

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council

**Minutes of the Guildhall Committee held on
Thursday 14th September 2017 at 8.00pm
in the Roysse Room, the Guildhall, Abingdon-on-Thames**

Present:

Cllr Dennis Garrett	Chairman
Cllr Mike Badcock	Vice-Chairman
Cllr Samantha Bowring	
Cllr Margaret Crick	
Cllr Neil Fawcett	
Cllr Robert Hall	
Cllr Brian Hedley	
Cllr Jan Morter	Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames (ex-officio)

In Attendance

Cllr Vicky Jenkins	
Cllr Jeanette Halliday	
Mr Jonathan Longden	Leys Longden
Mr Nigel Warner	Town Clerk
Mrs Jo Blackmore	Administrative Assistant (Clerk to the meeting)
2 Members of the public	

G15 **Apologies**

None.

G16 **Declarations of interest**

None.

G17 **Minutes**

Members received and considered the minutes of the meeting of the Guildhall Committee of 18th May 2017.

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting of the Guildhall Committee of 18th May 2017 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

G18 **Matters arising**

None.

G19 **Public participation**

Public statement: Mrs Hester Hand from "Friends of Abingdon."

Mrs Hand wanted it recorded that the local townspeople and visitors that the Friends of Abingdon have spoken with disagree with the Council's statement that 'people are happy' with the proposed changes to the Guildhall. The Friends of Abingdon's feelings are:

- 1 The removal of the old staircase is vandalism.
- 2 There are inadequate details on the plans so how can the council say they are affordable.
- 3 The plans provide no town centre meeting place whereas the originally the Council had promised it was going to be the town's village hall.

Mrs Hand also stated that the Friends of Abingdon wished to be consulted regarding all proposals.

G20 **Finance Report**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Treasurer/ RFO in relation to the above.

Resolved: that the report of the Treasurer/ RFO be approved.

G21 **Guildhall Development Project**

Members received and considered the Report of the Town Clerk and the notes of the Guildhall Development Working Group meetings of 11th July 2017, 1st August 2017 and 7th September 2017.

Tender for building works

The Town Clerk explained that as agreed a tender process had taken place in relation to 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 also received a tender report from Leys Longden, Chartered Surveyors.

The detailed results of the tender process were considered by the Guildhall Development Working Group at its meeting of 7th September 2017. The Group had made a recommendation that the Council accept one of the tenders and

proceed with the work this autumn. This would be further considered under confidential session due to commercial sensitivity of the business.

Letter from Vale Disability Access Group

Members received the letter from the Vale Disability Access Group, dated 31st August 2017. This letter detailed their “wholehearted support” for the Council’s plans to install a lift at the Guildhall. They stated that the proposal was “very inclusive, ensuring that users do not feel excluded, isolated, inferior or vulnerable.” They understood Historic England’s desire to keep the 18th Century staircase but expressed their serious concerns regarding its safety for those with mobility issues. The Disability Access Group also considered that the alternative proposals from Historic England “would prove more costly and not ensure the same equality of access to the whole building.”

Guildhall Project Update

Members received and considered the Guildhall (historic rooms) project update from the Town Clerk, which is attached to these minutes. Members commented as follows:

2. Installation of lift and rebuilding of staircase

- A Member wanted it noted that not all the Councillors were in support of installing a lift and remodelling the old staircase and enquired why the plans were not going to Full Council. They were reminded by the Chairman that Full Council had delegated this matter to the Guildhall Committee and that any Councillors who wanted to ask questions were welcome to attend the Guildhall Committee meetings.
- A Member suggested that as Historic England and Friends of Abingdon were against the lift an independent report should be obtained. A Member reminded the Committee of the Council resolution to treat all people equally including with regard to disability. This meant improving access to the Guildhall.

6. Wi-Fi and hearing loop system

Concern was raised over proposals for a mobile loop system and whether such a system would be robust enough.

8. Replacement heater controls – These must have control ability.

Abbey Hall and 1966 side of building

The Town Clerk reported that the Council resolution of January 2017 stated

That the Town Clerk be instructed to advise the County and District Councils that this Council would wish to explore the potential for alternative community uses on the land occupied by the modern part of the Guildhall (the Abbey Hall) and would wish to be part of the County Council’s Place Review which is due to take place early in 2017.

Consequently the Abbey Hall was now substantively a corporate property matter rather than a Guildhall service matter.

