



THE FRIENDS  
OF ABINGDON  
CIVIC SOCIETY

**THE FRIENDS OF ABINGDON  
TRUSTEES' ANNUAL REPORT: 1 JANUARY - 31 DECEMBER 2017**

Charity no: 225880

Registered Address: 18 Thames Street, Abingdon OX14 3HZ

President: The Earl of Lindsay and Abingdon

Vice Presidents: David Clark BSc, MSc, FSA; Mrs Felicity Dick DL, Layla Moran MP (from August 2017)

**1 Trustees**

**1.1 Charity Trustees for the review period:**

Bryan Brown	Chairman
Kevin Senior	Vice Chairman
Bruce Hunt	Treasurer
Hester Hand	Secretary
Rosemary Allan	
Barbara Beach	
Patricia Bryden	
Caroline Bullock	
Glynne Butt	
Richard Charles (to March 2017)	
Peter Clarke	
Elizabeth Drury (to June 2017)	
Maggie Henderson-Tew (from June 2017)	
Bobbie Nichols	

**1.2 Custodian Trustees:** The Official Custodian for Charities

**2 Structure, governance and management**

The Friends of Abingdon (the Society) is constituted as a Trust and governed by a Trust Deed dated 15 May 1953. The Charity Trustees are elected by the AGM and form the Executive Council which administers the business of the Society. Custodian trustees are appointed by the Executive Council.

The Society employs a part-time Curator who lives on site and manages the day to day operation of the Buildings but everything else is done by contractors or volunteers. The previous Curator left in July and following a recruitment exercise was replaced in September.

The Executive Council met bi-monthly throughout the year. Agendas covered both governance and operational issues. The Civic and Community sub-committee met bi-monthly and reported to Executive meetings.

As reported last year, ideas for major enhancements to the Buildings were progressed by a working group. With the assistance of Purcell Conservation

Architects, a proposal was made to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) under their Resilient Heritage scheme and a grant of £68k was awarded in April 2017. This grant is to review our Society's governance and organisation and community engagement and to undertake an architectural feasibility study linked to a business plan focussed on developing a long-term strategy for enhancing and sustaining the Abbey Buildings. It should lead to a capital application to the HLF. Purcell, our lead consultants, are working on the architectural proposals; we have also engaged DCA Consultancy Ltd, heritage management consultants, to work on the heritage/management briefs. Katie Norgrove has been appointed as an HLF Mentor and Evaluator. We plan that a Round 1 proposal to HLF should be ready for submission in the second half of 2018.

Although this report is for 2017, it should be noted that the governance work has produced recommendations for major changes to the structure of the Society which were approved by members at a Special General Meeting in April 2018. They will be submitted to the Charity Commission in June or July 2018. If approved, a further Special General meeting will be called to agree the winding-up of the present charity and its replacement by two separate Charitable Incorporated Organisations. Until that time, however, the Society continues to operate in its present form.

### **3 Objectives and activities**

In summary, our objects are: a) to arouse interest in Abingdon and its setting b) to help preserve the best old buildings and ensure that new buildings are appropriate, and c) in support of these aims, to acquire and restore buildings and to promote meetings and lectures.

### **4 Public Benefit**

The Society owns the freehold of the Abbey Buildings, a range of medieval buildings remaining from Abingdon Abbey. It maintains the buildings and makes them available for visits by groups (including schools) and, during the summer months, by casual visitors. Admission for visitors is free, although donations towards the Friends' work are encouraged. The buildings are also available for hire by local community groups, individuals and other organisations, for plays, concerts, weddings, parties, meetings etc.

The Society also co-ordinates the annual Heritage Open Days for Abingdon, organises free walks around places of interest in the town, and manages the "Community FreeSpace" in the town centre which voluntary groups can use free of charge to promote their activities. A number of other events were held this year to increase community outreach, these included repeats of the previous year's Jazz Festival and Beer Festival and a "Music for a Summer Evening" concert of Early English Music.

