

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council

Draft Minutes of the Guildhall Committee held on Thursday 30th July 2015 at 7:00pm in the Bear Room, Guildhall, Abingdon-on-Thames.

Present:

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| Cllr Dennis Garrett | Chairman of Guildhall Committee |
| Cllr Mike Badcock | Vice-Chairman of Guildhall Committee |
| Cllr Samantha Bowring | |
| Cllr Neil Fawcett | |
| Cllr Robert Hall | |
| Cllr Brian Hedley | |
| Cllr Sandy Lovatt | Chairman of Finance and General Purposes Committee |

In Attendance:

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| Cllr Angela Lawrence | |
| Cllr Andrew Todd | |
| Nigel Warner | Town Clerk |
| Susan Whipp | Treasurer |
| One member of the public, Dr Philip Kenrick. | |

G14 Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Jan Morter.

G15 Declaration of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received at the meeting.

G16 Minutes

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meetings of the Guildhall Committee held on 11th June 2015.

An error was identified on page 9 item 4: “insulation” should be amended to “installation”.

Resolved: that, subject to the correction above, the minutes of the meeting of the Guildhall Committee held on 11th June 2015 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

G17 **Matters arising**

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

G18 **Public Participation**

The Town Clerk verbally reported a question which had been received from Dr Jim Halliday:

"I noticed that that the Chairman of the Guildhall Committee was quoted in the 1st July edition of the Abingdon Herald as saying that "a new cinema extension had not been ruled out". As this statement is at variance with the quotations in press statement issued by the Town Council on 25th June, please could the Chairman clarify whether the Council is, or is not, planning to seek funding and planning permission for the cinema extension, and if so, on what timescale."

Cllr Dennis Garrett stated that this Council was not planning to seek funding for a cinema extension but that he could not talk for future Councils. This response would be conveyed to Dr Halliday.

G19 **Guildhall Development Working Group**

(Mr Steve Rich, Head of Services, joined the meeting at this point, the time being 7:04pm).

The Committee received notes from the meetings of the Guildhall Development Working Group of 18th June 2015 and a verbal report from the meeting of 24th July 2015.

Mr Dan Lewandowski and Mr David Boyd from Lewandowski Architects presented the revised plans to the Committee. Questions were raised on particular aspects of the proposed design and these were answered by Mr Lewandowski and Mr Boyd.

A summary of the proposals is attached to these minutes.

In presenting the plans the architects drew Members' attention to the following features:

- Ground floor – glazed panels and doors;
- Removal of external escape stair and ramps both front and rear;
- Welcoming elevation on to Abbey Close;

- New external rear stairs with existing lift and disabled WC upgraded.
- Large cafe/ social space opening on to existing piazza area;
- Upgrading of existing toilets, in current locations, and new disabled and transgender toilets;
- Newly opened up space between existing WC's could act as meeting space and house treasures/ historic objects;
- Terrace to rear of building off the proposed cafe / social; space;
- Upgrade of kitchen;
- Abbey Hall to have major, comprehensive upgrade. Stage repositioned at west end of the Hall;
- Retractable seating – an option that could be deferred to a later stage;
- Existing stage to be partitioned off to provide very large storage area;
- Potential for storage in the alcove areas;
- Some of the alcove areas could also be adapted as space for a “temporary bar;”
- A proposal for an additional floor plate above the stage area providing a new space for hire accessed by the proposed new external rear stairs & lift.

In response to a question, the architects stated that the scheme did not provide for level access directly from the Bridge Street entrance to the modern building. They pointed out that there were some practical problems in terms of differences in existing floor levels and also ceiling height issues which would have to be overcome, possibly by ramping but they could look at designing in a corridor between the two areas, based on access through part of the current bar cellar.

