

Draft Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Tuesday 9th May 2017 in the Roysse Room, Guildhall, Abingdon-on-Thames.

Present

Cllr Alice Badcock

Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames and Chairman of the Annual Parish Meeting

30 residents of the Parish including Town Councillors and officers. One member of the press.

1 General Introduction.

The Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames, Councillor Alice Badcock, welcomed all those present to the Annual Parish Meeting. She highlighted that under statute the Parish Meeting was a meeting of the electors of Abingdon organised by the Council each year but was not a Council meeting. Whilst not a legal requirement, it gave the Council the opportunity to inform the public of its work and the progress being made, with the Chairmen of the main committees presenting reports.

The Mayor further outlined the council's services and how the Council worked and made decisions, including its working in partnership with other organisations.

2 Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of 9th March 2016

It was proposed by Cllr Mike Badcock and seconded by Cllr Sandy Lovatt that the Meeting receive and consider the draft minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 9th March 2016.

Matters Arising

It was reported that the new town signs had been installed.

In relation to Children's Centres, Cllr Mike Badcock reported that the Town Council had put a sum of £90,000 in its budget to be allocated towards Children's Centres over the next three years (i.e. £30,000 per annum.) He stated that although he had been told that the need for this was urgent, it had not as yet been applied for.

Resolved: that the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of 9th March 2016 be as a correct record.

3 Reports by Committee Chairmen

The Mayor introduced the Chairman of each committee, who then proceeded to give their report to the meeting.

Members of the public had the opportunity to ask questions of the various Chairmen and were given answers at the meeting.

(a) Amenities & Recreation Committee

The Chairman, Cllr Sandy Lovatt, gave his report to the meeting.

In his report he mentioned the following matters:

- Masefield Crescent;
- Improvement to drainage in Chilton Close;
- The Abingdon-on-Thames town entry signs had been installed;
- The Council was responsible for two cemeteries but there was a requirement for a new cemetery in the future. The Council had requested that the Vale of White Horse District Council set aside a site of the size of 13 acres as part of the Local Plan Part 2;
- The town was continuing with its Abingdon in Bloom initiative. The Town's flowers received many compliments and they looked resplendent;
- Bus shelters. The Council had installed three new bus shelters including at Morland Gardens and Marcham Road;
- The Town Council was responsible for administering the Abingdon Fisheries and Tim Badcock acted as Water Keeper;
- The Town Council was responsible for the Christmas Lights and received lots of compliments;
- The Council has responsibility for a large number of trees in the town and undertakes a professional tree survey every four years. It is currently working through necessary work so that urgent matters are attended to.

A resident asked how she would be able to dedicate a tree in the cemetery. She was advised to contact Mr Steve Rich, Assistant Town Clerk / Head of Services.

A resident asked whether or not brown tourist signs were likely to be introduced to signpost Abingdon from the A34. Cllr Mike Badcock, the Leader of the Council, said that this was a matter for the Highways Agency and whilst many efforts had been made over the years, it was clear that they were reluctant to give permission.

A resident commented that the electronic information given on the bus shelters was erratic. Cllr Robert Hall, the Council's Transport Representative, offered to take this up with the County Council.

A resident stated that panes of glass in the bus shelters at Daisy Bank required replacement.

A resident wondered what the position was in relation to mooring rights and whether action was being taken to move on individuals who were mooring longer than they were supposed to. Cllr Mike Badcock stated that this matter was being dealt with by the District Council who were due to be issuing new regulations which were capable of being enforced. These regulations would include a maximum mooring period for visitors of three days. It was also noted that mooring was not permitted along the north bank of the Thames along the Wharf (by the Anchor Public House) but this was a separate issue.

(b) Community Services Committee

The Chairman of the Committee, Cllr Andrew Todd, gave his report to the meeting.

In his report Cllr Todd mentioned the following:

- Updates and improvements had been made to the website. The Committee would be amenable to any sensible suggestions for further improvements.
- The Committee deals with tourism related matters.
- The Committee is responsible for the administration of the Market Place. Bookings for events on the Market Place are largely organised by the officers of the Council. The Committee encouraged events on the Market Place as they were good for footfall.
- The Committee administered the Council's Community Grant System. These were well advertised and there was an increase in demand on the funds available from the Town Council. He noted that grants from the County and District Councils had reduced over the years. He stated that a wide variety of groups had benefitted from the Council's grants scheme this Council year, including the Abingdon Eagles Basketball Club, Carbon Cutters, Age UK, local Cadet Forces and the Abingdon Street Pastors. The Council was currently looking at its criteria in relation to awarding of grants but as a general rule grants were given for capital / project expenditure rather than running costs (such as electricity bills).
- Fun and Music in the Park. These annual events are organised on the first Saturday in June each year and the Council aims to break even on the events. They have in the past benefitted from grant funding but these funding sources were diminishing. Both events are very popular and the plan is to continue to organise them.
- The Committee's budget was £51,000 for 2017/18, a reduction from the £55,000 the previous year.
- A resident asked whether or not the Town Crier was continuing to be published. Cllr Todd stated that the Town Crier had been an expensive publication and demanding of officer time. Although a sum had been placed in the budget to allow for the publication of a Town Crier during the year there were currently no plans to do so although the matter would be reviewed, for instance, the potential to share the publication with another group. Cllr Todd also stated that the Council's website was full of information.

