

**Draft Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Wednesday 12th March 2019
In The Roysse Room, Guildhall, Abingdon-on-Thames.**

Present

Cllr Margaret Crick

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

Nigel Warner

Town Clerk (Clerk to the meeting)

30 residents of the Parish including Town Councillors and officers.

1. **General Introduction.**

The Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames, Councillor Margaret Crick, welcomed all those present to the Annual Parish Meeting. She stated that the Parish Meeting was a meeting of the electors of Abingdon organised by the Council each year, in accordance with statute, but was not a Council meeting. Whilst not a legal requirement, it gave the Council the opportunity to inform residents 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, how the Council operated and how it made decisions, including its partnership working with other organisations.

2. **Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of 14th March 2018**

It was proposed by Cllr Alice Badcock, seconded by Cllr David Pope and **resolved** that the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of 14th March 2018 be agreed as a correct record.

3. **Reports by Committee Chairmen**

The Mayor introduced the Chairmen of each of the Council's committees, who then proceeded to give their reports 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 Alice Badcock, gave her report to the meeting. A copy of this report is on the website. Further to her report, Cllr Badcock proposed a vote of thanks to the Works Team for their hard work and the Assistant Town Clerk / Head of Services was requested to pass this on to the team.

Mr Alastair Fear stated that the new fishing signs did not mention the close season and wondered why this had been left off. In response the Leader of the Council, Cllr Mike Badcock, stated that the coarse fishing closed season had recently been subject to a public consultation and that one of the options given by the Environment Agency was to remove the close season altogether. His own view was that a close season was still required. Mr Alastair Fear asked what a member of the public should do if

they see fish being taken away and not returned to the river. Cllr Alice Badcock responded that the Police should be contacted on 101.

Mr Alastair Fear asked what arrangements were in place for monitoring the fisheries. Cllr Alice Badcock responded that the outside staff acted as water keepers and regularly patrolled the riverbank.

In relation to Christmas lights, Sue Stevens asked why the lights in the Bury Street Shopping Centre were often switched on in November, ahead of the rest of the town, and left on after the other lights had been switched off on or before Twelfth Night. Cllr Alice Badcock responded that the Bury Street Shopping Centre was privately owned and they do not liaise with the Town Council regarding the switch on date or the Christmas lights scheme more generally. Mr Fred Stevens stated that it was sad to see the lights not being co-ordinated with the rest of the town. It was agreed that the Town Clerk write to the owners of the Bury Street Shopping Centre to see if their lights display could be co-ordinated with the rest of the town.

Sue Stevens stated that there was a dangerous tree on the Tithe Farm estate and asked regarding how this could be reported. Cllr Alice Badcock stated that the best option was to go through "Fix My Street". Bobbie Nichols remarked that she had used Fix My Street and had not found it to be very responsive. Cllr Alice Badcock stated that it probably depends on the nature of the problem and the potential hazard which it posed.

(b) Community Services Committee

The Chairman of the Committee, Cllr Vicky Jenkins, gave her report to the meeting. A copy of the report is on the website.

Further to the report, Cllr Alice Badcock, Chairman of the Summer Events Sub-Committee, reported that wristbands for the "Music in the Park" which was due to take place on Saturday 1st June 2019 would be on sale online from Easter and hopefully through the Abbey Cinema.

Mrs Bobbie Nichols congratulated the Town Council on a year's good work, specifically referring to the opening of the Guildhall and the Abbey Hall. She thanked the Town Council for its hard work. Her question was in relation to publicity. Social media was good and there were a good number of people at this meeting. However, since there were now no noticeboards there had been no paper copies of the agenda on display and she posed the question as to where the upcoming election notices would go? She stated that last year there had been an under spend on the communications budget which she understood had gone into the reserves. She recognised that matters such as publicity and keeping the noticeboards up to date were time consuming and that the Town Council did not have a large staff resource but organisations such as the Friends of Abingdon could assist in this regard. She also noticed that whilst there were a good number of residents at the meeting it was possible to attract more. Coming to the Annual Parish Meeting was important and it was also an opportunity for residents to thank the Council and to ask questions. She suggested that in future years a banner could be considered to make people aware of the meeting.

Cllr Vicky Jenkins thanked Mrs Nichols for her interesting contribution.

Cllr Alice Badcock stated that the matter of noticeboards was on the agenda for the next Amenities and Recreation Committee when the Committee would be looking at the different styles and potential locations for noticeboards.

