

# Abingdon Abbey Buildings Resilient Heritage Project

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## Executive Summary



6 February 2019  
Final Version

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## What were the aims of the Resilient Heritage Project?

In February 2018, aware of increasing pressures on its sustainability and limitations to its ambitions, the Friends of Abingdon Civic Society secured HLF Resilient Funding of £68,800.

The Resilient Heritage project sought to determine the key strategic issues in meeting our Society's long-term objectives of ensuring a more sustainable future for the Abbey Buildings and creating stronger and broader links with our community.

- The fabric of the Buildings needed to be brought back into good condition commensurate with their importance as scheduled monument and Grade 1 listed Buildings. At the moment parts are inaccessible and we felt it was important to remedy this serious deficiency.
- We have extensive archives and wanted to use these and the stories they tell to provide new and enhanced facilities for revived and growing audiences.

The Civic Society embarked on 5 interlinked pieces of work:

1. A **Governance Review and Plan** to review our present constitution and organisation in order to decide where this required strengthening and to provide a new governance model for the future. Our organisation needed to be more resilient and sustainable whatever the conclusions of the other 4 pieces of work but we felt that it was essential to take account of the skills and expertise we will need to embark on a major development project.
2. An **Architectural Options Appraisal** to analyse the heritage importance and condition of the historic fabric and hence to determine whether the Abbey Buildings could be sensitively repaired, upgraded and extended to accommodate a variety of uses in a viable way. Options were determined in tandem with the Business Development Plan so that the scope and cost of a development project could be assessed. This appraisal led to a preliminary development programme.
3. A **Business Development Plan** to review the Society's current activities, undertake a market and demand assessment and, using a creative iterative process with the Architectural Options Appraisal, to determine what combination of viable uses of the Abbey Buildings the Society should seek to develop to maximise their long-term sustainability. This process led to a preferred business and financial model for the future of the Abbey Buildings.
4. A **Stakeholder Engagement Plan** to determine ways in which the local community, users, volunteers and other stakeholders could be fully engaged in our aspirations for our Buildings and activities. We wanted to encourage a sense of ownership and future long-term engagement with the Abbey Buildings.

- 5. A **Funding Strategy** to develop a realistic plan to ensure that our proposals could be funded, and to determine funding options and likely sources including the required level of contributions from each. This would enable us to apply for any main Heritage Lottery Fund which might be available.

## Why did we decide to embark on this Resilient Heritage Project?

In developing the parameters of the Resilient Heritage Project, the Society has been mindful of the acute challenges that it faces in coming years as the costs of maintaining the outstanding Buildings and the risks of major failures increase, and our resources decline.

The Society has reviewed all the options that might possibly address this increasing risk to the Buildings and their enjoyment by people of the town. As a background to the Resilient Heritage Project, the Society identified the following high-level options for the site, and this analysis continues to be the background against which it has reviewed its own capability, its understanding of the interests and needs of the community, the potential basis of long term operation and sustainability and consequent necessary works to the Abbey Buildings that make up the component parts of the Resilient Heritage Project.

### 1. Do nothing

The Friends of Abingdon has a long and honourable history of caring for the Abbey Buildings and as a force for good stewardship of other heritage within in the town. But times change and the present Trustees are acutely aware of the increasing costs of stewardship of the buildings. At the same time, without investment and new activities and attractions, the Buildings are being overtaken by new and improved attractions elsewhere. With a building that does not meet the most basic standards of access and has few facilities, the Society faces a continuing and escalating struggle to generate the income to meet these costs. This dilemma is shown in stark terms when the potential income that can be dedicated to maintenance and care of the site is mapped against the potential rising cost of that care:



As the chart shows, the Society is already close to the point where it cannot meet any unforeseen maintenance cost (as happened in 2016) and if nothing is done, rising cost and declining income will place the Abbey Buildings at severe risk.

## **2. Relinquish responsibility for part or all of the site**

If the Society cannot invest, it will face the escalating risk that it cannot maintain and care for the site. It would have to consider whether it would have to step back from the responsibilities that it has taken on as a voluntary society since the 1940s by either:

### **a) Finding a new steward for the site**

The Society has considered whether it would be able to pass responsibility for the site to a larger organisation. It has had supportive and helpful discussions with English Heritage and the National Trust (who are happy to support the Society's own efforts to improve the site), but, understandably, neither is likely to agree, given their own policies and finances, to take on a potentially rapidly escalating liability.

