

## ABINGDON TOWN COUNCIL

Report to	Community Advisory Committee
Meeting date	1 March 2022
Report author	Dan Sancisi
Agenda item	13

### Report of Museum Manager

#### 1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To inform Members about the current activities and events at the Abingdon County Hall Museum.
- 1.2 To report the Collections Officer's and Abingdon Museum Friends updates.
- 1.3 To request approval for Forward Plan 2022 - 2026 and the Key Aims Action Plan appendix FP1 2022.

#### 2. Summary

##### 2.1 **Museum Operation (from 3 January 2022 to 11 February 2022)**

2.2 The new year began with an extension of one week for the popular exhibition 'It's not all black and white; Abingdon in true colours' by Martin Wackenier. This was followed by the current exhibition 'Morland; A family business'

2.3 The Morland exhibition has engaged with Abingdon's recent history, evoking memories and reminiscences from our visitors, many being local people who worked there. It has been supported widely by locals but is also proving popular with the wider public too, capturing the spirit of this industry trying to rebuild after the challenges of the Pandemic.

##### 2.4 **Visitors Returning to Pre-Covid Levels**

2.5 January 2022 visitor figures record a return to 'normal' visitor numbers at 1,047, comparing favourably with 879 from January 2020 and 1,057 in 2019.

##### 2.6 **Education**

2.7 The Museum's schools education programme is gaining momentum in the new year as schools begin to book sessions at the Museum again.

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2.8 Virtual workshops help maintain educational outreach to schools during 2020 and 2021 but enquiries for physical visits to the museum have overtaken demand for virtual sessions.

**2.9 One Planet Abingdon - Climate Emergency Centre**

2.10 OPA returned to their normal opening hours on 3 February 2022 after an extended festive break, due to concerns about Omicron variant of the Covid virus.

2.11 They have a busy calendar of workshops booked for the Kempster room, several weeks in advance.

2.12 The relationship with the Museum schedule and activity seems harmonious currently, your Officers are in dialogue with OPA regarding possible future collaborations and mutually beneficial events.

**2.13 English Heritage and Abingdon Town Council Maintenance agreement**

2.14 The estate maintenance team at English Heritage have worked on site during January assessing decorative repairs required and have removed the Cupola door for renovation. Their regular maintenance routine continues and will inform future repair works schedules.

**2.15 Total Access Lift Project**

2.16 Your Officers continue to liaise and facilitate the creation of a feasibility study for a new lift to the museum first and second floor.

**2.17 Platinum Jubilee Oral History Project**

2.18 The volunteer led steering group met on Friday 3 December 2021 and began to contact local schools to engage them with the project. Several schools have shown interest and the project continues to develop.

**2.19 Accreditation Renewal**

2.20 The Museum Officers have completed draft documents in preparation for the accreditation renewal deadline of 1 April 2022. The final two documents requiring committee approval are herewith attached.

**3. Action required**

3.1 Members are requested note this report and recommend approval of the 'Forward Plan 2022 – 2026' and the 'Key Aims Action Plan appendix FP1 2022', accessed via the links below.

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. The lift project aims to widen access to the Museum collection, events and activities.

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 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 **One Planet Abingdon Climate Emergency Centre**

5.2 A license was signed by the OPA directors in December 2021 allowing a twelve-month trial period for a Climate Emergency Centre in the Museum café.

5.3 **English Heritage and Abingdon Town Council Maintenance agreement**

5.4 The agreement has been approved by Finance, Governance & Asset Management Advisory Committee on 23 November 2021 and is now with English Heritage management awaiting signature.

5.5 **Total Access Lift Project**

5.6 Ridge Partners LLP were commissioned by your Officers to complete a feasibility study for installation of a lift to first and second floors of the Museum in December 2021 following approval by FGAM on 23 November (FG45).

6. **Key information and options**

**6.1 Museum Operation.**

6.2 Visitor numbers rallied in the month of January 2022 at 1,047, our current figures stand at 7,956 visitors since reopening on 18 May 2021. Your Officers consider there to be renewed confidence in visitor's return to the Museum and temporary exhibitions, with hope that the 2022 – 2023 period will attract further growth.

6.3 'Morland; a family business' has attracted comprehensive media coverage and public interest. BBC Southeast Today gave an excellent report at 6pm on 18 January 2022. This followed on from front page coverage in the Oxford Mail in early January. The exhibition continues until 27 March 2022.

6.4 The exhibition 'It's not all black and white; Abingdon in true colours' by Martin Wackener attracted good visitor numbers and press coverage and followed a equally successful exhibition by HapticArt textile artists.

6.5 Both these shows enjoyed a commercial aspect which benefited the museum and raised a total of £1,324.50 in commission sales.

6.6 **Shop** sales continue an average spend of £0.34 per visitor, totalling £2,737.96 to 9 February 2022.

6.7 **Roof** takings are £2,095.83 for the same period averaging at £0.26 per visitor. A reduction in roof visitors is due to roof closure during maintenance work on the Cupola in addition to seasonal influences.