Bobbie Nichols reiterated her offer for assistance in putting notices up.

In relation to election notices the Leader of the Council, Cllr Mike Badcock, stated that publicity in relation to elections was the responsibility of the Returning Officer at the Vale of White Horse District Council.

(c) Guildhall Committee

The Chairman of the Committee, Cllr Dennis Garrett, had given his apologies for the meeting. He had sent a report and this was read out by the Leader of the Council, Cllr Mike Badcock. A copy of the report is on the website.

Further to the report, Cllr Mike Badcock stated that Cllr Garrett had led the Committee very well during the last year and had got much work undertaken. He thanked him on behalf of residents for the hard work which he had put in and it was a shame that he had not been able to attend the meeting to hear the compliments that had been paid to him for his hard work.

With reference to the improvements which had taken place in the Roysse Court Gardens Cllr Mike Badcock stated that the paving slabs which had been installed were of a much higher specification than previously and this should mean that on occasions when vehicles had to go up onto the slabs, the slabs should not crack.

The Mayor, Cllr Margaret Crick, thanked the staff who had worked on the project. They had put in many hours over and above their usual hours and had a very detailed knowledge of the building.

Ron Skinner congratulated the Council on the work which had been undertaken and stated that the cinema was very well run. He referred to the level of service being provided, for example the ability to text food orders to the kitchen and for the food to then be brought to the table. The cinema was an excellent attribute for Abingdon.

Alastair Fear congratulated the Council on the work at the Guildhall and the Abbey Hall. He asked a question regarding what had happened to the 1980s collapsible tables. The response was given by Cllr Mike Badcock and the Town Clerk. The smaller tables were being re-used in the Guildhall, however the larger 12 foot tables were not used as they were actually quite hazardous for staff to try and assemble. There was also an issue with the potential for fingers to be trapped when the tables are assembled and taken down.

In response to a question regarding when all the work would be finished the current contract work would largely be completed by the end of the first week of April. However the Town Clerk stated that the work of maintenance and repair to the Guildhall and the Abbey Hall would now be an ongoing matter. Over the last year or so the Council had undertaken a lot of work which should have been done many years ago. Over the years many items of maintenance had not been undertaken and this had meant that the Council had to deal with these matters as part of the current project. There was still much work to do and the Council would now be looking at its forward programme for work in relation to the Guildhall complex. By opening the cinema and

entering into an external contract with the Abbey Cinema to manage and operate the Guildhall rooms the Council would now be running the Guildhall Complex at a much reduced subsidy / cost. However the Council was redeploying a significant portion of this saving by increasing the revenue contribution from the Guildhall cost centres for property repair and maintenance from £17,800 to £70,000 per year. The Council was determined to ensure that maintenance was undertaken on the properties and that they would not again get into the state which they had done previously.

Fred Stevens asked whether there were plans to improve the exterior of the Abbey Hall, which was looking shabby. The Leader, Cllr Mike Badcock, stated that the cinema operators were looking at what improvements could be made. The operators and the Council were also aware of some of the issues regarding anti-social behaviour in the vicinity. The Police were aware of matters and were taking action to address this.

Dr Jim Halliday was unable to attend the meeting but had sent the following questions:

Q1 Please can you tell me the date when the Guildhall closed for public use prior to the refurbishment?

Answer: *The Guildhall continued to be used by the public during the improvement project when the Information Centre was located in the Roysse Court Foyer area until March 2018 and the Roysse Room continued to be used for meetings of the Council and its committees for the duration of the project except during the month of October 2018. However the last date when the Guildhall was available for hire by the public prior to the development was 31st August 2015.*

Q2 Please can you tell me the first bookable date for public use of the Council Chamber after the completion of the refurbishment?

Answer: *The first bookable date for public use of the Council Chamber after the completion of the refurbishment was 11th February 2019. This was after the repair works to the staircase and the new carpet had been laid. However, had a hirer come forward and wished to use the Council Chamber prior to that date then it may have been possible to have expedited this use. The Roysse Room was available for hire from 10th November 2018.*

Q3. Please can you tell me the cost of hiring the Council Chamber for a community event for a three hour-long event both before and after the refurbishment?

Answer: *the cost of hiring the Council Chamber for a three hour long event before the improvement project was £45; the charge now being applied is £34. Both charges included VAT.*

Q4 Please can you tell me the total cost of the refurbishment (to date) and state if this figure includes the costs of all consultants and experts hired since May 2011.