### **b) Sell part of the site to meet increasing risks and liabilities**

The Society could consider the possibility of sale of the Curator's cottage so as to generate a capital sum either in the event of a major risk event (such as the roof needing major work or replacement) or a fund to finance ongoing maintenance. This would be a very sad option to have to consider further. The Trustees hold the Buildings in trust for the people of Abingdon and beyond, and for future generations. The cottage is an integral part of the Buildings, serving as theatre backstage accommodation and saving considerable cost by enabling the hosting of the Curator, and has within it some fine features including, it is believed, the oldest timber building beam in Abingdon. Were the Society to be forced to this option, a significant part of the site would permanently cease to be a community asset.

## **3 Buy neighbouring sites and bring them into income generating use**

The Abbey Buildings are cheek-by-jowl with other buildings: the neighbouring residential house that is attached to the Abbey Buildings and, beyond it, a disused and semi-derelict hotel of more recent construction. The old part of the Upper Reaches Hotel was the Abbey's corn mill and still contains the water wheel, next to the residential house mentioned above. There is a modern annex near the river. The carpark is on the site of the old town gas holder.

The Society has considered whether the Abbey Buildings would be a more sustainable proposition as part of a bigger site with diverse (and income-generating uses). In fact, the attached residential house would enable further development of the Society's activity, and with it its income, but it is understood that the current occupiers do not wish to sell the house; if it became available the Society would have to give careful consideration to additional costs and the attendant benefits of any purchase and renovation.

The hotel site beyond would be a large endeavour and might well be beyond the remit of the Society and a further source of significant risk. Whilst the Society would wish to engage with and influence any future developer of this site, it is unlikely that the Society itself could act alone to take on this challenge.

At this stage, therefore, the Society feels it must concentrate its efforts on the site already in its ownership and care.

#### **4 Invest now to repair, arrest decline and generate resources for long term care**

The 'do nothing' and 'disposal options' not only place the Abbey Buildings at severe risk, they also fail to respond to the widespread interest in, and enthusiasm for, the Buildings and the potential to bring them even more fully to life for people and for the community. Neither option would deliver the significant benefits that such heritage buildings offer for individuals and for the community.

It was in this light, aware of acute risks to the care of the site, and the interest and needs of the community that could be met by a renewed site, that the Society has focused the Resilient Heritage Project on the development and testing of options for the existing site. This approach safeguards its future as a community asset and enables the sharing of its fascinating heritage with larger and more diverse audiences and participants.

This determination of high level options set the direction of the Resilient Heritage Project: in business planning for long term sustainability, organisational capacity and structure, and exploration of the options for conservation, access and use of the historic buildings.

### **What process did we use to manage the Resilient Heritage Project?**

We conducted the Project between January 2018 and October 2018, led by our Chair Bryan Brown, and we established two interlinked groups of Trustees of the Civic Society. The first was an Officers' Group (including the Secretary and Treasurer) that dealt with the Governance Review and Plan, Business Development Plan and Stakeholder Engagement Plan. The second Enhancement Working Group (including the Curator and other active members of the Society) tackled the Architectural Options Appraisal which developed iteratively alongside the Business Development Plan. The Fundraising Strategy was commented on by members of both groups. The Chair and Vice-Chair sat on both groups.

To guide the development of our 5 strands of work, we appointed the following consultants:

- Lucy McCall, supported by David Clarke, both of DCA heritage specialist management consultants to produce the Governance Review and Plan, Business Development Plan, Stakeholder Engagement Plan and Funding Strategy;
- Niall Phillips and Clare Phillips of Purcell conservation architects, working with Greenwoods cost consultants to produce the Architectural Options Appraisal and preferred option cost plan;

- Katie Norgrove of Cultural Consulting Network to provide mentor support and evaluation of the Project.

Both groups met regularly, usually every two months. The Officers' Group worked primarily with Lucy McCall, with support from David, whilst the Enhancement Working Group worked with Niall and Clare with support from Lucy, David and Katie. Governance changes were approved by the Executive Council and then by the full membership of the Friends of Abingdon Civic Society at a Special General Meeting. Final reports were approved by the Executive Council.

## What were the results?

### Governance Review

The project has created two new Community Interest Organisations (CIOs), one for the Civic Society and one for the Buildings Trust . Previously there was one unincorporated body, broadly unchanged since 1953, which left Trustees personally liable and raised potential conflicts of interest and confusion of purpose.

