

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council
Draft Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee
on Tuesday 3rd October 2017 at 7.00pm
in the Roysse Room, Guildhall, Abingdon-on-Thames.

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| Cllr Michael Badcock | Chairman |
| Cllr Dennis Garrett | Vice-Chairman and Chairman of Guildhall Committee |

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| 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 Monica Lovatt | Chairman of CH Museum Management Committee |
| Cllr Sandy Lovatt | |
| Cllr Helen Pighills | |
| Cllr Andrew Todd | |

In Attendance

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|-----------------|--|
| 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) |

SECTION I (Open to the Public Including the Press)

F21 Apologies

Apologies were received from the Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames, Cllr Jan Morter.

F22 Declarations of interest

Minute F27 – Grant, Children’s Centre: Cllrs Samantha Bowring and Margaret Crick declared a non-pecuniary interest in this agenda item, as trustees of Abingdon Carousel.

F23 Minutes

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 13th June 2017.

(Cllrs Samantha Bowring and Margaret Crick and Helen Pighills entered the meeting, the time being 7:03pm).

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 13th June 2017 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

F24 Statements and Questions from the Public

The following members of the public gave statements to the Committee:

- (i) Mrs. Terry Boswell – spoke in favour of the planned improvements to the Guildhall. In particular the proposed lift would make the Guildhall fully accessible. She strongly endorsed the Council’s plans;
- (ii) Mrs. Judith Payne – opposed the proposed changes to the staircase and felt there were other ways to improve accessibility. Felt there was a need for a large town centre hall and that the Abbey Hall should be re-opened.

Questions were received from the following members of the public as follows:

- (i) Mrs Bobbie Nichols, saying she was speaking on behalf of the Friends of Abingdon Civic Society, asked four questions. The Chairman of the Committee, Cllr Mike Badcock, responded and his replies are shown in italics after each question:
 1. At the September Guildhall Committee meeting it was agreed that the future use of the Abbey Hall should be considered by the Finance and General Purposes Committee. There is a great deal of public interest in this subject – it is after all the only large town centre venue available for community use, effectively “Abingdon’s Village Hall” – so please can you tell us what you have in mind? *At the present moment this is commercially confidential, pending discussions with other local authorities.*
 2. The last two proposals for the complex have been abandoned because they were deemed to be unaffordable. Please can we have an update on the projected costs for the current plans for the historic parts and how these compare with the £1m (approx.) which we believe remains from the Vale ‘s “dowry” for the whole complex? *At the present moment this is commercially confidential, pending discussions with other local authorities. A written reply will be given in due course.*
 3. The Friends of Abingdon accept the need to improve access to the upper rooms of the Guildhall. What alternatives to the removal of the 1731 staircase has the Town Council considered to achieve this? A less destructive option would be to fit a banister of a suitable height on the wall side of the stairs, which would address the problem of the low height of the existing banister, and install a stair lift for those with restricted mobility. This has been done successfully elsewhere. As this is almost certainly a cheaper option, it should then be possible to employ a carpenter with expertise in work on historic buildings to make any necessary repairs to the balustrade and the uneven stairs. *This is a totally impractical*

suggestion which would preclude the use of the Bear Room, Council Chamber and Mayor's Parlour to all Abingdon residents because obviously the track of the proposed stair lift would by necessity need to go across the doorways of these rooms. It would also be impracticable for wheelchair users.

4. Has the Town Council taken any advice from an accredited conservation architect, experienced in interior works to historic and listed buildings, on the best way of achieving the objective of improved access? *Advice has been provided by the Vale Conservation Officer and Historic England. They are the appropriate bodies we are required to consult and I feel it would be improper to challenge their professional qualifications.*

(ii) Dr Jim Halliday.

The Chairman of the Guildhall Committee recently told one of my neighbours that the County Council were considering whether it might take over the Abbey Hall building for "community facilities". Please can you advise me whether you anticipate these facilities will retain a meeting venue of the same size as the present Abbey Hall with associated catering and refreshment capabilities?