Answer: *the costs of the current improvement scheme are fully detailed in the reports which have been submitted to the Guildhall and Finance and General Purposes Committee, which may be accessed on the Council's website.*

(d) County Hall Museum Management Committee

The Chairman of the Committee, Cllr Monica Lovatt, gave her report to the meeting. A copy of the report is on the website.

Alastair Fear referred to the Information Centre which was located in the Museum. He stated that the facility was not well signposted and also wondered what the Council's plans were in terms of its longer-term location. The Leader of the Council, Cllr Mike Badcock, stated that this matter was being reviewed.

(e) Planning, Highways and Consultations Committee

The Chairman of the Committee, Cllr David Pope, gave his report to the meeting. A copy of the report is on the website.

Bobbie Nichols stated that she had concerns the Old Abbey House and the future plans for that property. She was requested to raise this matter at Minute 5.

Dr Philip Kenrick stated that he had been interested in the list of material and non-material planning considerations given by the Chairman of the Committee, Cllr David Pope, but queried that there had been no mention of conservation areas. He posed the question as to whether there was a specific policy in relation to conservation areas. He stated that there was in Oxford. Cllr Pope stated that the matter of conservation areas was addressed in the Local Plan but that he would raise this matter also with his District colleagues. The Mayor commented that any plans for development in the conservation areas were automatically considered by the Vale of White Horse District Council Conservation Officer.

(f) Finance and General Purposes Committee

The Chairman of the Committee, Cllr Mike Badcock, gave a report to the meeting. A copy of the report is on the website.

Dr Jim Halliday was unable to attend the meeting but had sent the following question:

Q1: Please can you tell me if it is possible to publish the monthly usage figures of the bus service being subsidised by the Council on the Council's website, and also report them to each F&GP committee.

Answer: the monthly usage figures of the bus service will be reported to each Finance and General Purposes Committee.

4. To discuss Parish (Town) Affairs

Bobbie Nichols raised her concerns regarding the Old Abbey House. This had been empty since vacated by the Town Council and although she knew that this property was owned by the Vale of White Horse District Council a lot of people were getting very worried about its future. Cllr Alice Badcock updated the meeting with information which she had received from the District Council:

Bobbie Nichols asked whether this information was available to the public; Cllr Badcock suggest that she email the District Council directly in this regard.

Cllr Alice Badcock also updated the meeting in relation to the Upper Reaches, quoting from a District Council update.

Nigel Luker asked a question in relation to the management of Boxhill Wood. He thanked the Council for refurbishing the pathway through the wood. He noted that during the last year there had been two or three trees at least which had been blown which he had reported and he wondered if there was a plan in place to survey the trees to decide which need felling due to their condition and is there a replenishment planting plan?

Cllr Alice Badcock, as Chairman of the Amenities and Recreation Committee, reported that a tree survey of the Council's tree stock takes place every two years and the next one was due at the start of 2020. It is this survey which is used to decide on priorities in relation to tree work.

Cllr David Pope had been contacted by "Make Music Abingdon" who were organising an event on the Market Place on 21st June 2019. He read out their email as follows:

Dear David Pope,

I contact you because of your councillor role, but also because I can see you are a keen singer. These two roles seem the perfect match for my request, and I hope it is ok.

I have just set the ball rolling for a Make Music Day Abingdon on June 21st in and around the Market Place. You can read more about it in the attached document. I have had a lot of enthusiastic responses already and believe this could turn into a wonderful annual event for our town and could engage the community.

We are a small group of locals who will be meeting on Tuesday 12th March to write up a constitution for our not-for-profit organisation and get things formalised. I can see that you have your Annual Parish meeting on that same day, and my hope is that you would maybe mention our initiative at the meeting just to make people aware of it?

If anyone wants to be involved, they are more than welcome to contact me - or maybe even pop over to our meeting at The Brewery Tap after your own meeting has finished :-). We start at 8.

If you have any questions, please ask.

*Best regards,
Hanne Fahl
Teacher and musician*

The attachment read:

MAKE MUSIC ABINGDON

A musical community event on 21st June 2019

A group of locals have set out to arrange a Make Music Day/Fête de la Musique in Abingdon on Friday June 21st 2019. It is an international concept with events taking

place worldwide on solstice day with the purpose of getting as many people as possible to make music on the same day. (UK website here: <https://makemusicday.co.uk/>)

Different from most other music events is the communal aspect of it, involving as many people as possible in actively making music during the day and hopefully making new connections locally. The plan is to organise a day of workshops, concerts and performances in and around the Market Square.

