

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council

Draft minutes of the Guildhall Committee held on Thursday 7th December 2017 at 7.00pm 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 Brian Hedley	

In Attendance:

Mr Nigel Warner	Town Clerk
Mr Jonathan Longden	Leys Longden
Two members of the public	

G25 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Robert Hall.

G26 Declarations of interest

None.

G27 Minutes

Members received and considered the minutes of the meeting of the Guildhall Committee of 14th September 2017, as circulated with the agenda.

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting of the Guildhall Committee of 14th September 2017 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

G28 Matters arising

Minute G19: Public Participation: A Member stated that he did not agree with the statement made by Mrs Hester Hand on behalf of the "Friends of Abingdon."

G29 **Public participation**

Questions were received from members of the public as follows.

The responses provided by the Chairman, Cllr Dennis Garrett, are stated in bold italics after each question.

Mrs Bobbie Nicholls

1. The Friends of Abingdon are pleased that the Guildhall Committee has appointed Asset Heritage Consulting to give an independent assessment of the provenance and significance of the historic staircase. We understand that they have submitted an initial report and have been commissioned to carry out a more detailed survey. However, we are disappointed that the initial report, which will be of great interest to many townspeople, is being treated as 'confidential' and has not been made available to the public.

- (i) Can the Committee confirm that no further work will be done or expenditure incurred on the staircase/lift proposal before Asset Heritage's full report has been made public?

I can confirm that no further expenditure will be incurred in relation to the staircase / lift proposal until the report from Asset Heritage Consultants, has been received by the Town Council, with the exception of expenditure to commission of the report in relation to the safety and suitability of the existing staircase which is likely to be undertaken at the same time.

- (ii) When is it expected that the report will be available?

It is anticipated that the report will be received early in the new year.

2. We note that the Council aims to reopen the historic rooms in July 2018, subject to a safety assessment of the staircase.

- (i) Please may we have assurances that the 'appropriate professional' appointed for the staircase risk assessment will be someone with specific expertise in access and risk issues for historic buildings.

The Council will appoint an appropriate professional, having due regard to the Council's requirements in relation to the building and the service to be delivered from it.

- (ii) Has the Council considered putting a handrail above the wood panelling on the wall of the first long flight of the staircase?

The Council will await the various reports which it has commissioned.

(iii) Will they keep open options for inclusive access via the 1960s foyer?

Access via the 1960s' foyer would not assist in providing inclusive access for the Guildhall.

3. Since the Guildhall Committee are not currently able to achieve their objective of fully inclusive access by July 2018, would they discuss with their Finance and General Purposes Committee colleagues the desirability of making the accessible rooms in the 1960s building available for public use until long-term solutions for both parts of the complex are found?

The detailed review of historic use of all Guildhall rooms which this Committee will now undertake if it approves the recommendation to reopen the historic rooms in the Guildhall in July 2018 will include information regarding Abbey Hall, which I have no doubt F&GP will take into account as part of its overall consideration.

Dr Jim Halliday

1. I notice on page 15 of tonight's agenda a project budget is reported and was pleased to see that the Town Council has been awarded "other grants" totalling £175,000. Please could the Chairman give further details of these grants - their source, what they have been awarded for, and the date by which the Council must claim/spend the grants.

The "other grants" referred to on page 15 of the agenda are part of the project budget and the Town Council has not stated that these grants have been awarded. The majority of the project expenditure is funded by the deferred grant awarded by the District Council, some 79% of the project estimates. However, the Council's professional advisor has also identified some potential additional sources of grant funding and these will be applied for at the appropriate time. I would confirm that these grants do not relate to the building work which is due to take place from January 2018.

Please can the Chairman confirm that a) the Council intends to use the Commercial Kitchen to service functions in the Roysse Room, Bear Room, Abbey Room, Council Chamber and the Mayor's Parlour, and b) that it is planned that this use will continue in all the scenarios envisaged for the future development of the Abbey Hall. Should the long-term use of the Commercial Kitchen not be certain, please could the Chairman outline how catering will be provided for the functions in the Roysse Room, Bear Room, Abbey Room, Council Chamber and the Mayor's Parlour in the future.

a) I confirm that the commercial kitchen works and redesign will allow it to service functions in the rooms mentioned in the question.

b) The Council is only commissioning essential work in relation to the commercial kitchen so that options are open for later when the future use of the Abbey Hall is known.