The Objects of the 'Friends of Abingdon Civic Society' are:

*“For the benefit of the public to promote amongst the people of Abingdon-on-Thames and its neighbourhood a lively and practical interest in the civic life, heritage and environment of the town and its surroundings; to advance the preservation of all that is best worth retaining amongst its buildings and to encourage high standards of planning and development worthy of the town’s civic tradition and character.”*

Whilst the Objects of the 'Friends of Abingdon Abbey Buildings Trust' are:

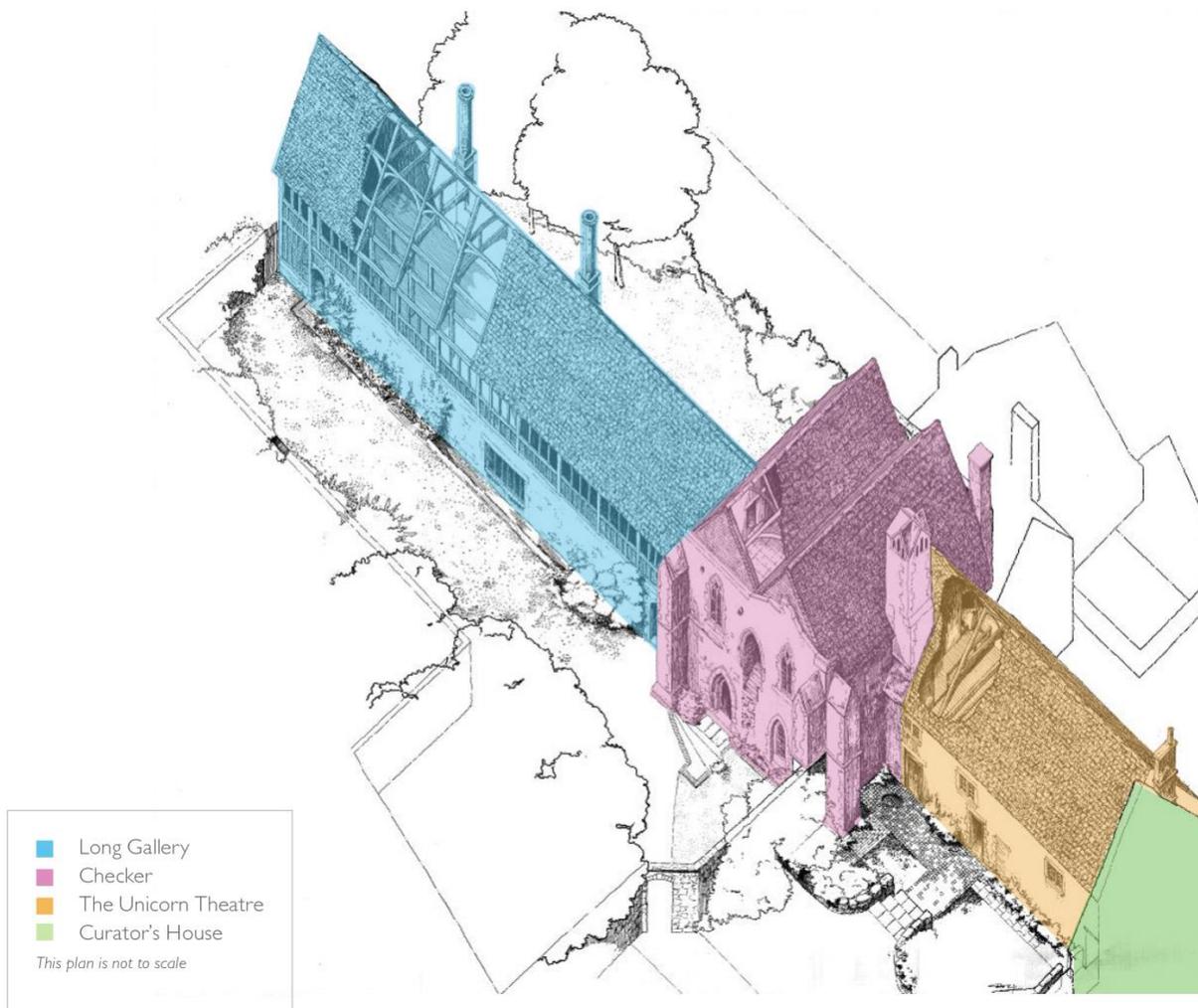
*“For the public benefit, to advance the heritage of Abingdon and its surroundings, primarily through the preservation, restoration, development and maintenance of the Abbey Buildings and its site, which are all listed and part of which is a scheduled ancient monument, and, if relevant, of other historic buildings and land in the town and its surroundings; to advance the education of the public by providing public access to these buildings and engaging the public in their heritage.”*

The registration of both CIOs should be concluded by the end of November 2018.

