

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council

Minutes of the Guildhall Committee held on Monday 16th September 2019 at 7:00 pm In the Old Magistrates Court, Guildhall, Abingdon

Present:

Cllr Margaret Crick	Chair
Cllr Grace Clifton	Vice Chair
Cllr Charlie Birks	Ex-officio - Mayor
Cllr Samantha Bowring	Ex-officio – Chair F&GP Committee, Leader

In Attendance

Mrs Jo Blackmore	Clerk to the Meeting
Cllr Jim Halliday	
Mr Nigel Warner	Town Clerk
Mr Ian Wiper	The Abbey Cinema
Mrs Sue Wiper	The Abbey Cinema

G26 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Cllrs Cheryl Briggs and Neil Fawcett.

G27 **Declarations of Interest**

None.

G28 **Minutes**

Members received and considered the minutes of the meeting of the Guildhall Committee of 19th August 2019.

Resolved: that the minutes of the meeting of the Guildhall Committee of 19th August 2019 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

G29 **Matters arising**

None.

G30 **Public participation**

None.

G31 **Financial report**

Members received and considered the financial report of the Treasurer and Responsible Financial Officer.

Resolved: that the financial report of the Treasurer and Responsible Financial Officer be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

G32 **The Guildhall and the Abbey Cinema**

Ian and Sue Wiper entered the meeting at this point, it being 7:20pm.

The Chair, Cllr Margaret Crick, introduced Sue and Ian Wiper of the Regal Cinema, Evesham. It was noted that the Regal leased the Abbey Hall from the Council for the operation of the Abbey Cinema and also managed and operated the Guildhall on behalf of the Council.

Mr and Mrs Wiper made a presentation and updated the Committee regarding the management of the Guildhall. The presentation included a report relating to Guildhall bookings, their forecast for 2020/21, a report on the Downton Abbey premiere and fundraiser, details of the open weekend 21st to 22nd September 2019. They detailed outstanding issues which included audiovisual facilities, use of the Old Magistrates Court and accessibility proposals, including a lift in the Foyer area. They also requested that the Council consider installing a bar facility in the Roysse Room Foyer.

These matters were discussed with the Committee.

The Chair, Cllr Margaret Crick, thanked Mr and Mrs Wiper for their presentation.

G33 **Guildhall Complex of buildings – property matters**

Members considered the report of the Town Clerk in relation to property matters, as circulated with the agenda.

Access and passenger lift

Mr and Mrs Wiper were requested to remain in the meeting and participate in an advisory capacity due to their roles in the Guildhall; they did not participate in making the decisions in relation to this matter.

As reported at the previous meeting the passenger lift to the Abbey Hall was out of commission from mid-August 2019 until early September. This followed a breakdown of the lift which the cinema reported to be the only one since opening in December 2018.

There had now been a further technical inspection of the lift with additional training for staff in relation to passenger release. The view of the lift company was that although the lift is dated, it is in good working order. However ideally the door mechanism needed replacing, as opening the doors had been the problem when the lift had broken down in August. There was a substantial cost to this, detailed in the confidential report.

The Committee considered the possible ways forward.

There were works which had been suggested in relation to the current lift. These included replacement of the doors and the door mechanism so it could be more easily opened in an emergency. The lack of an autodialler was also highlighted although it was understood that this was not required as the lift was an existing installation and the cinema considered that their procedures were such that the facility was not required. Mr Wiper stated that staff were aware of who was using the lift at all times and it was always checked after the films ended. Finally the Committee considered modifying the lift so that it could be used in a fire, as detailed in the confidential report.

In terms of the frequency of use of the current passenger lift Mr Wiper stated that this varied but it was used regularly and this usage increasing with more people attending with mobility issues particularly due to specialist screenings such as dementia friendly shows.

In moving towards equal access and longer-term, the Committee considered that the best option would be to look at access options within or at the front of the building. One potential solution, proposed by Ieys Longden Chartered Surveyors, had been considered at the meeting in May 2019 although the Leader, Cllr Samantha Bowring, reminded Members that at the subsequent Finance and General Purposes Committee Members decided that “this should not be high priority in the immediate future.”