As you know, in accordance with the Council's resolutions in October 2017, we are working with partners including Oxfordshire County Council and the Vale of

White Horse District Council on the Guildhall complex of buildings. I anticipate that detailed proposals will come forward in due course but I confirm that part of this Council's brief for the work is that a commercial kitchen will need to continue to be provided in order to undertake catering for functions in the Roysse Room, Bear Room, Abbey Room, Council Chamber and the Mayor's Parlour in the future.

G30 Notes of the Guildhall Development Working Group and the report in relation to the Guildhall Development Project

The Committee received and considered the notes of the Guildhall Development Working Group of 10th November and 1st December 2017 together with the report of the Town Clerk, in relation to the above.

The Committee noted the update on the building works due to commence in January 2018 and the update in relation to other aspects of the Development Project.

It was reported that the Working Group had, in accordance with the delegation given to it, further considered the matter of the installation of a lift, the rebuilding of the staircase in the old building and the development of these plans. Asset and Heritage Consultancy of Wolfson College Oxford had undertaken a site visit in order to understand issues at first hand, to advise whether there would be a good case to be made for the removal of the staircase in terms of the impact this would have on the significance of the "special interest" of the listed building, and whether the harm arising could be sufficiently justified by the results and benefits. In accordance with their delegated powers, the Working Group had resolved as follows:

- (i) Having considered the report of the Town Clerk and the findings in relation to the historic staircase, to commission Asset Heritage Consultancy to prepare a further and more detailed report to describe and provide an analysis of the staircase, making reference to the peculiarities noted regarding its construction and alignment, and concluding with an assessment of its significance. The report also to make reference to the wider building where relevant in order to provide context, having reference to the work already undertaken by the Council in relation to this matter;
- (ii) Having taken advice from the Council's insurers and having due regard to concerns regarding the safety of the staircase resulting from its original design and construction, that a full risk assessment be undertaken by an appropriate professional to assess whether it is safe and fit for purpose as the main access for the historic Guildhall.

Resolved:

1. that the notes of the Guildhall Development Working Group of 10th November and 1st December 2017 together with the report of the Town Clerk be approved together with the recommendations contained therein;
2. that in addition to the Roysse Room, that the Abbey Room, the Bear Room and the Council Chamber be available for hire from 1st July 2018, subject to consideration of the risk assessment regarding the safety of the historic staircase and whether it is suitable to be used by the public to access these rooms. That in making this decision the Council make clear that its objective in relation to the Guildhall building and service remains full and proper access for the disabled and those who have difficulty with stairs and equal access to Council services for all. In this regard the Council regrets that, despite its intent and efforts, that at this stage it will only have partially achieved this objective.

G31 Finance Report & Estimates for 2018/19

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

A Member stated that the Council needed to consider the business plan for the Guildhall when it re-opens for lettings. The Chairman, Cllr Mike Badcock, stated that he is speaking with the officers regarding the detailed estimates, which would be provided for within the agreed budget.

Resolved that the report, including the management accounts for the year to date, be approved.

Recommended to the Finance and General Purposes Committee that a net revenue budget of £158,539 (the same as for 2017/18) be considered by the Finance and General Purposes Committee for inclusion in the Council's 2018/19 estimates.

G32 Exclusion of the public, including the press

The Chairman moved:

"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."

G33 Confidential Appendix

Members received and considered the confidential appendix to the minutes of the meeting of the Guildhall Committee of 14th September 2017.

G35 **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising from the confidential appendix to the minutes of the previous meeting which was not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

G36 **Guildhall Development Project**

The Committee received and considered the confidential appendix to the notes of the Guildhall Development Working Group of 10th November and 1st December 2017 together with the confidential report of the Town Clerk, in relation to the above.

It was noted, as reported in the report at minute G30, that the Guildhall Development Working Group had, in accordance with the delegation given to it, further considered the matter of the installation of a lift, the rebuilding of the staircase in the old building and the development of these plans. Asset Heritage Consultancy had produced an initial report and a further more detailed report was now being commissioned.

The Group had resolved that for now the advice being received should remain confidential on the basis that the information is intended for future publication and that to publish the initial findings of the consultant would be premature and potentially misleading. The report in relation to the staircase would come forward through the Working Group together with the report and risk assessment which would assess whether the staircase was safe and fit for purpose as the main access for the historic Guildhall.

Following full consideration the decision of the Working Group was **endorsed** by the Committee.

The Committee received a financial update for the Project, which complemented the update given at minute G30. The report was considered confidential on the basis that the disclosure of the details could adversely affect the financial position of the Council.

Resolved:

that the confidential appendix to the notes of the Guildhall Development Working Group of 10th November and 1st December 2017 together with the report of the Town Clerk be approved together with the recommendations contained therein

The meeting rose at 7.37 pm