(c) Guildhall Committee

The Chairman of the Committee, Cllr Dennis Garrett, gave his report to the meeting.

Cllr Garrett stated that the Committee had to make some difficult decisions during the year. The Committee worked hard and all decisions had been fully supported by councillors. In taking matters forward there had been two main objectives:

- i. That the Guildhall should in future be used by as wide a range of groups in the community as possible;
- ii. That the cost of running the Guildhall should be reasonable to the council tax payer.

These objectives had been quite difficult to reconcile, at a time when government spending was being cut and grants reduced from District Council.

Cllr Garrett stated that when the District Council ran the facility the cost was approximately £200,000 per year. It had been run down by the previous owners who had spent very little on it for 40 years. Unfortunately a lick of paint would not be

sufficient to address the problems of the Guildhall and it needed a broad, wide approach.

The Council had developed a bold and imaginative plan and a business plan which whilst requiring £1 million of borrowing would have brought running costs down substantially. However in the end the total project costs proved to be too high. Consideration had been given to scaling back the project in relation to the Abbey Hall but this had an adverse effect on the business plan. The environment within which the Guildhall was operating was also changing, with many alternative venues available including Abingdon School, which had the Amey Theatre and in the future the refurbished Abingdon Four Pillars Hotel.

The Guildhall was now in a very good position. The aim of the Council was to have the historic part of the building well used with full access to all parts of the building. In addition, from the end of August 2017 the Council will take occupancy of the Old Magistrates' Court and this would provide for accessible exhibition space and also would enable the Council to bring back museum artefacts which were in storage at the Museum Resource Centre at Standlake, which was currently costing the Council approximately £16,000 per year.

In order to provide full disabled access to the Guildhall it was necessary to install a lift and the best way of doing this was to narrow the staircase in the old side of the building. The Council's plans would also provide for proper ground floor toilet facilities.

Cllr Garrett concluded his report by stating that the Guildhall comprised of a suite of wonderful rooms which he wished to see available for hire and enjoyment by every resident. It was a shame that the Council would be losing the large Abbey Hall.

A resident stated that with the loss of the Abbey Hall there would be no room large enough for large public meetings or for societies such as ADFAS and the National Trust. She suggested that the Council should simply improve the PA system and upgrade the furniture in the Abbey Hall. In response, Cllr Garrett stated that the Council had had to make a difficult decision but that the running costs of the Guildhall, which had previously been up to £200,000 per year, were unsustainable. He was sorry to lose the Abbey Hall but he felt that there were other facilities in the town which could take up the slack.

A resident asked what type of community facilities may be provided in the Abbey Hall as a result of discussions with the other local authorities. The Leader of the Council, Cllr Mike Badcock, stated that he was unable to enter into dialogue in this regard because the discussions were commercially sensitive.

A resident stated that when the District Council ran the Guildhall it was costing £200,000 per year. He stated that the previous leader, Cllr Sandy Lovatt, had stated that the Town Council had been running the facility at £150,000 per year. However, even with losing the Abbey Hall, there would still be a substantial staffing cost. Cllr Dennis Garrett stated that he anticipated that the costs of running the re-opened Guildhall would be between £100,000 and £120,000 per annum.

A resident asked what would happen if discussions with other bodies resulted in the conclusion that they did not wish to use the Abbey Hall. Cllr Dennis Garrett responded that he remained optimistic that they would wish to use the Abbey Hall.

(d) County Hall Museum Management Committee

The Chairman of the Committee, Cllr Monica Lovatt, tabled her report to the meeting, attached as appendix 1.

A resident asked how many visitors came to the Museum each year. Cllr Monica Lovatt stated that this varied between 26,000 and 30,000 per annum. The resident commented that he understood the numbers last year were 30,000 and had declined from 32,000 the previous year.

A resident commented that the treasures on display at the Museum were excellent.

(e) Planning, Highways and Consultations Committee

The Chairman of the Committee, Cllr Margaret Crick, stated that the Town Council was a statutory consultee in the planning process. It was consulted on all planning applications in the town but the decisions were made by the Vale of White Horse District Council. In the last year the Committee had considered 259 plans and made recommendations in relation to all these plans. In terms of the recommendations, the Committee had differed with the District Council on a total of eight occasions.

