

ABINGDON TOWN COUNCIL

Report to	Community Advisory Committee
Meeting date	06 September 2022
Report author	Dan Sancisi
Agenda item	11

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 on the progress of pre-application advice for the development of a planning application to install a lift to the first and/or second floors of the Museum.
- 1.3 To report on options for granting One Planet Abingdon a twelve-month or five-year license to use the café.
- 1.4 To report the Collections Officer's and Abingdon Museum Friends updates.

2 Summary

2.1 **Museum Operation**

- 2.2 'Sea Dragons and Giant Monsters of Abingdon' attracted over 2,500 visitors up to the 14 August 2022 and continues to be popular especially with the young.

2.3 **Lift planning advice**

- 2.4 The Museum Manager met with Councillor Halliday, Vale of the White Horse planning and conservation officers, Kathryn Davies from Historic England and Adrian Kite of Ridge Partners LLP to discuss the pre-planning advice response.

2.5 **One Planet Abingdon and Café update**

- 2.6 The license agreement between Abingdon Town Council and One Planet Abingdon expires on 27th November 2022. The Museum Manager requested approval for renewal of the twelve-month license at FGAM meeting on 26 July 2022.

- 2.7 Committee requested a new report detailing the option of granting a five-year license following advice from Slade Legal.

3 Action required

3.1 Members are requested to note the report.

4 Link to strategic plan and objectives

4.1 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.

4.2 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 Lift planning advice

5.2 Confidential minute FG45 County Hall Museum Lift report 23 November 2021, it was recommended to the Town Council that the ‘S21-2833 – Abingdon County Hall Museum Lift Feasibility Report’ be approved and that a business plan is prepared if it is found that installation of a lift is feasible and it is decided to take the project forward.

5.3 26 May 2022, Ridge Partners LLP submitted a pre-planning advice application to Vale of the White Horse Planning.

5.4 On 8 August 2022 your officers met with local Councillor Halliday, Historic England Planning and Ridge Partners to consider three options for the lift.

5.5 One Planet Abingdon and café update

5.6 One Planet Abingdon signed a license agreement to utilise the café space at Abingdon Museum as a climate emergency centre, on 27th November 2021.

5.7 The license was drafted by Slade Legal and formed a legal basis for the formal utilisation of the café for a climate emergency centre.

6 Key information and options

6.1 Museum Operation

6.2 ‘Sea Dragons and Giant Monsters of Abingdon’ has attracted a diverse and particularly young visitor base due to innovative use of virtual reality in visualising the Pliosaur attraction.

6.3 The purchase of VR headset and development of the Pliosaur interactive will become integral to the permanent digital interpretation of the palaeontology collection in the attic gallery after the current exhibition.

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- 6.4** This experience of developing such media will inform future exhibitions where an augmented or virtual reality component materially expands the scope of interpretation of the subject.
- 6.5** Professor Dave Martill of Portsmouth University gave a talk about the Abingdon Pliosaur on 20 August 2022 which received great deal of interest from a diverse audience. Your officers videoed the talk and will launch a premier YouTube production of the talk on 17 September 2022.
- 6.6** Heritage Open Days runs from 11 to 18 September 2022. Your officers have planned talks throughout the day, in collaboration with Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society, also including digital premiere and content prepared by your officers.
- 6.7** The Museum's 'Crafting Crew' will provide a children's activity for the day with the theme 'Iconic Views of Abingdon'.
- 6.8** Visitor numbers are improving each month but have yet to meet pre-covid numbers. On 26 August 2022 we had welcomed over 7,500 visitors since 1 April 2022.
- 6.9** **Collections Officer report**
- 6.10** **Accreditation**
- 6.11** Our application for Re-Accreditation was submitted by the deadline 31 March 2022. It is currently being assessed and will be decided by the Assessment Panel in September, October or November.
- 6.12** **Loans**
- 6.13** Items on long term loan from the Ashmolean Museum are part of the Museum's permanent archaeology displays. The loan was now up for renewal and has been renewed for a period of 5 years.
- 6.14** **Key performance indicators of the Museum**
- 6.15** Shop sales total £3,891.70 which equates to £0.52 per visitor. Last reported visitor average spend of £0.62 was inflated due to sales of Platinum Jubilee merchandise.
- 6.16** Donations hold steady at £2,029.87 averaging at £0.28 per visitor.
- 6.17** Roof takings of £2,148.33 have an improved visitor average spend of £0.32, reflecting the seasonal variance of roof visits.
- 6.18** **Lift planning advice**
- 6.19** It was recommended that the Forward Plan include a business case for the lift as it is important to include future costs for the Town Council. The business case could investigate numbers likely to use the lift, cost, a ten-year forward plan revenue cost for maintenance and the accessibility audit which is already

planned. The research could consider alternatives for access, such as electronic access to exhibits.

