had designed a social media project to collect people's memories and experiences of Bun Throwing. The project had been

adapted to not only include a social media element but to enable a unique catalogue of Bun Throwing from living memory.

The future exhibition plan had not changed since the last Committee meeting.

Collections

Work continued to fill the gaps in the scanning record of the photo and ephemera collection, mainly by two volunteers, Peter Squire and Trevor Jenkins.

All the silver was now entered in the new Vernon database, and work was now being done to improve the records, creating linked entries for makers and associated persons or events. Cllr Mike Badcock enquired whether the catalogue could be rendered in such a format that council members could view it, and also if the insurers required a copy of the new catalogue, in case the added information added value to the collection. The Collections Officer will look into the possibility of exporting the records into a format that could be printed and viewed, and will get in touch with the insurers.

An image usage policy had been drafted for the museum together with proposed charges for the use of the museum's images. This had already been circulated to the Treasurer. A report was requested from the Collections Officer on the proposed charges. Cllr Patrick Lonergan proposed and Cllr Margaret Crick seconded that the policy should be circulated to the Committee between Committee meetings. The proposal was turned down by 4 votes to 3. It was **resolved** that the policy will be discussed at the next Committee meeting.

The Collections Officer reported that she had attended the launch of the Collections Trust's new ethical policy. These guidelines were not legally binding, but they were regarded as an industry standard, and they formed the basis of the museum's ethical framework for acquisition and disposal as required for accreditation. Committee members enquired what exactly the ethical policy entailed, how it affected the museum and whether other museums had their own ethical policies. The Collections Officer would give a report on these matters at the next Committee meeting.

Visitors

The museum acquired a tablet and stand to digitally conduct visitor surveys previously conducted on paper. This was a move to improve the museum's environmental impact as dictated in the Accreditation Plan, and to improve the data collection and analysis of survey data. The digital survey included a question regarding accessibility, in which visitors could describe any difficulties they had in accessing the building. Cllr Angela Lawrence asked whether a question on accessibility could be published in the Town Crier to reach those people who don't come into the museum in the first place.

The museum had exceeded its target of 27,000 visitors. The gallery visitor count for 2015-16 was 27,500, with a further 5,400 estimated to have come into the museum without visiting the sessions gallery. This brought the annual count to 32,900. The target of 27,000 was based on the record visitor count of 2014-15, when the Heritage Open Days increased the outreach visitor count by 5,000. The museum would be supporting and organising the 2016-17 Heritage Open Days and as such would benefit from those increased numbers again. The Chairman Monica Lovatt thanked the museum team for their work.

Shop

2015-16 sales were reasonable overall, albeit a slight drop in sales from 2014-15, but these still provided a solid foundation to develop this year's sales target with a renewed strategy. Profitability has been increased during the last financial year by adjusting key prices and running down stock in preparation for the introduction of new lines and a refreshed shopping experience. With the aid of the Preparing for Profit grant, the retail display area in the gallery would be developed and a point of sale introduced in the café. The intention was to broaden the product range to include non-typical museum shop items as well as the familiar lines. The focus was on offering products not currently available in other Abingdon shops, such as kitchen utility products, as well as developing the merchandising for the Mousehole brand. Other new items included educational games which develop reading skills and numeracy.

One problem was that some of the suppliers the shop wished to buy from would only accept payment by BACS or direct debit/standing order, a facility not currently available. This was preventing the shop from selling key products to

boost the museum's sales and profile. Payment by BACS would soon be industry wide practice, and the worry is that payment by cheque was becoming extinct.

Developing the shop and café customer base would necessarily be part of audience and visitor development for the museum. It was the fastest way of increasing visitor numbers without large expenditure on marketing and publicity for the exhibition programme. As a new approach the 'retail product' would be developed as a whole, so that café sales would climb with shop and special exhibitions sales.

Cllr Angela Lawrence suggested that the products for sale in the café could tie in with the family activities.

The Treasurer pointed out that when the renewal of the financial regulations were discussed, members of the F&GP committee wanted to keep the level of control that payment by cheque gives them and did not envisage any change. It is possible to change the regulations, but any proposals will have to go through a whole meeting cycle.

12 Financial Report for year to date

The committee received and considered the management accounts and the Treasurer's financial report. Cllr Patrick Lonergan proposed and Cllr Margaret Crick seconded and it was **resolved** that the report of the Treasurer be approved.

It was proposed that a new cost centre be established for the café for the new financial year. At the moment the income and expenditure of the café are not clear because they are subsumed under trading. All agreed that a new cost centre should be established.

13 Abingdon Museum Friends

The committee received and considered a report on the activities of the Friends given by Mr Peter Clare. The Friends have held two very successful fundraising events. The talk about John Piper at the Amey Theatre and the Fish and Chip Supper Quiz between them made a profit of just over £1,000. The tour of the

Bodleian library and Radcliffe Camera was highly praised by participants, and it looked as though the other two summer events will be sold out. The Spring Newsletter was published in March and forwarded to the Town Council office for distribution to members of the Management Committee.

The Friends very much enjoyed the Private Evening visit to the museum on Friday 6th May.

14 Dates of meetings for 2016/17

The Committee noted the proposed dates and times of the Committee meetings for the remainder of 2016/17. The Committee discussed the start time of the meetings and all agreed to hold the future meetings at the later time of 7 pm.

The dates and times are:

- 8th September 2016 7 pm
- 17th November 2016 7 pm
- 9th February 2017 7 pm

15 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.

16 Confidential Appendix to the Minutes

Resolved that the Committee approve as a correct record the confidential appendix to the minutes of the meeting of 2nd February 2016.

17 Confidential Report of the Museum Manager

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Museum Manager. See the Confidential appendix to the minutes.

The meeting rose at 3.27 pm.

DRAFT