

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council

Draft Notes of the Guildhall Working Group of Friday 1st December 2017 which took place at 2.30pm in the Meeting Room, Roysse Court, Abingdon-on-Thames.

Present:

Cllr Dennis Garrett	Chairman
Cllr Mike Badcock	Vice-Chairman
Cllr Margaret Crick	
Cllr Neil Fawcett	
Cllr Jan Morter	Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames (ex-officio)

In attendance:

Mrs Jo Blackmore	Administrator
Mr Jonathan Longden	Leys Longden
Mr Nigel Warner	Town Clerk

1 **Apologies**

There were no apologies for absence.

2 **Notes of the meeting of 7th September 2017**

The Open and Confidential notes of the meeting were agreed as a correct record. There were no matters arising.

3 **Guildhall Development Project**

1. **Staircase**

The Working Group received and considered the confidential report of the Town Clerk in relation to the above and 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 an initial site visit and inspection of the historic staircase and issued an initial report on whether there is 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.

Following full consideration of the matter and in accordance with their delegated powers, the Working Group **resolved**:

- (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.

The Working Group considered that, due to the planning and listed building processes which the Council would have to comply with in order to achieve its stated objectives of full and proper access to the Guildhall and equal access to Council services for all, that the proposals in relation to the staircase will likely take some time to resolve. Members considered that it was important to make the historic rooms of the Guildhall available for hire when the current building works are complete and consequently **recommended to the Guildhall Committee**:

That the 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.

The Working Group **resolved** that for now the advice being received should remain confidential. However the resolutions of the Group and the recommendations would be noted in the open papers.

2. **Building Works**

It is anticipated that works on site will commence on 8th January 2018 and that completion will be achieved by 15th June 2018 in order to enable hirings of the Roysse Room to be taken from 1st July 2018. The building works were to provide a link /toilet extension to the rear of the Guildhall to facilitate disabled access, provide toilet facilities and new muniment room; works to reception and

access to the Old Magistrates' Court; and Roysse Court Garden improvements. It was anticipated that work will commence with the removal of the concrete ramp at the back of the modern building. The construction of the link / toilet extension to the rear of the Guildhall would also start at this time and this is likely to be ongoing through the contract period.

In response to a query, Mr Longden stated that he expected the Roysse Room to be available throughout the works but did not consider that the completion date could be brought forward.

The plan is to start taking bookings in March/April for the July opening. All rooms except the Roysse Room being dependant on the safety review of the staircase. Fees and charges to be considered in the New Year.

3. Lighting of historic building

Mr Longden outlined the options for lighting. He felt that a central bank of lights would be vulnerable to vandalism and would in danger of dazzling those using the pathways and the building. Protruding lights could be a trip hazard so he recommended pavement lights, similar to those installed at the County Hall Museum in 2012, with the object of lighting the building not the gardens. The Working Group **resolved** to accept his recommendation.

There were currently no plans to have a facility to enable projection of images onto the building.

4. Roysse Court gardens

It was anticipated that the Roysse Court Garden improvements, including the replacement of the paving, will take place from approximately 1st March 2018. If these works commence on that date it is estimated that, with a ten-week construction period, completion would take place by Friday 11th May 2018.

The area of circular paving in the plans was queried, it being the area where the old fountain was. The Working Group considered this and felt this was now unnecessary to have this area. It was **resolved** that the paving should go continue straight across the front of the building with a half-circle into the lawn where the current circle of paving was. The hexagonal planter, which was showing signs of age, would be removed. This part of the gardens could then accommodate some additional seating, it was noted that this area was increasingly popular for people to sit in.

It was suggested that further soft landscaping could be considered by the outside team.

5. Heating

It was **resolved** to undertake further work and to commission a survey of the existing heating system to better understand the relationship between the heating of the old and new parts of the building and to ascertain how best to improve the control of the system so that the heating may be more effectively controlled in the individual rooms. The engineer's advice would then be considered in January 2018 to allow for works to take place by 1st July 2018.

6. Project Updates

Commercial kitchen: proposals from commercial kitchen expert in relation to the scope and cost of the project will be considered in January 2018 to allow for works to take place in time for 1st July 2018.

Wi-Fi: This should be within budget.

Security improvements. Quote received for separate system for historic Guildhall (recommended rather than adding on to existing system in reception/information centre). ADT have also surveyed Old Magistrates Court and this quote is awaited.

Bar. Mobile bars to be provided for functions similar to those previously operated in Roysse Room. Note the Guildhall bars previously operated as "bottle bars."

7. Financial budget update

The latest financial projections for the Project, with savings resulting from the deletion from the project of the removal of modern internal staircase and of flagpole. As building work had yet to commence this saving had been prudentially transferred to the contingency, therefore not affecting the bottom line. As a number of the lines were estimates the update was considered confidential for reasons of commercial sensitivity.

8. Future Meetings

It was noted that when works commence on site there would be the necessity for the Council to make quick decisions on matters which were brought forward by the surveyor. Therefore it was agreed that from January 2018 a meeting would be scheduled for every Friday afternoon (2.30pm) which would be confirmed or cancelled on the Wednesday before depending on requirements of the building work.

The meeting rose at 3.30pm