Mr Wiper had an alternative proposal that a new lift should be installed outside the entrance to the cinema and the entrance area extended. The lift would serve the Abbey Hall/ cinema and bar area. Access to the Abbey Room would be achieved by extending the “pigeon alley corridor” through the current cupboard and into the bar. This meant that there are only a few steps required to reach the Council Chamber. Mr Wiper felt that money would be better put towards this rather than works to the existing passenger lift and that customers would be happy with the current situation knowing that we were working towards a good long term solution. Mr Wiper felt that the cost of this new lift would be less than £100,000. Members were informed that any new lift would meet all current regulations and that it being designated as an evacuation lift would also be considered.

The Committee considered re-instating the platform/ chairlift from the Abbey Hall reception to the Abbey Hall, which had been decommissioned approximately six years ago. A quote had been received and was detailed the confidential report. The advantages and disadvantages of a platform/ chairlift were discussed. In terms of the disadvantages it could be considered inelegant/ undignified for the users. It would reduce the width of the stairs from the lobby to the hall and adversely affect the look of that area. However it was reported that when cinema staff spoke to users some were not always keen in using the current lift, which meant having to go around the back of the building via a shared access road. Entering the building from the back was not a good customer experience. The proposed platform/ chairlift would mean users coming in through the same entrance. It was reported that when the platform/ chairlift was in operation it was usually the preferred lift for users over the passenger lift at the back. Installation of this proposed lift would mean that there were two ways to access the Abbey Hall via a lift.

Members considered that a platform/ chairlift should be installed between the Abbey Hall entrance foyer and the Abbey Hall/ cinema, pending a more comprehensive solution to the access issues affecting the building.

Members felt that advice on options for improved access should be sought so that options were available for consideration by 31st March 2020. Any decision on access would have to be considered alongside the priorities which are set following receipt of condition maintenance surveys later in the year.

Resolved:

1. That further quotes be obtained by the Town Clerk in relation to the installation of a platform/ chair lift and that authority be delegated to the Town Clerk to procure the lift from the Abbey Hall property/ maintenance budget, the estimate as set out in the confidential report of the Town Clerk.
2. The Council seek further professional advice with a view to examining the options and feasibility to obtain improved physical access to the Abbey Hall/ cinema and the Guildhall. Authority to commission the appropriate advice to be delegated to the Town Clerk from the property/ maintenance budget for the Abbey Hall/ cinema and the Guildhall.

Mr and Mrs Wiper left the meeting at this point.

Water fountain

It was retorted that the previously plans for the Water Fountain in Roysse Court have previously been approved but unfortunately there had been a significant delay by OG Stonemasonry of Oxford in relation to the stone materials. However work to install the Water Fountain would commence week commencing Monday 30th September and will take approximately three weeks.

It was **resolved** to register the water fountain on the “Refill App.” following the installation of the water fountain.

Audio-visual equipment

It was reported that the Council had obtained three separate quotes in relation to the above. However matters have taken longer than originally anticipated, due in part to the need to seek clarification on some items within the quotes. As one of the original companies who quoted had pulled out, the Abbey Cinema had requested an additional fourth quote, which had now been received.

The quotes needed to be analysed and it was noted that authority was delegated to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Guildhall Committee and the Mayor to select the equipment supplier and place the order. The intention was the equipment be installed by the end of October 2019.

Condition and maintenance surveys

It was previously reported that whilst the Council had undertaken significant works, these have been limited and there is now a need to inspect the whole of the buildings, both internally and externally, setting out the principal issues and producing a costed plan and maintenance report. This will identify the priorities for ongoing development, maintenance and repair and assist with budgeting for future years. These reports were anticipated mid-October 2019.

A member stated that there were a number of minor building related works which potentially would be resolved by the works team during the winter months.

Resolved: Cllr Charlie Birks to meet with the works team supervisor to identify works which could be dealt with in-house and then these works be undertaken, prioritized according to urgency, by 31st March 2020.

Muniment Room

It was reported that the muniment room had been built and had been in the process of “drying out.” Earlier in 2019 humidity in the room was running at 80%. Dehumidifiers were used for a number of months to bring this figure down and at points the humidity dropped below 50%. However the past few months the dehumidifiers have not been used. The latest humidity readings from the room are relatively stable at 69%, which is too high; humidity would be between 55 and 60%.

Temperatures had been satisfactory.

It was originally hoped that the muniment room might not require environmental control by way of a dehumidifier. This was not due to the cost of such equipment but a desire to avoid unnecessary electrical services.