The governance review identified the key skills sets required for Trustees of the Buildings Trust, which has four founding Trustees, all of whom were Trustees of the predecessor Society, including its Chair and Vice-Chair. Together they provide skills and expertise required in many of the areas needed to develop and deliver a large scale enhancement project and operate the Abbey Buildings as a sustainable heritage attraction.

At October 2018, a further three new Trustees are being recruited, one covering the conservation architect specialism, one covering archaeology and one with visitor attraction/museum experience. All three are individuals known to the current Trustees. There remains an additional process of open recruitment to plug gaps in drama/theatrical venue management and fundraising.

## Summary Architectural Options Appraisal



The Options Appraisal first undertook a high level review of the condition of the Abbey Buildings (see above). This concluded that, thanks to the efforts of the Society, the condition of the complex is reasonable given its age, usage and heating arrangements. However, the Buildings could very quickly deteriorate if the roof and services are not attended to in the very near future resulting in the loss of significant medieval fabric.

### Constraints – for audiences

Works were undertaken to the Abbey Buildings when they were first acquired, including converting the Checker Hall into a 90-100 seat theatre, but very little work has been done to update them since the early 1970s. Although the Friends of Abingdon Civic Society has been able to maintain the main fabric, the lack of available investment means that the Abbey Buildings now have a **poor internal environment, little heating, no insulation, poor electrical services, limited sanitary facilities, and almost no general access for disabled people, with none at all to the principal spaces. Interpretation is limited** even though guided tours are excellent.

**These issues limit the potential market for users and restrict the use of the Abbey Buildings almost entirely to the warmer summer months.**

### **Constraints – heritage value**

The Buildings are Grade I listed and a Scheduled Ancient Monument, meaning that any proposed changes must be of exceptional quality in design and have a strong justification for change. Purcell's conservation statement and analysis emphasise the extent of the complexity of the historic alterations to the four constituent buildings, and therefore the potential to follow historic precedent in potential interventions.

### **Project aims – physical**

The proposed works have been designed to provide major improvements to the Abbey Buildings to make them fully accessible, water-tight and properly heated. They will also be fully interpreted, with much improved facilities for a greater number and diversity of visitors and users, and with new incomes underpinning long term care of the site. The outcomes will be to:

- Make all areas of the Buildings **accessible** by providing a lift and new stairs, creating level access to and between spaces where possible, and restoring covered entrances between internal spaces and to the exterior.
- **Improve facilities** by providing a catering kitchen, a dumb waiter to upper floors and new toilets.
- Provide a **new accessible entrance sequence**, revealing the historic Undercroft and enabling improved visitor welcome and a modest refreshment and retail offer.
- **Glaze** openings that are currently windowless.
- Provide **new electrical services** including underfloor heating to main areas of the Buildings which are currently unheated.
- Improve **heat retention** through insulation to roof spaces.
- Repair stone and plaster work.
- Undertake works in the grounds to **improve levels** and landscaping.
- Improve **internal and external signage**.
- Provide **new and accessible green room/dressing room facilities** to the theatre so as to enable wider use and create spaces that can double **as learning and activity space** for the Abbey Buildings.
- **Restore the historic interiors** of the Curator's cottage to provide spaces for income to be generated through rental.
- Create **new imaginative interpretation** to tell the stories of the Abbey Buildings.

### **Options**

Five architectural options were generated, debated by the Enhancement Working Group and presented to the Society, Historic England and the public.

All options included improving thermal performance in the Long Gallery and the Lower Gallery, with reinstatement of historic openings in the latter. All options included a new floor for the Undercroft to allow for services, and further

reinstatement of historic openings to create connections to the Unicorn (via the Vicar's cellar), the Lower Gallery and the Mill Stream Garden to the rear.

All also included a new stair and lift, although the arrangement of these varied, with most options involving placement in the Long Gallery and Lower Hall with resultant limitation in flexibility and loss of historic fabric.

All options assumed the same core visitor journey route from the Undercroft welcome area, through to the Lower Hall, up into the Checker, and then into the Long Gallery. All options included more toilets and most had better catering facilities to support events and venue hires.

Options 1, 3 and 4 included a new-build green room extension (which could also be used for meetings, groups etc.), allowing for more residential accommodation in the cottage. Option 5 offered minimal intervention working with the building fabric.

All options included refurbishment of the Unicorn Theatre, including a new door through a historic opening, a new floor and seating enabling disabled access to the front rows, and a new control room. Some options allowed for a new-build lobby to enable a better separation of uses at the two ends of the building range so that a performance and a wedding could occur at the same time.

Options 2, 3 and 4 were costed, as were the costs of phasing.

