

WELLS CITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE ARCHIVES AND CIVIC ASSETS COMMITTEE HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER AT WELLS TOWN HALL ON WEDNESDAY 21st April 2010

PRESENT: Cllr J North (Chairman)
Cllrs: Cllr H Siggs; T Robbins

IN ATTENDANCE: Town Clerk F White; Archivist: W Smith
2 representatives from Wells Museum Trust
2 members of the public

OPEN SESSION

The Chairman welcomed everyone and the meeting started with an open forum to discuss transfer of the City Council archives to the Museum. The Archivist spoke about the legal duty to provide public access to archives, and to store them properly. The duties are defined by the Public Records Act 1958, superseded by the 1967 revision and the Freedom of Information Act 2000; storage is regulated by BS545. He reported a visit to the Museum facility; a rough measurement and calculation indicate that the space will be suitable. The conditions are in every way superior to those in the current City Council facility, being light, clean, airy, spacious, and having a stable atmosphere, with modern air conditioner for use when required.

Mr Barry Lane and Mrs Jean Imray spoke on behalf of the Museum and there was a general exchange of information and ideas. Mrs Imray explained that a specialist archivist would be needed to provide continued care for the archives; they cannot be stored in the ordinary way. The following points of concern were identified:

- i. Ownership of archives after transfer: archives would normally be expected to remain under the ownership of the Council, on permanent loan to the holder (the Museum)
- ii. Public Access: There is general concern that access to the new public record office at Norton Fitzwarren will be very difficult from Wells, making it even more important to keep local archives within the City.

10/09A APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllrs: C Borastero (The Mayor); C Price.

10/10A DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest

10/11A MINUTES OF THE MEETING held on Wednesday 20th January 2010 were approved.

10/12A MATTERS ARISING

- i. Land Registration. The Town Clerk reported registration of the Councils properties is progressing; all the documentation has been researched by the Solicitor.
- ii. Heritage Week open day Saturday 11th September. The Archivist reported arrangements have been made to have the first floor of the Town Hall open to the public; the ground floor is already booked to the Antiques Fair on that day. The Town Hall Manager will be away but the Archivist has undertaken to prepare a display of material and will be present at the event. It was agreed it would be a good idea to allow tours of other parts of the Town Hall if sufficient stewards are available and if access can be arranged.

10/13A THE REPORT OF THE ARCHIVIST AND CHAMBERLAIN was received; he spoke briefly in answer to questions.

The Committee accepted his recommendation that the suggestion of transferring the City Council's Archives to the care of the Museum be pursued, with a view to completing the transfer before his retirement in June 2011

10/14A PROPOSED TRANSFER OF ARCHIVES

Councillor Siggs summarised the history of the gathering of the scattered City Council archives. He spoke about the benefits of a closer relationship with the Museum and improved public access to all the City's archives. However, he felt that the decision to move the Council's archives to the Museum must be taken very carefully, ensuring justification of the costs involved and a lasting result. Most local Councils send their records to be stored at the County Records office and there should be good reasons given for not doing so.

Councillor Siggs then outlined the following issues to be decided:

- i. How much of the collection is to be sent
- ii. How much of the comparatively modern records are to be sent
- iii. How are current records being stored and what type of archive is now being created?
- iv. Should ownership of transferred archives be retained by the Council?
- v. How will insurance cover be arranged?

Councillor Robbins agreed and shared his concern about the financial aspects; the Council would still require use of the archives for displays and exhibitions; this might be an opportunity to make the archives more accessible than they have been.

The Chairman then proposed that the Council draw up a framework of its requirements to be presented to the Museum; it was agreed the Clerk will prepare this in consultation with Councillor Siggs, to be circulated to Committee members and then to the Museum representatives, in order to take the process as far forward as possible in preparation for the next meeting.

The Museum representatives were invited to attend the next meeting.

10/15A APPOINTMENT OF ASSISTANT ARCHIVIST

The Chairman proposed that pursuant to the provision of the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted; agreed. The public left the room.

The job description and terms drafted by the Town Clerk and Archivist for the assistant archivist, were approved; the post to be for a fixed contract of 6 months. The Town Clerk has met with Dr Julia Wood who is willing to take up the task. It was agreed to appoint her, subject to contract.

10/16A ANY OTHER MATTERS OF REPORT

The Chairman thanked everyone for their support of the work of this Committee throughout the past year.

10/17A Date of next meeting: 7pm, Wednesday 14th July 2010.

The meeting closed at 7.30pm.