

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council

Draft Minutes of the County Hall Museum Management Committee held on Tuesday 28th July 2015 at 2.00 pm in the Bear Room, the Guildhall, Abingdon-on-Thames

Present

Cllr Monica Lovatt	Chairman
Cllr Patrick Lonergan	Vice-Chairman
Cllr Margaret Crick	
Cllr Dennis Garrett	
Cllr Angela Lawrence	
Cllr Lorraine Oates	
Mr Peter Clare	Co-opted (Abingdon Museum Friends)

In Attendance

Mr Nigel Warner	Town Clerk
Ms Jane Bowen	Museum Curator
Ms Elin Bornemann	Museum Collections Assistant (Clerk to the Meeting)

13 Apologies for Absence

None

14 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

15 Minutes

Resolved that the Committee receive the minutes of 18th May 2015 and that they be signed as a correct record by the Chairman.

16 Matters arising

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

17 Report of the Museum Officers

The Committee received and considered the Curator and Museum Officers' report.

In terms of visitor numbers the Curator reported that whilst her report had indicated that the numbers were slightly down on this time last year, there had been a surge in visitor numbers over the previous week. These were individual visitors and family groups, many of them local.

The Committee considered the marketing of the Museum. The Museum's Twitter base amounted to 1,100 and a new cafe Facebook page had been

created. However the Curator pointed out that many people find out about the museum via social media, and that the museum needed to increase its activity on these media in the future.

It was suggested that the Museum should advertise itself in conjunction with other attractions in Abingdon to show people that it is worth visiting Abingdon for the day. The museum could for example produce joint advertising with guided heritage walks or companies like Salter's Steamers. It was proposed by Cllr Angela Lawrence and seconded by Cllr Lorraine Oates and **resolved** that a leaflet promoting the Museum plus other attractions should be produced. The Curator stated that she would look into this further but did highlight the budgetary constraints which the Museum had in producing publicity material.

The report raised the issue of opening hours and it was noted that relatively few visitors arrive in the first hour that the Museum is open on Sundays. It was therefore suggested that in 2016 the Museum should open from 11am to 5pm on Sundays and Summer Bank Holidays Mondays. This change to hours would also benefit the café which is often at its busiest at 4pm. Interestingly, Saturdays seemed to have a slightly different pattern with more visitors early in the day, hence the Curator suggested that the Museum retain the 10am - 4pm hours for Tuesday to Saturday.

The Committee considered the suggestion to change the Sunday opening times. It was proposed by Cllr Patrick Lonergan and seconded by Cllr Angela Lawrence and **resolved** that a change to the Sunday opening times should be made from January 2016 as detailed above.

The Curator reported on a number of building maintenance issues. The lift was now in working order following maintenance conducted by a local company. In recent weeks the immersion heater had been replaced and an electrician was investigating the lighting and other electrical issues in the basement. There was scaffolding upon the Museum roof, in order to access and diagnose a noted vibratory sound caused by the rotating weathervane during high winds. English Heritage advisors were looking at possible causes and would be returning to the site on several occasions to properly diagnose and remedy the issue. For safety reasons access was prohibited to the east side of the roof, however most visitors had not been put off roof visits despite the inconvenience, if anything the scaffolding was acting as a beacon for prospective roof visitors.

A Member stated that more museums were now charging for entrance, an example being York, and the Committee should consider a more prominent donations box. A number of views were expressed, from it being unnecessary to consider charging at present and a concern over impact on visitor numbers. However another Member stated that the matter should be kept under review and may become necessary if, for instance, the District Council reduced or stopped its grant.

In relation to volunteers the Committee was pleased to note that the Museum had been successful in attracting several new volunteers in the last few weeks. The Museum currently had 20 volunteers who assisted with visits to the roof, café duties, visitor surveys and the fossil collection project.

The Committee noted the Collections report and was pleased to note the progress which was being made in adding the fossils collection to the e-Hive database.

The Council had previously agreed that the Town Council's collections should be detailed on a collections database, they were currently detailed on a manual system. The Committee considered the different databases which were on the market, including Filemaker Pro 14 and Adlib. It was **resolved** that the Museum should purchase an Accessions register (£180 inc VAT) and continue to investigate the most appropriate database with sufficient flexibility to incorporate all the different collections that may over time be added.

Finally the previously agreed exhibition plan was noted.

Resolved: that the report of the Curator and of the Museum Officers be approved.

18 Financial Report

The committee received and considered the Treasurer's financial report. Clarification was sought regarding the sums paid to Oxfordshire Museums Service for Museum services and storage. The Curator explained that the budget for these agency services was just under £16,000. Approximately £6,000 related to the fee for the extra storage space which was given to Abingdon Museum at Standlake following the Museum Improvement Project. £10,000 related to the costs of existing storage and services such as conservation and documentation. The Curator also pointed out that if the museum's collections were moved back to Abingdon, a significant saving could be achieved.

It was noted that there was a £3,000 budget for maintenance contracts and in response to a question regarding what this covered, the Curator reported that there were contracts in place for lift maintenance, fire and intruder alarms, heating, plumbing and refuse collection.

Resolved: that the report of the Treasurer be approved.