### **Preferred Option**

The main differences in options centred on the location of the stair and lift and inclusion, or not, of the new-build green room extension. The preferred option 4 was the only option with the stair and lift in an internal enclosure which is better not only in terms of acoustics and fire separation but also in terms of impact: it will not have such an effect on the Long Gallery visually and structurally, and nor will it impede its flexible use. Option 4 also included the new-build elements seen as critical for sustainable operations.

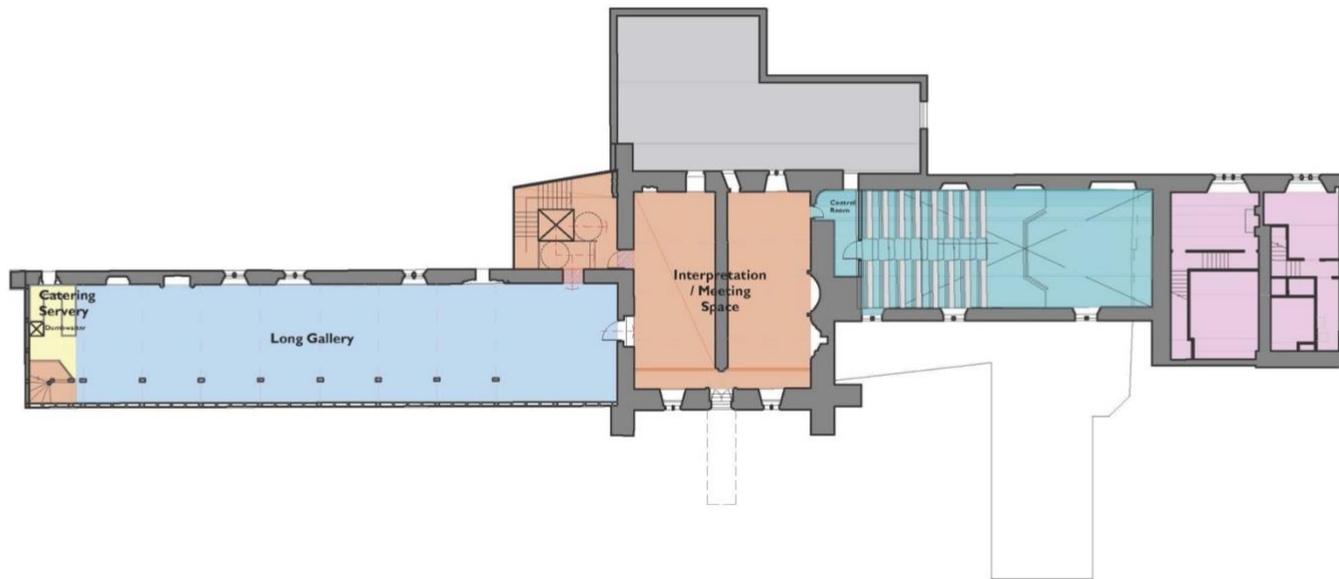
## Preferred Option Proposed Ground Floor



### Key

- Adjacent Property
- Services and Back of House
- Public Circulation / WCs
- Theatre
- Green Room
- Residential
- Weddings and Events
- Demolitions
- Infill
- Stage Extension

Preferred Option First Floor





## Business Development Plan

The business development plan takes as its starting point the Society's objective to bring the Abbey Buildings and their heritage back into good condition and to use them to tell the unique story of the Abbey and the lives and community it shaped. This objective has been shaped by the high level options set out in pages 4–6 above.

## Conclusions of the Market Appraisal and Comparator Analysis

The Abbey already enjoys a significant number of visits:

Theatre, music and film	27,000
Festivals and events	3,000
Heritage drop in visits	2,200
Hires	1,200
Total	33,400

The potential to grow all of these markets is strong provided that the weaknesses highlighted by the Architectural Options Appraisal are addressed. Abingdon offers a rich heritage experience, but only a limited number of heritage buildings in the town are open to the public. The local and regional markets show a strong propensity to engage in arts and heritage and attendance at arts and heritage destinations is above average. This market, together with the heritage tourism market for which Oxford is a significant destination, provide an extensive pool of potential audiences from which to draw heritage visits. The project also has the potential to act as a focus for supporting the visitor economy within Abingdon, generating secondary spend in existing cafes, shops and bars and being part of the mix which will draw new tourism related business to the town.

The challenge will be a marketing one. The specialist interest market, including historical, architectural and archaeological groups, and the broader market of students, already visit the Abbey Buildings in significant numbers. With improvements to the offer and greater marketing capacity, it will be possible to grow visits from these markets. With 34 schools in Abingdon and 350 schools in Oxfordshire, success in developing schools visits will be mainly about providing an offer that meets the requirements of the curriculum and having sufficient staffing capacity to build relationships with schools and provide appropriate on-site expertise.