6.8 **Donations** have sustained a level of £0.44 per visitor, totalling £3,473.80 to 9 February 2022.

**6.9 Education programme**

6.10 The Museum Educator Jennifer Doran continues to conduct workshops with schools aimed at key stage one and two programmes. She has developed a new workshop based on the Platinum Jubilee titled 'Come and Celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee at Abingdon Museum'.

6.11 We are offering schools an opportunity to handle primary sources which illustrate the long-standing tradition of royal links with Abingdon. Through historical enquiry and objects, we will consider life in the 1950s when Queen Elizabeth came to the throne.

**6.12. Climate Emergency Centre in the Mouse Hole Café**

6.13. The formally incorporated One Planet Abingdon have established regular sessions in the museum café, including toy swaps, clothes exchanges, repair workshops and educational talks about climate emergency issues.

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- 6.14. They are trialling an evening session once a week, for a month, to increase access to their services. The arrangement is without additional cost to the museum service as Oxford Security Services will be employed by OPA to open and close the museum for the sessions, while maintaining a security presence while they are open.
- 6.15 English Heritage and Abingdon Town Council Agreement.**
- 6.16 A visit by English Heritage Properties Senior Curator Louise Bartlett in December was useful in progressing agreement that repairs and maintenance for which EHT will take responsibility should be scheduled for 2022.
- 6.17 The estate maintenance team at English Heritage have worked on site during January assessing decorative repairs required to the Cupola and have removed the door for renovation.
- 6.18 A temporary door has been installed in its place. The roof is temporarily closed to the public while this work is underway. The estimated completion of this work in end of February 2022.
- 6.19. Collections Report**
- 6.20 The Grinling Gibbons mirror has returned from Compton Verney, where it was displayed as part of an exhibition celebrating Gibbons' life and work. It is now back in its usual place in the Sessions Gallery.
- 6.21 An email was sent out to the Museum's school contacts about the Platinum Jubilee Project, offering that our volunteers visit the schools and talk to the children about the changing life in Abingdon. We have received a couple of positive responses, and the project group will meet on the 25 February 2022 to discuss the next steps.
- 6.22 Total Access Lift Project**
- 6.23 The Town Council forward plan contains the updated the timeline for submitting a planning application for the project. This phase will come to completion at the end of the financial year 2021–2022 by submission of pre-planning advice application.
- 6.24 In January the Ridge design team visited the Museum to commence proposals for three options on the location of the lift.
- 6.25 A heritage statement and impact assessment is underway by Asset Heritage Consultants based on these proposals. Nick Doggett from Asset Heritage visited the site early February 2022. His observations will inform the Asset Heritage Consultants' response to the plans and pre-planning advice application.
- 6.26 Currently timing of the project has shifted by a few weeks due to unforeseen circumstances delaying preparation of the heritage reports. Your Officers foresee that a feasibility study will be completed by the end of March 2022 and submission

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of pre-planning advice to the Vale following shortly after.

**6.27 Friends Continuing Support for the Museum**

6.28 The link between AMF and the Museum management continues to develop a closer working relationship with the intention of streamlining future opportunities for fund raising with targeted objectives. This may be of help with any Museum plans for large scale projects or undertakings. It is hoped that the Friends can use the Museum as host to meetings and talks when the Coronavirus restrictions are lifted and physical meetings and talks can resume.

6.29 The Museum Friends have purchased and provided 300 new Abingdon Museum Friends Membership leaflets to the Museum. It is our hope that these will be promoted and help to increase our membership and by extension the resources that we have available for the Museum.

6.30 The Museum Friends have funds available for the Museum if they require funding for new items or equipment.

**6.31 Abingdon Museum Friends AGM**

6.32 The Abingdon Museum Friends Annual General Meeting will be on the first Thursday of April 2022.

**6.33 Abingdon Museum Friends' Talks/Other**

6.34 The Museum Friends will visit Fawley Hill Railway & Museum on Saturday 28th May 2022.

6.35 Steven Purnell, Secretary, Abingdon Museum Friends, 24 February 2022

**7. Climate change/green implications**

7.1 The climate emergency centre based in the Museum café continues to promote environmental sustainability and awareness about climate change through their workshops and repair sessions. Your Officers continue to support and enable their activities assisting set-up and logistics in their daily operations.

**8. Financial/budget implications**

8.1 There are no budget considerations.

**9. HR implications**

9.1 Your Officers received a letter of resignation from front of house Museum Assistant Ellie Baker in February 2022. We thank her for excellent service and commitment to the role over the past two years, wishing her great success in her future career.

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9.2 Your Officers are advertising for a replacement Weekend Museum Assistant with the intention of recruiting before the end of March 2022.

10. **Supporting papers and appendices**

10.1 Forward Plan 2022 – 2026.

10.2 Key Aims Action Plan appendix FP1 2022