Some ideas on the drawing board are:

- Large choir of primary pupils from local schools
- Ukulele workshops
- Body percussion/stomp workshops
- Build your own instrument and play it
- Harmonica workshop
- Choir workshops
- Folk sessions (Irish, Bulgarian, English...)

These workshops could lead to performances in the Market square later in the day along with more established musicians/choirs/bands.

One of the key principles behind Make Music Day is that it is free to attend to make it accessible to as many as possible so we rely on grants and sponsorships.

I hope that you find the sound of this musical community event Make Music Abingdon alluring, and if you want to be involved either as a host venue, sponsor, volunteer or musician, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,

Hanne Fahl on behalf of Make Music Abingdon

Cllr Pope stated that should anyone wish to become involved they could contact him and he would pass their details through to the organiser.

Cllr Alice Badcock updated the meeting in relation to developments at the Charter, based on information which had been issued by the District Council.

5. **Abbey Cinema and Guildhall**

The Chairman of the meeting, Cllr Margaret Crick, welcomed Sue and Ian Wiper of the Abbey Cinema to the meeting. The Abbey Cinema was operating from the Abbey Hall and was also managing and operating the Guildhall.

Sue and Ian Wiper gave a presentation to the meeting as attached as an appendix to these minutes.

The presentation included some of the following items:

- The Guildhall Open Weekend which took place on Saturday 16th and Sunday 17th February 2019 had been a great success. There had been over 1,000 visitors to the Guildhall and the event had been given plenty of publicity both on the website and social media.
- The cinema had a good working relationship with the Town Council and the Town Council team was helpful and supportive.

- The Guildhall and the cinema work well together as one building.
- At the Open Weekend there had been interest in bringing the town treasures back to the Roysse Room. In this regard Cllr Mike Badcock reported that work to improve the cabinet was due to take place in 2019/20. Until that time they would remain at the Abingdon County Hall Museum.
- Some visitors had also commented that the works of art would benefit from more panels explaining something about their background.
- People had been delighted with the very competitive community group room hire rates.
- They were considering having more Open Days / Sessions, potential regular times being a Saturday morning and Wednesday afternoon.
- There had been lots of enquiries for room hires and to date there had been 150 bookings of rooms, this including hires for Council meetings. There was also a steady flow of people dropping in to view the premises.
- The cinema was proving to be a great success. It had opened on 21st December 2018 and so far there had been more than 11,000 customers. The cinema complemented the Guildhall in that many people who come to the cinema also wish to view the historic rooms.
- Feedback had been very positive. In particular, there had been compliments regarding the very good food and beverage offer and the ambiance of the candlelit tables (note: rechargeable battery candles).
- On average 50-60 people come into the cinema throughout the course of the day simply to take a look.
- On launch there had not been strong marketing of the cinema but this was now being stepped up. Consequently it was likely that admittances would increase. 7,000 printed programmes were currently being delivered to residents.

In response to a question it was stated that the capacity of the cinema was currently 164 persons. However with some additional seating due to be installed in the balcony this would rise to 174.

Alastair Fear stated that the largest hall available to hire in the town centre could accommodate 120 persons but reminded the meeting that Preston Road Community Centre could accommodate 250 persons (200 seating). The Leader of the Council, Cllr Mike Badcock, stated that it was possible to hire the Amey Hall which had a capacity of approximately 400 persons, for major public events.

Sue Stevens made enquiries regarding the Clubs' and Societies' Day which was due to take place on Saturday 16th March 2019. She was informed that the event would take place in the historic rooms of the Guildhall, specifically the Roysse Room, the Old Magistrates' Court and the Council Chamber. The event would take place from 10am to 4pm.

Dr Philip Kenrick reiterated concerns over limited access to high speed broadband in the town centre. Cllr Alice Badcock stated that this matter had recently been discussed at the Oxfordshire Growth Board and the matter was being looked at. This was also of concern to the Town Council, particularly as in addition to the concerns of residents the Town Council was responsible for the Guildhall.

The Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames, Cllr Margaret Crick, thanked all the residents, including councillors, who had attended the meeting.

The meeting rose at 8.35 pm

DRAFT