Direct comparators with the Abbey Buildings are difficult as it is so distinctive - a range of medieval buildings, once part of a very large abbey, but with no remaining core abbey buildings, not even ruins. Another very particular feature is the conversion of the one-time exchequer building to a theatre and cinema. Its central town location with substantial gardens also distinguishes it from other heritage attractions of similar origin. Comparisons with medieval buildings in town centres offering a visitor experience were looked at. They provided some guidance on pricing, which for most is around £6 for an adult.

## Project Aims – Business Case

The business case was developed in tandem with the Architectural Options Appraisal with a view to addressing the key current constraints and opportunities described above coherently and efficiently.

There is a strong case to believe that if we remedied the barriers and limitations that our Buildings currently impose (the preferred option in the Architectural Options Appraisal), and enriched our offer to our various existing markets, we would benefit very significantly. The site has great untapped potential. Therefore the business development aims for:

- Better welcoming, engaging and serving a larger and wider audience for our fascinating heritage.
- Meeting visitor needs through improved welcome, and generating ancillary income from their interests, for instance in refreshment and merchandise sales.
- Developing our capacity to host and provide learning and activity about the heritage, for formal education groups and for wider, informal learning, audiences.
- Building on the success and community support for our theatre by improving accessibility and flexibility of use.
- Improving the condition and facilities of our spaces for hire, including extending use year round.
- Providing modest additional space to host key improvements to access, visitor flow, trading facilities and space for activity, with consequent income from visits and from hires of spaces.

### **The new business model**

The financial appraisal has been developed on the assumption that a capital redevelopment project will go ahead in 2020/21 with reopening in 2022/21. Income and expenditure has been projected until 2031/32.

Currently, the operation generates good levels of income (of the order of £70,000 per annum), but this income is constrained by the challenges of condition, utility and accessibility presented by the Buildings. With the preferred option identified in pages 4–6 above, it will be possible to grow a range of incomes.

Key **income** change assumptions are:

#### **1. Grants, donors, supporters, members and fundraising**

Aside from the significant capital funding requirement, some funders will in addition, or by preference, contribute to revenue style costs such as learning, engagement and activities. The Society will be eligible for Gift Aid tax relief on donations by UK tax payers, as well as on admission income where the tax payer includes a voluntary donation. Good current results in this area are forecast to be maintained, with some very modest forecast of growth.

#### **2. Admissions income**

The Abbey Buildings will charge for admission in the future. Visitor numbers will be around 10,000 at opening and over the 10 year forecast rise to 12,000. Basic single visit adult admission price will be £4.95 with a range of concessions, season tickets and family/group tickets of differing values. Therefore admissions should generate valuable new income for the operation.

#### **3. Theatre and Cinema income**

The recent introduction of cinema and the continuing community enthusiasm for theatre will continue to provide valuable income for the operation, with modest growth encouraged by the improved facilities,

access and environmental conditions achieved by the works.

#### **4. Trading activity – event hire, major events, cafe and merchandise sales**

Income from hires will be a significant area of growth as the potential for year-round hire can be realized and with much better ancillary spaces on offer. The major events such as the Craft Fair and Beer Festival will continue, and their growth and potential new events will contribute significantly to future income. The plans take a cautious approach to catering and merchandise sales, in line with expectations of visitor numbers and footfall, and the plans do not propose to sustain a full café offer, so the assumptions are based on a reception desk which takes admission monies, issues tickets and provides information and orientation, as well as taking limited range shop sales and a limited range of refreshments.

#### **5. Residential accommodation**

The Abbey Buildings include the residential premises currently divided between the accommodation provided for the Curator and the green room and dressing rooms serving, albeit not very effectively, the theatre. If the improvement and extension of the theatre-related accommodation can be achieved as set out in the Architectural Options Appraisal, the part of the building recouped by the proposed new green room extension can be converted to a lettable one-bedroom apartment.

The remainder of the building could be fitted out to enable letting as self-contained residential accommodation, either leased to someone to live in, or as one or possibly two self-catered holiday apartments. The final decisions on the strategy for these spaces will be made with commercial advice in light of market conditions as the project goes forward.

Key **expenditure** assumptions are:

##### **1. Staffing and volunteering**

Development plans will necessitate the need to move from the current almost wholly volunteer resourced structure (with the exception of the Curator) to a hybrid model in which volunteer commitment is grown alongside a core of the operation supported by a paid staff of 3.3 FTE posts, including the current Curator post and two new posts of a Community Engagement and Volunteering Officer and Project/Society Administrator/Coordinator funded by grants for a 5 year period and then continuing after that at slightly reduced hours.

