

ABINGDON TOWN COUNCIL

Report to	Finance Governance & Asset Management Advisory Committee
Meeting date	23 November 2021
Report author	Museum Manager
Agenda item	10

Report of Museum Manager

1. **Purpose of the Report**

- 1.1. To update members on the revised draft maintenance and responsibility schedule with English Heritage (requires approval).
- 1.2. To update members on progress on the arrangements with the Climate Emergency Centre (to note).

2. **Summary**

- 2.1. **English Heritage and Abingdon Town Council Agreement (Appendix 3).**
- 2.2. This agreement will formally define areas of maintenance and responsibility for the Abingdon County Hall building between English Heritage and Abingdon Town Council. It is the result of two years of discussions.
- 2.3. **Climate Emergency Centre in the Mouse Hole Café**
- 2.4. M11 of CHMMAC15072021 stated 'The advisory committee considered requests from Abingdon Carbon Cutters and One Planet Oxfordshire to use the basement of the County Hall Museum. It was proposed by the Chair, Cllr Lonergan, seconded by Cllr Birks and agreed that consideration of a temporary agreement with a local group to use the basement for up to twelve months be delegated to the Town Clerk and Museum Manager.'
- 2.5. The subsequent use of the Museum Cafe by Abingdon Carbon Cutters, who are formally overseeing the establishment of a new environmental awareness group 'One Planet Abingdon', has been established in accordance with Council policy and instruction to officers.
- 2.6. A 12-month license for use of the Café has been prepared and awaits the formal incorporation of One Planet Abingdon before signing completes.

3. **Action required**

- 3.1 Members are requested **to recommend** to the Town Council the 'Maintenance Agreement between English Heritage Trust and Abingdon Town Council' be approved.
- 3.2 Members are requested **to note** the report of progress for the Climate Emergency Centre in the café of the Abingdon County Hall Museum.

4. **Link to strategic plan and objectives**

- 4.1 KO1 To respond effectively and speedily to the climate emergency.
Facilitating a climate emergency centre in the café educates residents about issues of climate change and how individuals and groups can be proactive forces in combating global climate change.
- 4.2 KO2 To develop a resilient, sustainable town which will provide a home for residents now and in the future.
Facilitating a climate emergency centre in the café promotes public engagement with sustainability and develops skills and knowledge about reuse, repair and recycling.
- 4.3 KO3 To manage the Council's assets efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of the community now and in the future.
The agreement between English Heritage and Abingdon Town Council serves to secure the future care and maintenance of the historic Abingdon County Hall thereby protecting its value as a substantial asset.
- 4.4 KO4 To work with community partners to support those who are vulnerable and in need and to create opportunities to increase social inclusivity.
Working with Abingdon Carbon Cutters and One Planet Abingdon creates an opportunity for diverse communities to access free events and support, also to engage with the Museum.

5. **Background**

5.1. **English Heritage and Abingdon Town Council Agreement**

- 5.2. Abingdon County Hall was a scheduled Ancient Monument under the Ancient Monuments act of 1913 and 1931. The building is now listed under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, as amended for its special architectural or historic interest.
- 5.3. English Heritage acceded Guardianship over the (material fabric of) Abingdon County Hall, by transfer, from the Ministry of Works and Abingdon Borough Council in the original scheduled Deed of 30th January 1952.

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- 5.4. Since the extensive renovation of the building, completed in 2012, Abingdon Town Council and English Heritage have sought to clarify responsibilities for various maintenance and repair tasks.
- 5.5. **One Planet Abingdon**
- 5.6. The Mouse Hole Café ceased trading in March 2020 due to disruption of the Museum service during Covid 19 lock-down. Since then, your officers have investigated various uses for the café space following the decision not to reopen the Mouse Hole Café 4th November 2020.
- 5.7. Full Council minute F74 Matters referred from other committees' states; Cllr Pat Lonergan, Chair of County Hall Museum Management Committee, explained that the committee had considered the future of the Mousehole Café over recent meetings and was recommending that the café be closed permanently, with immediate effect (the café has remained closed since the museum reopened in September 2020).
- 5.8. Following a suggestion to work with climate awareness group your officers contacted Abingdon Carbon Cutters who were delighted to establish events in the café. This formally began during the 'Oxfordshire Great Big Green Week'. On 25th September 2021 Abingdon Carbon Cutters began a week of apple pressing in the Kempster Room and engaging the public with climate awareness issues in the café area.

6. Key information and options

- 6.1. **English Heritage and Abingdon Town Council Agreement (Appendix 3).**
- 6.2. The attached agreement (Appendix 3) will formalise these responsibilities, such that they be, within the scope of the areas specified.
- 6.3. The benefit of formalising the relationship of responsibility of care for the building between English Heritage and Abingdon Town Council is for future continuity and regular maintenance of the building.
- 6.4. Your officers conceded responsibility over only those additional mechanical and infrastructural elements to the building required for the hosting of a museum, such as additional air-conditioning/heating, data cabling and exhibition lighting. New installations, for instance the perimeter lights, would also fall under the remit of Abingdon Town Council.
- 6.5. **Climate Emergency Centre in the Mouse Hole Café**
- 6.6. Your officers have facilitated the ad-hoc use of the café at Abingdon County Hall Museum by Abingdon Carbon Cutters. Evidence of public liability insurance has been provided. A new group, 'One Planet Abingdon' (OPA), will begin a 12-month trial establishing a climate emergency centre and sustainability education facility in the café.

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- 6.7. To allow the trial period OPA must sign a license of use. To do this they must become incorporated, this is a requirement to legally for a license.
- 6.8. This concept has developed from Abingdon Town Council's key objective 1, gaining support from members, while also contributing to the forward plan of the Museum to find productive local community-based use for the café space.
- 6.9. Your Officers have appointed Slade Legal to draft the license document which required the 'OPA' group to become incorporated. The license has been ready to sign since 4th October 2021 and awaiting the adoption of legal status of OPA to proceed.
- 6.10. It seems most likely that the legal status will be attained by week commencing 22nd November 2021 and the license can be signed and notarised immediately following this.
- 6.11. The license agreement is available to members on request, please email the Museum Manager should you require a copy.

7. Climate change/green implications

- 7.1 The climate emergency centre establishing in the café of the Museum is promoting awareness about the climate emergency recognising the Council's position on climate change.

8. Financial/budget implications

- 8.1 There are no budget considerations.

9. HR implications

- 9.1 The use of the café by One Planet Abingdon facilitates care and invigilation of the basement without the need to recruit additional staff.

10. Supporting papers and appendices

- 10.1 Appendix 3 'Maintenance Agreement between English Heritage Trust and Abingdon Town Council'

Dan Sancisi - Museum Manager
17 November 2021