

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council

Minutes of the Guildhall Committee held on Thursday 5th December 2019 at 7:00 pm In the Old Magistrates Court, Guildhall, Abingdon

Present

Cllr Margaret Crick	Chair
Cllr Grace Clifton	Vice-Chair
Cllr Cheryl Briggs	
Cllr Neil Fawcett	
Cllr Charlie Birks	Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames (ex-officio)
Cllr Samantha Bowring	Chair of Finance and General Purposes (ex-officio)

In Attendance

Mrs Jo Blackmore	Clerk to the Meeting
Cllr Jim Halliday	
Mr Jonathan Longden	Leys Longden and Co
Mr Steve Rich	Assistant Town Clerk / Head of Services
Mr Nigel Warner	Town Clerk
Mrs Susan Whipp	Treasurer / Responsible Financial Officer
Mr Ian Wiper	The Abbey Cinema
Mrs Sue Wiper	The Abbey Cinema

SECTION I (Open to the Public Including the Press)

G40 **Apologies for Absence**

None.

G41 **Declarations of Interest**

None.

[Cllr Neil Fawcett entered the meeting, the time being 7:07pm]

G42 **Minutes**

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the meeting of the Guildhall Committee held on 16th September 2019.

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting of the Guildhall Committee of 16th September 2019 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

G43 **Matters arising**

The committee considered minute G32 – The Guildhall and the Abbey Cinema - and were updated by officers on developments on these matters.

Regarding the muniment room, it was noted that a more detailed specification of the proposed humidifier and dehumidifier, and estimates of running costs, have been requested by officers. Cllr Jim Halliday requested a copy of the specifications and the committee agreed this would be passed onto him. It was noted that officers expect the necessary installations of the equipment and shelving to be completed in time for archives returning to the Council's premises after Easter 2020.

Regarding access, members considered the issues with the passenger lift. It was agreed that in the event that the lift is not being used then cinema staff be instructed to run the passenger lift weekly. The committee were updated on progress regarding the installation of a chair lift at the Abbey Hall stairs into the cinema, the order will be placed once structural loading calculations have been obtained. These calculations have been requested from a structural engineer but have not been forthcoming. Mr Longden was asked by the committee to contact an alternative surveyor in order to progress matters.

Regarding the drinking water fountain, this had been registered with the "Refill" app which allows members of the public to identify locations of free drinking water. Members will be further updated once the information has become "live" on the app.

G44 **Public participation**

None.

G45 **Financial report**

The committee received and considered the financial report of the Treasurer / Responsible Financial Officer.

It was **resolved** that the management accounts for the period 1st April 2019 to 30th September 2019 be approved.

Section 3 of the report included a table which showed the number of room bookings for the historic rooms since January 2019, and it was suggested by Cllr Jim Halliday that the table be extended in the next report to identify the number of bookings included which were by the Town Council. The committee

agreed this would be useful and the Treasurer agreed to do so in her next report.

The committee noted the full year projected net expenditure, as reported in section 4 of the report.

Members then considered the estimates for 2020-21. The Town Clerk drew members' attention to the confidential report at agenda item 11 as this contained recommendations which would require an increase to the budget for property matters in future years. *The committee agreed to enter the confidential section of the meeting and then return to consider the remaining open agenda items. The budget recommendation for 2020-21 was therefore as minuted below.*

Regarding the proposed budget for the Space for Change facility, it was noted that at one stage Members of the previous administration had stated that the day to day running costs of the facility would be borne by the District Council as part of their contract in relation to public toilets. However this assistance had not materialised. The Town Clerk was requested to contact the Vale of White Horse District Council to ascertain any agreement regarding the financial and day-to-day running of this facility.

[Cllr Samantha Bowring entered the meeting, the time being 7:27pm].

The committee considered the room hire charges for the lettings of the historic rooms.

It was **recommended** to Full Council that:

- (i) Room hire rates be increased by £1 per three-hour sessions (applied pro-rata) from 1st April 2020;
- (ii) A budget for 2020-21 of:

Expenditure	£297,879	
Income	£ 99,399	
Net expenditure	<u>£198,480</u>	be approved and included in the Full Council budget.

G46 **SECTION II Exclusion of the public, including the press**

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.

G47 **Guildhall Complex of buildings – property matters (part A)**

Members received and considered part A of the confidential report of the Town Clerk in relation to the repair, maintenance and improvement works to the Guildhall Complex of buildings, together with the reports from Ridge & Partners and Leys Longden and Co.

Introducing this item the Town Clerk made a number of points. There had been a major project of property repair, maintenance and improvements during 2018. However, this work was not a full refurbishment of the Abbey Hall and the Guildhall. Works to improve these properties would be part of a continual process as long as the Council owns the buildings. In relation to the Abbey Hall and the 1966 extension, works were undertaken during 2018, to make the building fit to be let as a cinema for a temporary two-year period. Whilst scope had been extended, especially in relation to emergency lighting and fire detection, little work had been done to the structure of the modern building and its internal repair and decoration beyond what was necessary for the two-year period of letting. Work was undertaken in relation to the old side of the building, the Guildhall, although much of this focused on the new extension with various other building works being done in relation to the existing rooms, some electrical works, roofing works, and redecoration. At the time it was made clear that there remained major works required to the building, including the Abbey Hall roof, heating systems and lighting throughout the building.