It was considered that it was more appropriate that Cllr Dennis Garrett, Chairman of Guildhall Committee responded. Cllr Garrett responded as:

It is in the public domain that the Council is in discussion with other Authorities. If I referred to the County Council specifically it probably reflected my most recent discussions. I would have said 'Community Use' rather than Community Facilities, which has a different interpretation.

F25 **Matters referred**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk in relation to matters referred from the Amenities and Recreation Committee and the Guildhall Committee.

Resolved that the recommendation regarding additional expenditure on arboriculture works be approved, with the additional budget of £6,000 be funded from the Council's pooled property fund.

The Committee **noted** that the Guildhall Committee had approved the recommendation from the Town Clerk, following the Council's policy decision taken in January 2017, that consideration of the Abbey Hall was now substantively a corporate property matter rather than a Guildhall service matter. This was in line with the Council's Terms of Reference for the Committees in that the Finance and General Purposes Committee advises the Council in relation to property matters.

F26 **Financial Report**

The committee received and considered the report of the Treasurer / RFO. It was agreed that section 5 of the report would be considered in fuller detail in the confidential section of this meeting, as discussion of the detail of the write-offs being considered would involve the disclosure of personal information.

Resolved that:

- (i) The schedule of accounts for the period 1st May 2017 to 31st August 2017 be approved;
- (ii) The management accounts for the period 1st April 2017 to 31st August 2017 be approved;
- (iii) The report of the Internal Auditor be approved.

F27 **Grant - Children's Centre**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk in relation to the above.

Cllr Samantha Bowring (as representative of Abingdon Carousel) gave a PowerPoint presentation which explained Abingdon Carousel's understanding of the need for the children's centre and the potential impact this could have on the development of users and their families. Cllr Bowring then answered questions from the committee, in particular regarding progress made on agreeing the lease arrangements with Oxfordshire County Council / Caldecott School.

Resolved that:

- (i) That the business plan from Abingdon Carousel in relation to the Children's Centre be approved;
- (ii) That payments of the grant be made on a six-monthly basis;
- (iii) That the first instalment of grant, amounting to £15,000, be made when a letter of intent has been received from Oxfordshire County Council that they will enter into a lease agreement with Abingdon Carousel in relation to the premises at Caldecott School, authority to approve the payment when such a letter has been received being delegated to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

Cllrs Samantha Bowring and Margaret Crick both declared a non-pecuniary interest in this agenda item, as both are trustees of Abingdon Carousel.

F28 **Publicity**

None.

F29 **Dates of meetings for 2017/18**

The Committee noted the dates of the meetings for 2017-18:

- 19th December 2017
- 9th January 2018
- 27th March 2018

F30 **Exclusion of the public, including the press**

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

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

SECTION II (Excluding the public and the press)

F31 **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 13th June 2017.

It was **resolved** that the confidential appendix to the minutes of the meeting held on 13th June 2017 be approved.

F32 **Matters referred**

Members received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk in relation to matters referred from the Amenities and Recreation Committee and the Guildhall Committee.

(a) Amenities and Recreation Committee of 6th September 2017

It was **resolved** that the recommendations received from the Amenities & Recreation Committee on 6th September 2017 be approved. *See the Confidential Appendix to these minutes.*

(b) Guildhall Committee of 14th September 2017

(i) Tenders and contract for building works

It was noted that tenders had been received for the following building works:

- Building of link corridor from the Guildhall to Roysse Court and extension for new ground floor toilets and muniment room;
- Improvement works to Bridge Street reception and disabled access from Reception to the Old Magistrates' Court;
- Re-paving and associated works, Roysse Court;
- Associated works including insulation of the Roysse Room ceiling and provision for underpinning works to chimney adjacent to the Roysse Room.