Members discussed the plans and a number of points were made, as detailed below:

- Storage space is a problem at present and the scheme needed to ensure that there were sufficient accessible spaces throughout the buildings;
- A Member asked whether a transgender toilet was a legal requirement. The architects responded that it was not, it had been included at the request of the Working Group;
- Query: why not remove the old stage altogether? The architects responded that this would likely cost too much money. There was also plant under the stage and so if the stage were removed, unless the plant was also to be removed, it would not be at the same level as the Hall itself.
- Query: what happens to current stage? Response: the retractable seating would sit against it. It was planned to be partitioned off and used for storage or rooms.
- A Member was worried that the Abbey Hall would be smaller than at present. The architects confirmed that the actual floor area would not

change except the existing stage would be partitioned off. However at the west end of the hall, the wall would be moved back (towards the current reception area to create a new stage) so space would be gained for the hall at that end. The seating capacity would be unchanged.

- The orchestra pit would be removed.
- The new hiring space created by the additional floor plate above the stage could be divided in to two separate rooms with a corridor or could be treated as one space capable of division with acoustic panels. Some natural light would be designed in. The area could be very versatile;
- A Member stated that the new ground floor area could look stunning, a cafe bar which would draw people in, light and welcoming.
- In response to a question the architects stated that the cafe/ bar would have its own food preparation area, it was a bar/ cafe rather than a full restaurant. The bar/ cafe would not be serviced by the commercial kitchen which was there to service functions;
- The Abbey Hall works would include the ceiling being dropped to improve acoustics, which might preclude some sporting activities, these not in any case being a feature of the current activity of the Guildhall;
- It was important that proper provision was made for those with disabilities. The Guildhall should provide services which were accessible to all.
- A Member stated that the scheme provided for maximum flexibility – a refurbished Abbey Hall and new rooms. It would also give options for the future. The Council would need, when the plans are progressed and fully costed, to come to a view on what it can afford.
- A Member was worried about the loss of the balcony. However another Member pointed out that it had very rarely been used in recent years and it would not be cost effective to include such an area in the scheme.
- Optional retractable seating was part of the current plans for the Abbey Hall but could be omitted if the plans proved to be too costly.
- Concern was expressed over storage areas being created in the alcove meaning that natural light could be lost. A Member asked if this was a crucial part of the scheme. The architects responded that there would still be natural light above the alcove areas which were designed to store stackable chairs and folding tables, there was storage elsewhere in the scheme specifically the partitioned off stage area.

It was proposed by Cllr Sandy Lovatt and seconded by Cllr Michael Badcock and **resolved** that the plans as presented for the Guildhall Project to RIBA level A/B (appraisal and design brief) be approved as the basis for proceeding with the Guildhall Development Project. All members of the committee

agreed. The Guildhall Development Working Group would now operate within its delegated powers to take matters forward.

The Committee also agreed that, based on these plans, the Council was now in a position to review and update its business plans in relation to the Guildhall.

The Vice-Chairman, Cllr Michael Badcock, proposed a vote of thanks to Mr Dan Lewandowski and Mr David Boyd for all their efforts and patience during the rescoping of the Project, and they then left the meeting.

G18 Financial Report

The Committee received and considered the report of the Treasurer in relation to the Guildhall cost centres.

Resolved: that the report of the Treasurer be approved.

G19 Date of next meeting and calendar of meetings

The Committee noted the approved calendar of meetings for the Guildhall Committee, with meetings commencing at 7.00pm.

- Thursday 12th November 2015;
- Thursday 4th February 2016.

The Town Clerk stated that additional meetings would likely be required but the dates of these have not yet been agreed.

Dr Philip Kenrick was asked whether he had a view on what had been presented. He stated that he was much encouraged but what he had seen and sensed a greater realism in the way the Council was proceeding. He left the meeting at this point.

G20 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.

G21 **Confidential appendices of meetings**

The Committee received and considered the confidential appendices of the meeting of 11th June 2015 noting that whilst the discussions and recommendations regarding the Guildhall development had been detailed in confidential session, due to reasons of commercial sensitivity and in particular the need to protect the commercial interests of those who had submitted bids to the Council, following a decision by the Council the resolutions had been published in to the public domain, subject to appropriate redactions.

Resolved: that the confidential appendices of the meetings of the Guildhall Committee held on 11th June 2015 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

G21 **Matters arising**

There were no matters arising.

G22 **Guildhall Development Project**

The Committee received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk. See confidential appendix.

(Mr Steve Rich left the meeting, the time being 8:10pm).

The meeting rose at 8:20pm.