19 Abingdon Museum Friends

Mr Peter Clare reported as follows:

AGM – Mrs Sheila Hills had retired as Chairman and Mrs Sue Stevens had been elected as the new Chairman. Sheila had been thanked by all

present for the work that she had put into the Museum Friends, particularly during the years of fundraising for the restoration of the Museum.

Finance – The subscriptions were increased at the AGM to £10 Single & £15 Joint; there was no evidence yet that this had deterred people from renewing their membership.

Fundraising – The Fish & Chip Supper Quiz was its usual success and had made a profit of over £400.

Events – There have been 3 successful visits this summer: The Ashmolean Print Room, BMW Plant at Cowley and a private visit to Haseley Court Gardens.

It was pointed out that the Town Council itself was a Corporate Member of the Friends and there was budget provision for this membership. It was **resolved** that payment of the Corporate Membership fee of £50 be approved. The Town Clerk stated that if the newsletter is forwarded to the office it would be circulated to all Members.

Resolved: that the report be noted and the Museum Friends be thanked for their continued hard work in relation to the Museum.

20 Dates of meetings for 2015/16

The committee noted the dates of the Committee meetings for 2015/16, to be held at 2pm:

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10th November 2015
2nd February 2016

21 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.

22 Confidential appendix to minutes

The Committee received and considered the confidential appendix to the minutes of the County Hall Museum Management Committee of 3rd February 2015 and 17th March 2015 and it was **resolved** that these be approved as a correct record.

23 Confidential report of the Museum Curator

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Museum Curator.

Building. The Committee noted the progress being made in relation to some outstanding building issues. It was reported that there was an outstanding issue in relation to ingress of water in to the building through the lift shaft. A possible solution would be to obtain a tarpaulin to cover the lift shaft and keep the rain out.

(At this point the Town Clerk left the meeting, it being 3.20 pm.) It was **resolved** that the museum should pursue that solution.

(The Town Clerk returned to the meeting at 3.24 pm).

Museum basement and café. The Committee discussed the basement cafe and the plans to share the space with the Community and Visitor Information Centre (CVIC). Earlier in the year it had been decided that the Community and Visitor Information Centre should be temporarily relocated to the basement of the Museum during the period of the Guildhall redevelopment. This decision had been taken on the basis that as the Guildhall was due to be closed for an extended period, there needed to be a location for the Information Centre within the town centre and that with "Throwing Buns" withdrawing from providing the cafe service in the Museum basement, this space could be used primarily as the Information Centre, with a basic refreshment offer running alongside based on coffee a machine/cold drinks and pre-packaged cake, biscuits etc.

Members considered that since the original decision had been taken to move the CVIC in to the basement, circumstances had changed. The Guildhall Project had been rescoped and the historic rooms of the Guildhall would be available for use by the Council following temporary closure of the building on 31st August 2015. The Council's professional advisors had been requested to look at the possibilities of re-opening the historic rooms once works had been undertaken on that side of the building and then keeping these rooms open during the major works on the new side of the building. A proposal was coming forward to the Guildhall and Finance & General Purposes Committees in the next few weeks which would propose that the CVIC be relocated to the Foyer area outside the Roysse Room, until further notice. It was noted that this location had been seriously considered by the Council some four years ago when the Guildhall was acquired by the Town Council.

In addition, there had also been a change in the circumstances in relation to the Museum basement itself. The Curator had developed the Museum cafe in a creative and successful manner since March, making good use of volunteers supported by a temporary member of staff. The cafe had achieved a four star rating from the District Council and following intention of the one recommendation from the catering inspection, was likely to be a five-star establishment as at the next inspection. The Museum was looking to widen its offer in order to provide a stronger income stream for the Museum and the Museum would soon be licensed for a number of licensable activities, including the sale of alcohol. The location was always going to be temporary and therefore this would preclude any major structural intervention to provide a proper Information Centre and working

space. In addition, with the cafe now operating as it is, there would not be enough space to host a viable information centre, there being insufficient space for leaflet racks and desks unless covers were lost, in which case the viability of the cafe would be compromised.

The Committee noted that the matter would be determined by the Finance and General Purposes Committee at a special meeting in August 2015 but asked that its view that the CVIC should relocate to the Foyer outside the Roysse Room rather than the Museum Basement, should be passed on to that Committee.

Mousehole cafe: The Committee considered the progress made in relation to the cafe but that continuing to run it with volunteers was not sustainable and would not allow for its development in the future. The Committee considered the proposal put forward by the Curator to employ a Cafe Supervisor at SCP18 for 25 hours a week, the annual salary being £12,109 plus employer on-costs. With the cafe being run in-house it was projected that there would be no adverse impact on the budget, in fact the impact would be positive and so no additional supplementary estimate or virement would be required. Consequently the matter could be resolved by the Committee.

It was proposed by Cllr Monica Lovatt, seconded by Cllr Patrick Lonergan and **resolved** that, subject to confirmation by the Finance and General Purposes Committee at its meeting in August 2015, a Cafe Supervisor be recruited as outlined above, noting this should not result in any additional net expenditure against the Museum cost centres.

The meeting rose at 3.45 pm.