However following environmental monitoring of the room which commenced earlier this year, Mark Stevens (Berkshire County Archivist), Jackie Smith (Abingdon Archivist) and the Town Clerk had agreed that environmental control and a dehumidifier is required. The combined humidifier and dehumidifier which has been identified by Mark Stevens as appropriate is a Hanwell CCR30, see attached. Mr Stevens has advised that his view is that unless we need to get quotes, he would chose that particular item, the cost of which was likely to be less than £5,000. The Town Clerk reported that the Council's Financial Regulations did not require quotes to be obtained for expenditure of less than £5,000, although they can be and sometimes are.

It was **resolved**, that subject to the details outlined in the Confidential Report of the Town Clerk and obtaining a third quote, (i) that authority be delegated to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Guildhall Committee, the Berkshire County Archivist and the Abingdon Town Archivist, to accept a quote and procure work in relation to the fit out of shelving and map chest in the Muniment Room and (ii) that authority be delegated as in (i) above, to accept a quote which is not the lowest quote if this is the one which is preferred on grounds of design or quality.

The council aimed to move the archives into the Muniment Room in the first quarter.

Resolved:

1. Additional budget of £3000 towards the Muniment Room fit out, to be funded from the pooled property fund.
2. Installation of the combined humidifier and dehumidifier as detailed in the Report of the Town Clerk, subject to when choosing equipment running costs and energy efficiency over a number of years to be considered.
3. Mechanism for the installation of the shelving and map chest, as detailed in the Town Clerks confidential report and appendix.

7 Treasures cabinet

The council treasures are now displayed at the Museum than it was previously possible to display within the cabinet in the Roysse Room and so the Town Clerk envisages that some of these would remain in the Museum. Members felt that it was a good idea to split the collection freeing up space in the Museum for temporary exhibitions and that the Museum is not accessible to everyone. Civic town items such as the Mace being displayed in the Roysse Room, with

an improved display and item descriptions also possible rotation of items between the two sites.

It was noted that the Assistant Town Clerk Steve Rich, the Council's Collections Officer Elin Bornemann and the archivist Jackie Smith, to work on matters and bring forward proposals.

It was **resolved** to recommend to the Finance and General Purposes Committee that the council proceed with the replacement of the treasures cabinet in the Roysse Room and that this be funded from the earmarked reserves in relation to civic treasures (£20,866) and the property improvement budget (17,784).

It was **resolved** that an initial scoping meeting be called to consider what final approval they would wish to give in terms of design and commissioning of work. Cllr. Margaret Crick, Cllr. Grace Clifton, Cllr. Charlie Birks and Cllr. Jim Halliday requested attendance at this meeting.

8 Car Park

After discussions it was **resolved** that Bicycle parking, bins store and any emergency car park patching which becomes necessary between now and the end of the financial year – to be accommodated within a budget of £10,000.

G34 Environmental implications

Check external Abbey Hall flood lights are on daylight sensors.

G35 Publicity

Members requested the following were included in council publicity;

1. The drinking fountain when installed.
2. Bicycle storage when installed.
3. Building usage figures subject to agreement by Mr and Mrs Wiper.

G36 Dates of meetings

The calendar of meetings for the remainder of the Council year, was noted as follows:

- Thursday 5th December, in the Old Magistrates' Court;
- Thursday 5th March 2020, in the Old Magistrates' Court.

G37 Exclusion of the public, including the press

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.

G38 Confidential appendix to the minutes of the Guildhall Committee

Members received and considered the confidential appendix to the minutes of the Guildhall Committee of 19th August 2019.

G39 Guildhall Complex of buildings – property matters

Members received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk in relation to the Guildhall Complex of buildings – property matters.

Resolved: that the confidential report of the Town Clerk in relation to the Guildhall Complex of buildings – property matters be agreed as a correct record.

Lightning protection

It was **resolved**;

1. That the risk assessment and design for the lightning protection works in relation to the Guildhall, be approved.
2. To obtain from Vector Design an explanation of what the likely effects of a lightning strike on the building are.
3. That three quotes are obtained for lightning protection works and that authority to approve the tender list be delegated to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chairs of the Finance and General Purposes and the Guildhall Committees;
4. That tenders be obtained for the Council by Leys Longden Surveyors and the matter then reviewed by this Committee.

Part B: Future of the Abbey Hall and lease extension application

The recommendation is detailed under the confidential appendix to the Finance and General Purpose Committee of 18th September 2019.

The meeting rose at 9.20 pm.