It was proposed by Cllr Mike Badcock, seconded by Cllr Margaret Crick and **resolved** that this matter be referred to the Finance & General Purposes Committee for congoing consideration.

G22 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.

G24 Guildhall Development Project

The Committee received and considered the confidential appendix to the notes of the Guildhall Development Working Group together with the confidential report of the Town Clerk, in relation to the above.

The following points were made regarding the staircase and installation of a lift:

- An independent report could be sought regarding the staircase; were any organisations known that could perform this.
- Observations had previously been made that this staircase had been altered at various times in the past so was not the original.
- Couldn't a lift be installed without taking anything away?
- Safety concerns about the staircase and particularly that the current bannisters were too low to comply with modern regulations.
- Not all Councillors agreed with the alterations to the staircase for a lift of which some Members of the council had not been aware.
- The council made the decision that enabling access was more important than not altering an historic staircase. Interested parties in using the Guildhall would require full and proper access to all the rooms.
- Some sections of the town were insisting that the Abbey Hall should remain open as a meeting venue.
- The Full Council agreed a motion to treat everyone in the town equally and this meant that the Council should make the Guildhall fully accessible to all Abingdon townspeople.
- The Museum had been refurbished without a lift and that this was not satisfactory as the Museum was not fully accessible. This must not be allowed to happen at the Guildhall.
- A small section of the public were trying to dictate to the Council and it should be the democratically elected Council that makes the decision.

The Guildhall Working Group would consider matters further following discussions with the District Council.

Building works

Members received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk and the confidential appendix to the notes of the Guildhall Development Working Group meetings of 11th July, 1st August and 7th September 2017.

The report and the notes outlined the tender process which had taken place in the summer months in relation to 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 also received a tender report from Leys Longden, Chartered Surveyors.

It was **recommended to the Finance and General Purposes Committee**

- a. That the Council accept the report of Leys Longden in relation to the proposed building works and their recommendation that the tender as detailed in the confidential appendix be approved.*
- b. That the scope of building works be increased as follows:*
 - *Removal of the ramp running from the car park to the Abbey Hall;*
 - *Lighting of the outside of the Guildhall building and flagpoles in Roysse Court.*

Members were presented with a financial update in relation to the various projects which comprise the Guildhall Development Scheme. This would be further reviewed ahead for the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

Other Issues

The Chairman, Cllr Dennis Garrett, stated that there had been some very active lobbying against the Guildhall proposals from certain groups within the town. Concern was raised that the views of those less organised and less

eloquent towns' people must be taken into consideration and that those lobbying are not seen to represent the views of all towns' people.

The meeting rose at 9.10pm

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**Appendix to the minutes of the Guildhall Committee
of 14th September 2017**

Minute G21 – Guildhall Development Project - Project update

List of Guildhall-related (historic rooms) projects 14th September 2017

Project	Status/ update
<p>1. Link / toilet extension to the rear of the Guildhall (behind Roysse Room) to assist disabled access, provide toilet facilities and new muniment room.</p>	<p>Tenders received. To be considered by Guildhall Ctte 14th September 2017. This will then need to be referred to F and GP and the full Council for decision.</p> <p>Considering requirements for building closure when building works commence. Will depend on contractor and their requirements.</p> <p>Location of reception/ information centre– Surveyor of opinion that Roysse Room should be available when reception itself has to move – need to arrange phone line, computer etc. Roysse Room should be available for use for meetings during this period but will be periods of noise, disruption to services etc during working hours.</p> <p>Loss of all or part of car park during works.</p> <p>To complete spring 2018.</p> <p>Proposal to remove concrete ramp at back of modern building subject to fire risk assessment. Will increase usable area of site both during construction phase and afterwards.</p>
<p>2. Installation of lift and rebuilding of staircase.</p>	<p>Meeting held with Vale Disability Access Group – letter of support received from group and member.</p> <p>Meeting held with Friends of Abingdon – letter received 12.09.17. A number of other representations received objecting to proposals.</p> <p>Letter in Abingdon Herald June 17 objecting to proposal and suggesting that Council commission a</p>