As the town's Civic Society, the Friends also monitor planning applications to ensure that proposed changes are appropriate and contribute actively to public debate on issues affecting the town. Particular issues during the year were concerns over the continuing closure of the Abbey Hall – the town centre's largest indoor public space, proposals for major alterations to the

listed Guildhall building and the state of neglect of buildings in the Town Centre Conservation area. The Society made representations on all of these to the relevant authorities.

In making decisions about the activities of the Friends, the Trustees have had due regard to the Charity Commission's public benefit guidance.

## **5 Achievements and performance**

- We had around 900 casual visitors to the buildings during the May-September opening period. As a result of an arrangement with a tour company we also hosted around 20 group visits, involving over 500 people. Both of these represented big increases on previous years.
- We organised an Open Day at the May Bank Holiday, with displays and performances aimed at attracting more people to the Buildings. This brought in 230 visitors. At Heritage Weekend we hosted a Flower Festival which had over 400 visitors, many of them from other parts of Oxfordshire.
- The theatre was used by local groups for 24 drama productions and 16 concerts and there were 19 other community hires of the buildings.
- The Community FreeSpace was used by 23 different groups or organisations in 2017 for a total of 30 weeks.
- Heritage Weekend is a collaboration between the Friends of Abingdon and other local heritage groups: the theme for the 2017 event was "Made in Abingdon" – highlighting Abingdon's industrial past – and the programme included walks, talks and a very successful exhibition in the Community FreeSpace.
- The free walks at May Bank Holiday and over Heritage weekend were enjoyed by many participants of all ages.
- An important source of revenue for many years has been the autumn Craft Fair, hitherto run by a commercial organizer who paid rent to the Society. The previous organizer pulled out at the beginning of the year so the Friends decided to engage a local event organizer to help us run it ourselves. It was decided to focus on higher-quality, traditional crafts rather than gifts and proved very successful.
- During the latter part of the year we entered negotiations with the Regal Cinema company who were looking for a venue to show new-release films as part of their efforts to establish a cinema in Abingdon. The Society recognized that this was a good opportunity both to earn revenue in otherwise quiet periods and to bring new audiences in to the Buildings. The cinema operation started on 29 December and has proved enormously successful in both respects.

## **6 Financial Review**

### **6.1 Policy on reserves**

The Friends of Abingdon aims to broadly balance income and revenue expenditure in any year and usually needs about £15-20K in a current account to meet short term operational cash flow requirements. The balance of the investment funds (ideally around £35-45k) is available to cover the cost of major works of both a capital and revenue nature and any operational deficit incurred in a financial year.

The buildings owned by FoA are all listed and major works and repairs to them must be cleared well in advance with the appropriate authorities such as Historic England (formerly English Heritage) so major outgoings can normally be planned at least six months ahead.

## **6.2 Investment Policy**

The Society's aim is to achieve the best returns available on surplus funds by prudently investing them in the short, medium or long term within a level of risk acceptable to the EC so as to best meet the objects of the society and fulfil legal requirements.

For greater flexibility, a total return approach has been adopted on the total of medium term and long-term investments. Under this approach the form in which the investment return (eg. interest, capital growth, dividends) is received is not important. We aim to achieve an overall target of capital preservation with an investment return after expenses at least equal to inflation, as defined by the Consumer Price Index, plus 2% per annum over any five-year period

In accordance with that strategy, as at the end of 2016, £32,000, at original cost, of the Society's reserves was held in two investment funds: £12,000 in the COIF Charities Investment Fund and £20,000 in the COIF Charities Global Equity Income Fund. The market value of these funds was about £54k at April 2018.

The Investment sub-committee, chaired by the Treasurer, reviews the performance of the Funds, makes the investment decisions throughout the year within the parameters of the investment strategy, and reports periodically to the Executive. Although the funds have increased in market value, it was decided not to crystallise these gains at present.

## **7 Declaration**

The Trustees declare that they have approved the report above.

Signed:

Full name: Hester Hand  
Position: Secretary

Date: June 2018