

ABINGDON TOWN COUNCIL

Report to	Community Committee
Meeting date	6 February 2024
Report author	Dan Sancisi
Agenda item	8

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. (no decision required, report to be noted)

2 Summary

- 2.1 Updates on the current exhibition, events, key indicators and Abingdon Museum Friends.

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.**
- 4.1.1 The Museum's presence in Abingdon County Hall sustains the condition of the building, maintaining it for future generations, enhancing its town centre context by articulating the history of Abingdon.
- 4.1.2 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.**
- 4.2.1 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 The Museum continues to operate its temporary exhibition programme, educational workshops and events.
- 5.2 One Planet Abingdon has developed its schedule of events and activities and is firmly established as the Climate Emergency Centre of Abingdon.

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Key information and options

6.1 The 'Basement Museum'

6.2 Your Officers have been approached by the owner of the 'Basement Museum' at 4 East St. Helen Street, Abingdon, OX14 3EA with a proposal for the Abingdon County Hall Museum to operate the Basement Museum as an appointment only 'annex' exhibition of Abingdon architectural history.

6.3 Mr Michael Russell met with the Museum Manager and Collections Officer in early January, at the venue to discuss the viability of such an arrangement. He intends to fund maintenance and building overheads going forward but cannot act as warden due to his age.

6.4 Parts of the building on the site can be traced back to early medieval period with certainly traces of much older habitation. Your Officers are seeking advice from local archaeologists to ascertain the value of the exhibition to the Museum and its relevance to local history contextualisation.

6.5 The Museum Manager will prepare a report and present it to this committee and to FGAM with financial implications in the coming months.

6.6 Should Members wish to find out more about the proposal the Museum Manager invites questions, although not much more is known currently, other than appears in this report.

6.7 Visitors

6.8 The Museum attracted 15,316 visitors from 1 April 2023 to 21 January 2024.

6.9 Exhibitions

6.10 'Celebrating Abingdon Women in the Arts and Sciences' opens our new year programme of temporary exhibitions and can be seen as having developed from our digital project 'Women of Abingdon'.

6.11 The exhibition culminates in March with the digital and social media project 'Women of Abingdon', which has been running since 2020, broadcasting throughout 'Women's History Month'.

6.12 Your Officers hope that the exhibition will encourage the public to come forward with more stories of women's achievements associated with Abingdon.

6.13 Events

6.14 Christmas crafts activity was well attended on the 16 December 2023 with 93 parents and children taking part.

6.15 The Museum 'Crafting Crew' are a vibrant and innovative team of volunteers that support the Museum, attracting loyal attendance to their free of charge events.

6.16 The team will be hosting 'Create an Abstract Artwork' on the 14 February 2024 during the school half term break.

6.17 Education

6.18 Approaching budget year end, your officers report some encouraging news about the Museum's school education sessions.

6.19 Jennifer Doran, Museum Educator, will have led 30 education sessions at the Museum by 31 March 2024, equating to approximately 900 student visitors.

6.20 The school sessions are aimed at Primary Schools key stage one and two levels, ranging from prehistory through Roman Britain, Anglo-Saxons to history of the river and canals, currently a popular subject of session requests.

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- 6.21 Local schools participating give excellent feedback, including schools such as St. Nicolas, Carswell, Rush Common, Caldecott, Marcham, Thomas-Reade and Thameside.
- 6.22 Senior Museum Assistant Tris Kear effectively nurtures contact with schools and keeps interest and bookings flowing, while our front of house team help co-ordinate the visits through the galleries ensuring a positive and enjoyable experience for the children.
- 6.23 **Key performance indicators of the Museum from 1 April 2023 to 20 August 2023.**
- 6.24 Shop sales totalled £6,093.38 equating to £0.39 per visitor. (Includes talks and events and commission sales)
- 6.25 Donations received are £4,936.50 averaging at £0.32 per visitor.
- 6.26 Roof takings of £4,191.67 have a visitor average spend of £0.27, the slight drop in roof visits is due to seasonal variation of weather restricting access.
- 6.27 **Abingdon Museum Friends (AMF)**
- 6.28 Your Officers met with the secretary of the Abingdon Museum friend to discuss the successful gift aid scheme and opportunities for donating to the Museum or assisting purchases.
- 6.29 We agreed that the Friends would buy some valuable teaching aids for the education programme.
- 6.30 This will fund a stone 'Saddle Quern' replica, produced by local stonemasons, which will help children understand how grain was ground to produce flour in the Iron Age.
- 6.31 **One Planet Abingdon**
- 6.32 One Planet have extended their opening days to include Sundays 10am to 4pm.
- 6.33 Your Officers welcome this new opening time as it allows the toilets to be available to visitors and creates additional footfall into the building.

7 **Climate change/green implications**

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

8 **Financial/budget implications**

- 8.1 There are no additional financial implications regarding the current budget.

9 **HR implications**

- 9.1 There are no current HR implications.

10 **Appendices**

- 10.1 Minutes of the Abingdon Museum Friends AGM 2023.

Dan Sancisi, Museum Manager, 29 January 2024