

## Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council

### Minutes of the Guildhall Committee held on Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> June 2015 at 7:00pm in the Bear Room, Guildhall, Abingdon-on-Thames.

#### Present:

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

#### In Attendance:

Cllr Margaret Crick	
Nigel Warner	Town Clerk
Susan Whipp	Treasurer

#### G1 **Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

#### G2 **Declaration of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received at the meeting.

#### G3 **Minutes**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meetings of the Guildhall Committee held on 7<sup>th</sup> January and 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015.

**Resolved:** that the minutes of the meetings of the Guildhall Committee held on 7<sup>th</sup> January and 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

G4 **Matter arising**

*(Cllr Neil Fawcett joined the meeting at this point, the time being 7:04pm).*

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

G5 **Public Participation**

Dr Jim Halliday asked the following question:

Given the Guildhall Committee is only currently scheduled to meet for a further three times during this municipal year, please could the Chairman outline how he intends to keep neighbouring residents informed of future plans for the Guildhall.”

The Chairman of the Committee, Cllr Dennis Garrett, explained that it is the intention of the Guildhall Committee to keep local residents fully informed of decisions taken and that neighbours of the Guildhall would be invited to a briefing which would take place after the next Full Council meeting, which is to be held on Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> June 2015.

Dr. Philip Kenrick stated that following his statement at the last meeting there had been an exchange which had not been minuted and he asked that a statement be added to the effect that “when submitting his question to the Committee, he had been unable to find any public notice of the meeting, despite the fact that the agenda contained an opportunity for public participation. The Town Clerk apologised for this and said that it had been an oversight. Cllr Littlejohn then added that the Guildhall Committee, being a sub-Committee of the Town Council, was not in fact obliged to provide for public participation at its meetings.”

The Town Clerk stated that under public participation, questions and statements are minuted but any exchanges which may occur thereafter were not. However he could confirm the comments attributed to him and would minute these with the minutes of 11<sup>th</sup> June 2015. With regard to the comments attributed to former Cllr Iain Littlejohn, he stated that Cllr Littlejohn was not present to confirm his comments or otherwise but there had until recently been some debate over how public participation sat with the Guildhall Committee.

G6 **Guildhall Working Groups**

This was deferred to the end of the meeting – see minute G74.

The Chairman, Cllr Dennis Garrett, stated his determination that all the Council work together on the Guildhall Project and that it should not be considered a party political matter.

#### G7 **Financial Report**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Treasurer. It was noted that vacancies in the establishment had led to an under spend against salaries and wages but that this had led to a significant costs against agency staffing, which had not been budgeted for.

Although the Guildhall was closing for building works on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2015, the Council had decided to budget a full year of running costs, on the same basis as for 2014/15, on the basis of setting a prudent budget. Consequently the budget set for 2015/16 was £158,539.

**Resolved:** that the report of the Treasurer be approved.

#### G8 **Guildhall Operations**

The Town Clerk gave a verbal report on Guildhall operations.

The Town Clerk explained that a major challenge at present was in relation to staffing. The Guildhall Manager was on maternity leave, the Supervisor's position was vacant, the afternoon shared receptionist position was vacant and there had been sickness absence amongst the rest of the team. The management was being undertaken by the Town Clerk and the Head of Services and this was a significant call on their time. The temporary administrator was proving to be a vital member of the staff. With the impending closure of the Guildhall, recruitment had been frozen and the Council was now very reliant on fixed-term contracts and casual staff but there was not much leeway to cover when, for example, a member of staff phoned in sick.

Building maintenance issues occurred on a regular basis and these included matters such as problems with heating and power, matters which it was intended to address fully as part of the development.

The Guildhall continued to organise the popular monthly Comedy Night and last weekend the Ruby Vintage Fair had taken place. However bookings were now slowing down ahead of the closure and with the summer months. There were very few bar functions left before the end of August and also very few family functions such as weddings.

With regards the ordering of bar stock, the Town Clerk explained that due to the small size of orders the Council are currently unable to benefit from many

discounts with the larger suppliers. The majority of bar stock now tends to be purchased from Booker Cash and Carry and the local supermarkets rather than from the brewery, as this proves to be much more economic way of purchasing. However small bottles of wine and mixers could be procured more economically from the brewery.

Thanks were expressed to the Guildhall staff who were managing to run the Guildhall in these less than ideal conditions.

G9 **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 30<sup>th</sup> July 2015;
- Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> November 2015;
- Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> February 2016.

G10 **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 1060 (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.