	<p>panel of local architects, conservationists and interested parties such as local drama groups and film societies to consider these two buildings (Guildhall and Abbey Hall) as a whole.</p> <p>Plans for the lift were endorsed by Committee in May 2017 following consideration of Heritage England's pre-application advice. Further considered by Working Group in meetings in July, August and September 2017. Planning application to be submitted when Guildhall Development Working Group gives go ahead.</p> <p>Current plans to re-open November 2018 – in which case matter needs to be progressed soon.</p>
<p>3. Works to reception and access to Old Magistrates Court.</p>	<p>Tenders to be considered by Guildhall Cttee 14th September 2017. This will then need to be referred to F and GP and the full Council for decision.</p> <p>Smaller area for information centre - need for more efficient use of information centre area to enable access to the new corridor.</p> <p>Completion spring 2018.</p>
<p>4. Roysse Court Garden improvements.</p>	<p>Tenders received. To be considered by Guildhall Cttee 14th September 2017. This will then need to be referred to F and GP and the full Council for decision.</p> <p>Working Group has suggested allowing for external lighting of Guildhall (similar to Museum), projection facilities on to building and space for flagpoles.</p> <p>Completion spring 2018.</p>
<p>5. Improvements to commercial kitchen.</p>	<p>No 1 (above) includes taking space from west part of kitchen. Have met with commercial kitchen expert - requirement now to scope and cost project within estimate set aside.</p> <p>Access to kitchen and its location may be affected by modern building plans.</p> <p>If commercial kitchen is to re-open spring 2018 suggest only essential work to be commissioned (advice required) so that options are open for later when future of Abbey Hall known.</p>
<p>6. Provision of Wi-Fi throughout the building and a hearing loop system.</p>	<p>Quotation received in relation to Wi-Fi on historic side; scope requires extension to Old Magistrates Court.</p>

	<p>Working Party suggests mobile loop system rather than fixed. Suggest consult with Vale Access Disability Group regarding loop systems.</p> <p>Require both Wi-Fi and loops to be ready for re-opening.</p>
7. Some re-carpeting and other works.	Depends on 2 (above)
8. Replacement for controls in relation to heaters.	<p>Council's heating engineer's advice awaited.</p> <p>Required improvements for re-opening.</p> <p>More substantive improvements to heating system may be considered at a later date in conjunction with potential works to Abbey Hall.</p>
9. Furniture & Equipment.	<p>Furniture needs to be agreed and procured for Roysse Room.</p> <p>Additional furniture for Council Chamber in time for re-opening of respective rooms.</p> <p>Retain furniture in Abbey and Bear Rooms.</p> <p>Note desire to avoid continual moving of furniture around the building.</p>
10. Works to Old Magistrates Court including external and internal repairs & improvements; displays and environmental controls.	<p>Music Practice vacated at end of lease 31.08.17.</p> <p>Environmental monitoring ongoing.</p> <p>M and E inspection has taken place – report awaited.</p> <p>Other professional survey work to be commissioned now vacant possession obtained.</p> <p>Proposal to be developed in line with existing policy, to include capital proposals and funding and ongoing revenue case for referral back to Council.</p> <p>Take in to account any works on modern side and Oxfordshire County Council Museum resilience</p>

	service proposals which it is understood will come forward later in 2017.
11. Security improvements (inc. CCTV) and display cases throughout the Guildhall including Roysse Room cabinet.	<p>There is CCTV already in reception area – supplier to be asked to quote for its extension. Decision required re CCTV and its extent.</p> <p>Assumption to replace Roysse Room cabinet to modern security standards, using existing facing.</p> <p>Potential for secure cabinets in Council Chamber – consider as part of work at 10 (above)</p>
12. Roysse Room ceiling insulation	Part of tenders received (see above)
13. Provision of bar facilities and circulation area to east of Roysse Room	<p>Potential location for permanent bar and circulation area/ ante room for Roysse Room.</p> <p>Timing affected by need co-ordinate both in relation to this area with plans for modern side.</p>

Abbey Hall and modern (1966) part of building

Council resolution of January 2017 is as follows:

That the Town Clerk be instructed to advise the County and District Councils that this Council would wish to explore the potential for alternative community uses on the land occupied by the modern part of the Guildhall (the Abbey Hall) and would wish to be part of the County Council's Place Review which is due to take place early in 2017.

This is now substantively a corporate property matter rather than a Guildhall service matter. Therefore it is **recommended** that this matter now be referred to the Finance & General Purposes Committee for congoing consideration.

Nigel Warner
Town Clerk
14th September 2017.

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