##### **2. Premises and operating costs**

Our assumptions for the cost of running the developed Buildings are based on the outline design scheme, current operating costs and benchmark costs of running similar heritage sites. At this stage we have made generous cost allowances for the annualised cost of managing and maintaining the Buildings. Allowances are also made for increased operating and organisational costs for a busier site.

### **Projected financial position**

The forecast outcome for the new operation shows it generating consistent surpluses in the order of £25,000 on a turnover of around £200,000 per annum. In the next stage, the new CIO and the project team will continue to

develop the detailed operational planning for the site and to test assumptions in this Business Plan as we move toward funding applications and the more detailed planning of the project.

## **Stakeholder Engagement Plan**

Abingdon Abbey Buildings are a much loved and well-used community asset. The Society already engages with the local community in a variety of ways. Since the 1950s, the Unicorn Theatre has been a venue for amateur dramatics and music. Over the last year, our partner Regal Cinema, Evesham, has brought back cinema to the town after a gap of 30 years. Over recent years, the Abbey Buildings have also been the venue for an increasing number of festivals and events. Theatre, music and film together now bring audiences of around 27,000 a year plus the drama groups and musicians themselves, festivals and events bring in around 3,000, plus associated stallholders, performers etc and other hires bring in around 1,200.

The Abbey Buildings are also a hire venue, particularly for weddings and celebrations, whose participants and guests constitute a further group of people in the local community for whom the Abbey Buildings may be significant.

Consulting with our local community to ensure that the project enhances and extends our provision for all existing and potential local users and audiences is fundamental to our stakeholder engagement.

Abingdon Abbey Buildings also welcome heritage visitors; open afternoons, Wednesdays to Sundays from May to September, for drop-in visits and to pre-booked group visits year round. Last year around 2,200 people visited the Abbey Buildings.

A stakeholder analysis allowed the Society to focus its communication efforts on internal and external stakeholders.

### **Internal stakeholders**

The Friends of Abingdon – Trustees, President and Vice-Presidents, members and specialists – have been engaged through the two groups established as part of the Resilient Heritage Project, and through meetings with the wider Trustee group and our members.

Our employee, the Curator, has been integral to the process as a core member of both groups, and he has ensured that our occupiers and user groups have been consulted on our project proposals. The Chair of the Society has led engagement with key user groups including Abingdon Drama Club, Studio Theatre Club, the Regal Cinema and Music at the Unicorn.

### **External stakeholders**

During 2018, we have collected signatures in support of our plans from over 1300 people who have visited the Buildings.

We kickstarted our engagement with external stakeholders through Heritage Weekend 2018 (7–9 September). This was a special occasion, when our stakeholders had an opportunity to hear about our plans so far and tell us what they think.

Niall Phillips of Purcell presented to two invited audiences, one made up of our institutional stakeholders and the other of a wider group of local people and organisations; there were almost 100 attendees across the two presentations. We produced an exhibition of our plans, giving all visitors an opportunity to see how they have developed so far and inviting their comments. This exhibition will continue to be on show in the Long Gallery to all visitors to the Abbey Buildings.

We also undertook our first visitor survey to find out the demographics of our visitors and their motivations which revealed that we attracted many families with young children and cross generational small adult groups without children. Most visitors were local but there were visitors from Europe and the USA.

Feedback was overwhelmingly positive. There has been a lot of favourable press coverage including the Abingdon Herald and ITV regional news.

### **Forthcoming engagement**

We intend to focus our engagement on key institutional stakeholders, setting up individual-face-to-face meetings, as an in-principle commitment from them to support our project will be essential in unlocking wider support.

We will also focus on key audience groups such as community groups, families and schools through existing and new partners to help develop our plans for expanded activities.

# Fundraising Strategy

## The Case for Investment: Key Messages for the Fundraising Campaign

### 1. Distinctiveness

The history of Abingdon is closely interconnected with the history of its Abbey—a rare medieval survival in the centre of a historic town and at the heart of its community;. This makes the Abbey Buildings of interest not only to historians, architects and archaeologists, and heritage visitors, but to everyone who is part of, or has links with, Abingdon’s communities. The Abbey Buildings are, at one and the same time, a precious heritage asset with many stories to tell and a highly distinctive community resource, home to a wide range of arts and leisure activities.