- 6.20 A proper cost-benefit analysis is needed, to consider long-term revenue and staffing implications, and short-term and long-term environmental impact. A cost-benefit analysis template may be useful for the review of all major Town Council projects.
- 6.21 At the meeting on 8 August 2022 to consider three options for the lift your officers met with local Councillor Halliday, Kathryn Davies of Historic England, Planning Officers Boris Van Der Ree and Nathaniel Bamsey and Adrian Kite of Ridge Partners.
- 6.22 The purpose of the meeting was to clarify the nature of the proposal for the installation of a lift and contribute to the planning advice for creating a viable planning application.
- 6.23 Kathryn Davies of Historic England was very cautious about all proposals. She kept say that all the options would be substantial harm to the significance of the heritage asset which is the main reason conservation applications are refused.
- 6.24 Her advice was to: Define the museum activities in each area of the building – specific to the Basement and Second Floor. Update the Access Plan and check the 2006 Access Audit – regarding second floor accommodation. Update the needs of the Museum. Review the impact on the Conservation Area including the view from East St Helen Street. Agree verified view with Boris Van der Ree from planning and prepare a Visual Impact Assessment. Add more detail the significance assessment for individual elements affected by each option. Add an option that only when to the Sessions Hall (not the second floor). Review the function of the basement and principle of letting to a third party.
- 6.25 **One Planet Abingdon and café update**
- 6.26 Slade legal will be required to notarise the signing of a new agreement although your Officers do not expect the detail of the license to change.
- 6.27 Your Officers have explored the benefits and complications of granting a five-year license. We found no complication as the right to break the license agreement with one month notice is unaffected by the extended time frame.
- 6.28 The cost for extending the existing license is also unaffected by increasing the timeframe of the agreement.
- 6.29 Your officers request approval to proceed with granting a five-year license to One Planet Abingdon based on the findings of this report.

7 Climate change/green implications

- 7.1 No additional climate change / green implications to report.

8 Financial/budget implications

- 8.1 There will be a cost incurred for legal services which will be coded to legal fees in the budget.

9 HR implications

- 9.1 Utilisation by OPA of the café space mitigates the need to staff the basement from Museum staffing budget. Normally the basement would remain closed without a fire warden volunteer or staff member present.

10 Supporting papers and appendices

- 10.1 One Planet Abingdon annual report.

- 10.2 Abingdon Museum Friends report.

Dan Sancisi, Museum Manager, 26 August 2022

Forward Plan entry

Museum: temporary exhibitions programme	Jan to Mar 22	Morland; A family business
	Apr to Jun 22	70 – Life in Abingdon in the 2 nd Elizabethan Era
	July to Sept 22	Sea Dragons & Giant Monsters of Abingdon
	Oct to Dec 22	Kate Hammersley - Common Land
	Jan to Mar 23	Planes, Trains and Automobiles - RAF Abingdon, GWR, MG.
	Apr to June 23	Abingdon Quilters
	Jul to Sept 23	Abingdon's Lost Monuments
	Oct to Dec 23	Geoff Dunbar – Abingdon Folk
	Jan to Mar 24	Mary Buckland's drawings
	Apr to Jun 24	Harwell's influence on Abingdon's town plan
Museum: digital projects	Aug to Sept 22	South Asian History month - Couldrey India paintings and poetry
	Oct to Dec 22	Black History Month - Museum at night - Hallowe'en
	Jan to Mar 23	
	Apr to Jun 23	Women of Abingdon ATOM festival
	Aug to Sept 22	South Asian History month - Couldrey India paintings and poetry - Festival Archaeology
Museum: events	July to Sept 23	Festival of archaeology – ancient sites tours
	Oct to Dec 23	Museum at Night