*Note on confidentiality: it should be appreciated that it is challenging, when considering the potential building works going forward, to retain a balance between what should be included in the open minutes and what needs to be kept in the confidential appendix. Rather than retain all discussions in confidential session, a view has been taken, in the interests of transparency, to include as much as possible in the public domain. However due to the nature of the discussions at this meeting the amount which can currently and prudently be disclosed is limited.*

*Dr Jim Halliday, Dr Kendrick and Mrs Kendrick left the meeting at this point, it being 7:25pm.*

G11 **Confidential appendices of meetings**

The Committee received and considered the confidential appendices of the meetings of 7<sup>th</sup> January and 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015.

**Resolved:** that the confidential appendices of the meetings of the Guildhall Committee held on 7<sup>th</sup> January and 28<sup>th</sup> April 2015 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

G12 **Matters arising, report of the new Build Group and Guildhall Improvement, Access and Cinema Project**

*(Mr Peter Turvey of PT Projects joined the meeting at this point, the time being 7:43pm).*

The Committee received the report of the Guildhall Phase 2 Build Working Group of 25<sup>th</sup> February 2015. It was **resolved** that the report of the New Build be approved.

The Committee received and considered the Confidential Report of the Town Clerk and **recommended** to the Finance and General Purposes Committee that this be approved.

The Committee considered the tenders in relation to outline proposals which had been received from cinema operators. The Committee considered the development project for the Guildhall and how it would be funded.

It was considered that, subject to the adoption of the recommendations by the Finance and General Purposes Committee and the Town Council, that recommendations nos 1 to 7 should then be made public. These recommendations are detailed below.

It was proposed by Cllr Michael Badcock, seconded Cllr Jan Morter and **recommended** to the Finance and General Purposes Committee for onward consideration by the Town Council:

1. That following the tender exercise undertaken earlier in the year, the bidders (details redacted) be advised that, having reviewed the tenders, the Council will not be taking their proposals forward. This is because the levels of capital investment were not sufficient for the Council to be able to afford the project without a loan which the Council considers to be an unreasonable cost against future budgets.

It was proposed by Cllr Neil Fawcett, seconded by Cllr Dennis Garrett and **recommended** to the Finance and General Purposes Committee for onward consideration by the Town Council:

2. That the Council commission the necessary architectural, surveying and quantity surveying work in order to deliver an alternative proposal based on the following priorities:
  - a. Improvements to the Abbey Hall, including installation of cinema projection equipment and screen, retractable seating and soundproofing;
  - b. Creation of entry to the modern part of the Guildhall at street level;
  - c. Access improvements with a view to enhance access for the whole building;
  - d. Improvement of toilet facilities;
  - e. Replacement of boilers / heating system (as necessary) and relocation of boiler room.
3. That it be noted that the current plans are designed in a modular manner and that the rescope project will be building on and represent a development of the work already undertaken. That the architects will be asked to ensure that any amended designs, in so far as is possible, do not impede the Council's ability to implement its previous plans should funding or other opportunities arise in the future.
4. That the Council set aside a sum of £250,000 to undertake work which was previously not scoped into the Phase Two development and in particular:
  - a. Kitchen improvements;
  - b. Security works;
  - c. Insulation of Wi-Fi and hearing loop systems in the historic rooms;
  - d. New carpeting;
  - e. Removal of access ramp to the rear of the building, subject to satisfactory agreement of disabled access and fire strategy.
5. That all necessary architectural, engineering and costing work be funded from the budget set aside at (3) above.

**Resolved:**

6. That a working group of four Members be appointed to consider the detail of this work and to bring back proposals through the Guildhall Committee. That authority be delegated to this Group to incur expenditure in relation to paragraph (4) above. That these Members be appointed as follows: Councillors Michael Badcock, Neil Fawcett, Dennis Garrett and Jan Morter.

It was proposed by Cllr Neil Fawcett, seconded by Cllr Dennis Garrett and **recommended** to the Finance and General Purposes Committee for onward consideration by the Town Council:

7. That authority be delegated the Leader and the Deputy Leader to make urgent contact with the Leader of the Vale of White Horse DC to update

him on the Council's plans and suggestions for provision of dedicated cinema at another site within the town.

G13 **Guildhall Working Groups**

The Committee discussed setting up a working group with its terms of reference being to take forward the recommendations as detailed in the confidential appendix.

**Resolved:** that a working group be established, consisting of Cllr Dennis Garrett, Cllr Mike Badcock, Cllr Jan Morter and Cllr Neil Fawcett.

The meeting rose at 8:43pm.