### 2. A transformational project

The Project will reveal the beauty and significance of the Abbey Buildings to all visitors and vividly tell the stories of the Abbey and of Abingdon: stories of wealth and influence, turbulent upheaval, conflict and dissent, as well, of course, as a peaceful and contemplative existence. Crucially, the project will make the Abbey Buildings accessible to all, ensuring that all visitors and users can benefit from all that the Buildings have to offer; experience the heritage, engage with the arts and simply enjoy the glorious environment. All the major improvements will make the Abbey Buildings a still more valued resource for community events and activities, and as a stage for key life-cycle events.

### 3 Need for the project evidenced by consultation

The already high level of use of the Abbey Buildings, even with all the drawbacks that the project will overcome, makes it clear that Abingdon’s communities need the resources that the Abbey Buildings provide. But in their current condition with poor access, poor circulation, ageing and limited facilities, and no proper heating, the potential of Abbey Buildings is constrained and some people are precluded from enjoying all they have to offer. We have already gathered over 1300 signatures in less than 6 months in support of our project.

We do not underestimate the challenge ahead in securing funding to realise our ambitions.

### Costs and fundraising target

The cost of delivering the project have been estimated by quantity surveyors and the Project team to be up to £4.5m. This includes construction costs and professional fees, interpretation and fit-out, and significant provision for activity and engagement.

Accordingly, the fundraising target is £4.5m.

### Summary potential sources of support towards fundraising target

We have researched sources of funding and potential contributions which are summarised below:

Source	Amount £
National Lottery Heritage Fund	cf3.1m
Local authority	10-15% of overall fundraising target

OxLEP	10-15% of overall fundraising target
Trusts and Foundations	4-6% of overall fundraising target
Community, individual and corporate	3-5% of overall fundraising target
<b>Total funding</b>	<b>c£4.5m</b>

### **How the fundraising campaign will be led and managed**

The newly formed Buildings Trust will lead the fundraising campaign. The Trust's four founding Trustees – Bryan Brown, Patricia Bryden, Peter Clarke and Kevin Senior – were all Trustees of the predecessor Society. The new Trust will benefit from these four Trustees' collective longstanding commitment to Abingdon, its heritage and communities, their established relationships with stakeholders, and their skills and expertise in many of the areas required to develop and deliver a large-scale capital project to enhance these precious heritage buildings.

As outlined in the Governance Plan, the founding Trustees will recruit additional Trustees to work alongside them to achieve the fundraising target, to manage the delivery of the Enhancement Project and operate the Abbey Buildings once the Enhancement Project has been delivered.

The Trust will also develop a Patron's Board to lead the campaign to raise funds from individual donors. The Patron's Board will be chaired by the Deputy County Lieutenant, previously a Vice President of the Friends of Abingdon.

The Trustees will require support to progress the fundraising campaign. To address this need, the Trustees intend to recruit a Capital Campaign Coordinator to assist with the wide range of tasks required to deliver a successful campaign.

## Conclusion

The Resilient Heritage Project has resulted in a great deal of change for the Society in a relatively short time period. It is to the Society's credit that it recognised the need for that change and embarked on the project with the interests of the Abbey Buildings as its paramount concern.

Resilient Heritage funding has enabled the Society to create a renewed and clear sense of vision and direction. To support its vision the Society now has:

- Embarked on a new governance structure and the recruitment of new Trustees to face future challenges
- Assessed its high level strategic options and concluded that the only viable option is to invest now to arrest decline, showcase the splendid Buildings properly and meet audience demand.
- Through a high quality creative and iterative process, the Trust has generated a preferred architectural option for investment which will enable the aims of the business plan to be realized. The scoped enhancement project has been costed.
- Understood the current and future market and audiences for the Buildings, their sustainable uses and earned income potential, with soundly researched projections for income and expenditure.
- Stepped up its stakeholder engagement to inform and excite people about the enhancement project.
- Produced a fundraising strategy which has identified sources of funding and the organizational actions needed to deliver it.

One Trustees described completion of the Resilient Heritage Project as “the end of the beginning”.

The momentum and focus created by the Resilient Heritage Funding Project has made the Society more confident in its ability to move forward in the right way, but at the same time has heightened its awareness of the risk to the Buildings if the Trust were not to act with determination and creativity.

Securing the right Trustees with those qualities and the capacity to fundraise for the enhancement project will be the most immediate next challenge.

## Appendices

Available on request, at the Society's discretion are:

- Governance Review
- Summary Architectural Options Appraisal
- Business Development Plan
- Stakeholder Engagement Plan
- Fundraising Plan

Please email [enquiries@friendsofabingdon.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@friendsofabingdon.org.uk)