A major plan which had been considered recently related to the proposals for housing on the north Abingdon development. The Committee was concerned that the increase in traffic which would result from the development and had recommended that its approval be conditional upon the delivery of the Lodge Hill Diamond Interchange.

A member stated concern regarding the road crossing arrangements at Oxford Road / Northcourt Road / Appleford Drive which he considered required improvement. The Chairman stated that this was not within the remit of the Committee, it was a matter for the County Council. Cllr Alice Badcock stated that this could be a matter which could be considered by the Community Led Plan.

A resident stated that he understood that the Traffic Advisory Committee was being reinstated. Cllr Crick confirmed that the committee was being reinstated but as yet its terms of reference had to be agreed by the Council and so there was no date for its first meeting.

(f) Finance and General Purposes Committee

The Chairman of the Committee, Cllr Mike Badcock, gave his report to the meeting.

Amongst the points he highlighted:

- The Band D Council Tax had been increased by £5 per annum to provide support for children's centres.
- The Council no longer allowed banners to be placed on the Market Place following serious Health and Safety concerns when a child almost had a serious accident.
- The Council was re-establishing a Traffic Advisory Committee
- Abingdon would be subject to a Public Protection Order which prohibited drinking in public; the Council would be monitoring the situation as it was not intended that the Order would affect traditions such as Morris Dancing.

A resident asked whether or not a Bun Throwing would be organised should Prince Harry be married? Cllr Badcock stated that this would be a decision for the Town Council following advice in relation to the national celebrations.

There was a discussion regarding the Children's Centres. A resident asked why funds had not already been released to the Children's Centre. The Leader of the Council stated that the Council's funding was subject to a satisfactory business plan being received by the Council and as yet this had not been supplied. Cllr Margaret Crick, who was involved with committee proposing to run the Children's Centre, stated that they were liaising with other Children's Centres throughout the county. This was taking longer than originally anticipated but they were working on a plan to re-open the Centre in October 2017.

A resident enquired regarding the Town Council's relationship with the Abingdon BID (Business Improvement District). It was stated that the BID was completely autonomous from the Town Council and the Town Council had declined to be on the board of the BID because it felt there was a potential conflict of interest. The BID had to be run by businesses, for businesses. However it was noted that Cllr Sandy Lovatt was on the board of the BID in a personal capacity.

In response to a question in relation to shops in the High Street, Cllr Mike Badcock reminded the meeting that the Town Council had very little influence in this regard as premises are privately owned. However the Council can raise concerns.

A resident stated that the telephone box opposite the multi-storey car park required attention.

4 **Community Led Plan**

Ms Hilary Lombard of Oxfordshire Community First gave a presentation in relation to the Community Led Plan planning process.

In discussion residents made the following points:

- The plan is a duplication of what is already happening. Note that young people are working more and more hours and there are no young people here this evening.
- Youngsters are not interested.
- A Community Led Plan is trying to put everything together. History is marching on and changes have to happen. We need to know how we move forward.
- Abingdon is full of community groups.
- The closure of the Guildhall is important. Clubs & Societies' Day had to be held at another venue.
- People are asking the Council to lead a Community Led Plan.
- It is our responsibility to make this town better, for our children and our grandchildren. By going down the route of a Community Led Plan we will be better equipped to face the future. We need to talk to everyone in Abingdon regarding how funds are allocated.
- There is a 1,000-house development pending in north Abingdon and Section 106 / CIL money is available. We need to advise the District Council on where this money goes. There is also the matter of Science Vale and the infrastructure for the area. We need to say what we want.

- We need to make the town and its services more accessible.
- This was a very useful presentation. In the autumn of 2016 we were told that a Community Led Plan would be delivered by January 2017. The current timescale is different.
- Evidence gathering / people's views take time and the Community Led Plan would probably take until 2019.
- In relation to the north Abingdon development, the planning application has now been made and it was anticipated that this would be heard in June 2017 at a Vale Planning Committee meeting at the Amey Hall.
- There was a discussion regarding Section 106 funding / CIL funding emanating from the north Abingdon proposals.
- In relation to Lodge Hill there would be a need for government matched funding. The main problem was traffic flow. However not a brick would be laid until the Section 106 funding was in place.
- Cllr Mike Badcock, the Leader of the Council, stated that the Town Council had been accused of trying to "land grab" from neighbouring parish councils. He pointed out that one of the areas involved was Abingdon Common which was owned by the Town Council and should be in Abingdon. He also stated that it was logical that the Dalton Barracks site be considered to be part of Abingdon, as it was functionally part of the town.
- Cllr Badcock also drew the attention of the meeting to the challenges in relation to proposals for 3,500 houses at Culham.