The Committee **recommended** to Full Council:

- a. That the scope of building works be increased and that additional budgetary provision be made for these works, as follows:**
 - i. Removal of the ramp running from the car park to the Abbey Hall;**
 - ii. Lighting of the outside of the Guildhall building and flagpoles in Roysse Court;**
 - iii. Removal of internal staircase from Roysse Room to Abbey Hall Foyer area.**
- b. That the Council approve the reports of Leys Longden and PT Projects in relation to the proposed building works which included a full tender analysis.**
- c. That a contract for works be entered into based on the lowest tender, following the detailed tender analysis.**
- d. That authority be delegated to the Town Clerk to place an order for the building works in accordance with the above tender and the additional works set out above at paragraph (a) and enter in to a contract with the company accordingly.**

(iii) Revised estimates in relation to the Guildhall Project

The Committee received and considered the revised total estimates in relation to the Guildhall Project as follows:

| | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|------------|
| Total project estimates | | £1,294,980 |
| Funded by | | |
| District Council deferred grant | £1,019,486 | |
| Other grants | £175,000 | |
| Revenue | <u>£100,494</u> | £1,294,980 |

The detailed estimates are included as part of the confidential appendix, for reasons of commercial confidentiality, in that disclosure of detailed estimates could adversely impact the Council's financial position as elements of the project go forward to quotation / tender.

The Committee **recommended** to Full Council:

- a. **That the Council approve the revised estimates in relation to the Project and that authority be given to the Guildhall Development Working Group to take forward all of the sub-projects, including necessary expenditure on fees, within the budgets set out in the report. In particular, full authority be given to the Development Working Group to deliver on the following projects:**
 - **The current building project in relation to the extension, works to Reception and Roysse Court Garden improvements;**
 - **Improvements to the commercial kitchen;**
 - **Wi-Fi / Hearing Loop – subject to agreeing suitable system;**
 - **New carpeting and other works;**
 - **Replacement for controls in relation to heaters;**
 - **Furniture and equipment;**
 - **Security improvements throughout the building;**
 - **Works to muniment room.**
- b. **Authority delegated to the Guildhall Development Working Group to further consider the matter of installation of lift and rebuilding of staircase in the old building and the development of these plans.**
- c. **The Working Group be requested to consider works to Old Magistrate's Court with reference back to the Guildhall Committee when proposals are received in relation to necessary capital works, revenue implications and funding of both.**

(iv) Interim arrangements during period of building works

It was **resolved** that the following arrangements be noted and approved:

- a. That when the Bridge Street reception becomes unavailable, the Council's reception / information centre operate from the Roysse Room with entrance through what is currently the Roysse Room fire escape. This will mean that level access can be maintained.
- b. The Roysse Room continue to be used for Council meetings during this period.
- c. Most of the car park will be required for use by the contractors, meaning a significant reduction in the number of spaces.

(v) Cost and Project management

It was **resolved** that authority be delegated to the Town Clerk to engage PT Projects in relation to the Guildhall Project and for this to be funded from the pooled property reserve, with the Town Clerk reporting back to the Guildhall Development Working Group on a monthly basis so that it is able to keep track of payments made.

F33 **Property Matters**

Members received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk in relation to the above.

The Abbey Hall

It was **recommended**:

- a. **That the Town Clerk be authorised to engage in further discussions with the County Council, the District Council and the relevant local health trust with a view to agreeing a brief in relation to a feasibility study to include the Guildhall complex of buildings and a memorandum of understanding.**
- b. **That when this work has been completed then the brief and the memorandum of understanding be brought to the Finance and General Purposes Committee for it to make a recommendation to the Town Council on taking any work forward.**
- c. **That the Council Investigate the feasibility of bringing the Abbey Hall back in to use at an early date and for a report to come back to this Committee in the next cycle.**

The Michaelmas and Runaway Fairs

Resolved: that the Council endorse the report and actions of the Town Clerk in relation to the above.

F34 **Report of the Treasurer / RFO**

Members considered section 5 of the Treasurer's Report in fuller detail.

It was **resolved** that the write offs of aged debts contained within section 5 of the Treasurer's Report be approved.

The meeting rose at 9:15 pm.

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Chairman

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Date

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