The Town Clerk concluded by stating that the point in relation to the longer-term future of the Abbey Hall was especially important. When the 2019-20 budget was set the Council was assuming, in line with Council policy and its engagement in the One Public Estate programme, that the Abbey Hall would be closing again in December 2020 and that there would be no further significant expenditure in relation to this part of the complex. The Abbey Hall and associated spaces accounted for approximately half of the floor area of the site. Following the emerging findings of the One Public Estate project, which suggested that the Abbey Hall was not suitable for a community hub and recommended for its disposal for residential use the Council (June 2019) took the decision to withdraw the property from that review and in September 2019 resolved that the Abbey Hall should continue to be used as a cinema. The Town Council now had to set out and fund a programme to maintain and improve the buildings over the next 10 years.

Mr Jonathan Longden drew member's attention to particular items contained within his report which require some works to bring them up to date. These included improved disabled access and levels of heat insulation especially in relation to the 1960s extension. Members also discussed the potential for replacing the existing heating system with a more environmentally sound scheme. The lighting in the building was dated and new LED systems would be more efficient and effective. There was a need to undertake repairs to the

external stonework. Whilst the heating system was gas-based and dated, it was well-maintained it was agreed in principle that the Council's funds in the shorter term would be best used to ensure the existing boilers continue to work and it was suggested that improving the roofs, especially the roof on the Abbey Hall which was nearing the end of its life, and insulation would result in bigger benefits. The Council should "spend to save." Members noted suggestions to install solar panels and consider air source and ground source heat pumps (using the River Stort as a possible source) and agreed these could be considered in the longer-term. Mr Longden also stated that following electrical inspections and works in 2018, it was likely that following the next periodic inspection in 2023, further works would be required. Cllr Charlie Birks requested that full electrical, mechanical and other services drawings were provided for across the whole site.

Mr Steve Rich (Assistant Town Clerk / Head of Services) suggested to the committee that the size of the Council's estate and the work involved was such that the Council should consider appointing an officer to manage all Town Council properties.

The committee considered the need for a working group to consider and make recommendations on the programme of on-going works.

It was proposed by Cllr Samantha Bowring, seconded by Cllr Neil Fawcett and **resolved** that:

- (i) The Confidential report of the Town Clerk should be approved in relation to the Guildhall Complex of buildings – property matters together with the reports from Ridge & Partners and Leys Longden be approved
- (ii) A Working Group be established, consisting of Cllrs Charlie Birks, Samantha Bowring, Margaret Crick, Neil Fawcett and Jim Halliday to consider a ten-year repair, maintenance and improvement plan in relation to the Guildhall complex of buildings.

It was **recommended** that a sum of £200,000 be allocated in the budget each year from 2020-21 to 2024-25, funded as follows:

1. Pooled property fund £60,000
2. Drawing from the existing property maintenance budgets within cost centres 350 and 360 £40,000
3. Additional budget bid £100,000 (this is included in the recommendation at minute G45).

The committee then returned to the open session of the meeting.

SECTION III (Open to the Public Including the Press)

G48 Guildhall and Cinema services – operation and management

Mr Ian Wiper and Mrs Sue Wiper of The Abbey Cinema entered the meeting, the time being 8:40pm.

Mr Ian Wiper gave a verbal update on recent activities at the Guildhall. Mr Wiper reminded members that the running of the historic rooms had been outsourced for several months now and he requested further guidance from the Council on the future aspirations for these rooms.

The committee then considered the current room hire rates charged to the community, noting Mr Wiper's comments that these rates do not cover the cost of servicing these rooms. Members were reminded that the community rates were set by the Council with the expectation that these would be subsidised by higher rates charged to commercial organisations / larger events, and therefore it was never expected that the community rates would cover all the costs.

Mr Wiper reported that the first full year for weddings was not expected until 2021 and now that the AV equipment has been installed this should increase the number of conferences. Mr Wiper also informed members that there are discussions with Cosener's House, Abbey Buildings and The Crown & Thistle Public House to build on links to work together for mutual benefit.

Mr Wiper then explained to members that the longer-term arrangements for the cinema would have an impact on the continued outsourcing to The Abbey Cinema of the running of the historic rooms and requested that these longer-term decisions be made as soon as is practicable.

[Mr Steve Rich left the meeting, the time being 9:17pm].

The committee then listened to suggestions from Mr Wiper on potential additions to the equipment available to room users. These included a semi-permanent bar / drinks counter in The Roysse Room foyer area, and a screen and projector in The Old Magistrates' Court.

The committee thanked Mr and Mrs Wiper for attending the meeting.

[Mr Ian Wiper and Mrs Sue Wiper left the meeting, the time being 9:24pm].

The committee then returned to the confidential section of the meeting.

SECTION IV Exclusion of the public, including the press

G49 Guildhall Complex of buildings – property matters (part B)

Members received and considered part B of the confidential report of the Town Clerk in relation to the cinema.

It was **resolved** that the report of the Town Clerk, and recommendations contained therein, be approved.

See the Confidential Appendix to these minutes.

G50 Management and Operation of Guildhall

The committee received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk.

It was **resolved** that the report of the Town Clerk, and recommendations contained therein, be approved.

See the Confidential Appendix to these minutes.

SECTION V (Open to the Public Including the Press)

G51 Environmental implications

The committee considered the environmental implications in relation to items on the agenda.

No issues were raised concerning environmental implications which had not already been considered elsewhere on the agenda.

G52 Publicity

The committee considered items of publicity in relation to the Guildhall.

No other issues apart from the Drinking Water Fountain app already mentioned under G43 of the minutes were raised concerning publicity in relation to items on the agenda.

G53 Dates of meetings

The committee noted the date of the remaining scheduled committee meeting for the 2019/20 municipal year, Thursday 12th March 2020.

The meeting rose at 10:30 pm.