5 To discuss Parish (Town) Affairs

The agenda reminded electors that in accordance the limitation upon discussions in relation to this item was generally considered to be fixed by the exclusion on the one hand of private matters (such as litigation between persons in their private capacity) and on the other, of public matters so general that they would affect the parish no more than any other parish. Subject to this, the parish meeting may discuss any public matter affecting the parish as a parish.

A resident stated that at the Craft Fair which had been held in the autumn of 2016 at the Abbey Buildings T-shirts had been on sale which included offensive four-letter words and knives had also been on sale. As this was a Christmas Fayre he considered this to be very offensive, particularly in the context that knife crime was on the rise. He asked whether the Town Council could make representations to the Trustees to require that such stalls do not operate in the future. Cllr Mike Badcock stated that the stalls selling the knives had been shut down and the police had taken appropriate action. The Chairman of the Friends of Abingdon had been embarrassed by the presence of this stall and it was closed immediately. In relation to the T-shirts, he understood that this had also been dealt with but that he would speak with Friends of Abingdon directly.

A resident referred to parking on roadside verges in Oxford Road and asked why councillors seemed unconcerned about this. He had contacted councillors in the past and they were not responsive. This had been ongoing for four years, nothing had been done – he had only heard excuses. There were public protection orders and the matter of criminal damage. He considered that the Council was frightened to take action and asked that the Council revisit this and take matters seriously. Cllr Mike Badcock stated that people should not be allowed to drive over grass verges.

There being no further business, the meeting rose at 8.35pm.

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council Annual Parish Meeting
Tuesday 9th May 2017.

Report from the Chairman of the County Hall Museum Management Committee

2016-17 has been an exciting year at the museum, with February concluding the first year of the new management structure at the museum as set out by the Town Council.

The year's exhibitions were:

- The Nature of Art, a very well received exhibition of metal art and large canvas oil paintings of water reflections. The museum sold 25% of the exhibition, the commission from which has contributed to our income budget for the year.
- A Right Royal Bun Throwing, to celebrate HM 90th birthday, this exhibition had the most visitors of the year – the museum created a 'bun thrower' from scratch on a shoestring which was incredibly popular with children – proving that imagination can trump budget.
- Alluring Objects, Interior Worlds – an exhibition of art from Clova Stuart-Hamilton. The pieces were stunning and again some pieces were sold, all contributing to the museum's income.
- MG: Racing, Rallying, Record-Breaking – again a highly visited exhibition with visitors from Canada, the US, Australia, China and continental Europe. The museum team researched and designed the interpretive material, which was supplemented by support from Frontline Services and the MGCC, both of whom contributed some excellent items and videos for use in the exhibition.
- Reflections – a lovely quilting exhibition that surpassed expectations and received over 5000 visitors. The quilters all worked incredibly hard to produce the exhibition pieces in time. The museum arranged with the quilters a series of 4 workshops, all of which sold out. This was excellent news not only for income, but that during a period of cut-backs on the museum's marketing budget, news spread and we were able to engage new audiences.

Targets

The manager's targets have been to improve inclusivity, income and accessibility of the museum. During this period of austerity these are a challenging series of targets. This is possible through several mediums, but has included the museum's participation in Abingdon Jazz Festival, ATOM and other town events, as well as managing the Heritage Festival linked with HoD. Another major related project is that as of mid-April the museum will display a series of new banners, signs and posters designed to improve the visibility of the museum from an external viewpoint. Our visitor research has proved that many Abingdonians still do not know that the museum resides in the County Hall, this project addresses this issue - the fruits of which will be apparent as the year progresses. With increased footfall through visual accessibility comes validity of purpose, increased engagement and the potential for increased income.

You will notice that the museum signs will include a suggested donation of £2 adult and £1 children. There will also be a new large panel behind the reception desk explaining why we are recommending a donation from visitors. In order to continue operating the museum service, additional income is required, and with the restrictions inherent in being the smallest team in the 5 years since reopening, the manager's plan – accepted by the committee – was to formalise an entry procedure that assures the friendly welcome as currently operated, but that also promotes our need for donations. If successful the museum may remain a free entry museum for the future. Alternative options were ticketed entry, closing floors of the museum, or seeking substantial sponsorship year on year.

We are very grateful to the friends for their extended support this year in funding our Bun Throwing British Pathe license, as well as assisting in costs for the museum's management of the 2nd Heritage Festival linked to Heritage Open Days. The manager hosted a private evening in the galleries for the Friends in recognition of their support, providing a chance to see the Bun Throwing Video on display after hours.

I would like to thank the staff and volunteers for their work and commitment as I know they have to cox and box to cover the opening hours.

Monica Lovatt – Chairman.
09/05/2017.

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