

**Extract of General Purposes Committee: Minutes**

**Date:** Tuesday, 15th September 2015

**Time:** 10.00a.m. – 1.20p.m.

**Present:** Councillors Bailey, Bullen, Cearns, Count (Chairman), Hickford, Hipkin, Jenkins, Kavanagh (substituting for Councillor Walsh), McGuire (Vice-Chairman), Nethsingha, Orgee, Reeve, Rouse (substituting for Councillor Criswell), Schumann (substituting for Councillor Brown), Shuter (substituting for Councillor Bates), Tew and Whitehead

**Apologies:** Councillors Bates, D Brown, Criswell and Walsh

**Also in**

**Attendance:** Councillors Harford and Leeke

**148. LESS THAN BEST CONSIDERATION DISPOSAL –  
CROMWELL MUSEUM BUILDING, HUNTINGDON**

The Committee received a report detailing options for dealing with the Cromwell Museum. Members were reminded that the withdrawal of County Council funding for the Museum was one of the Council's business plan savings. The Council owned the freehold for this small 12<sup>th</sup> Century Grade II building. Huntingdon Town Council had approached the Council with a proposal that it acquire the freehold of the building, that it become responsible for the structure of the asset, that the Museum Trust become responsible for the internal condition of the asset, and that the Town Council allow the Trust to continue to operate the building as a museum devoted to the life of Oliver Cromwell. It was noted that a proposal to transfer the freehold for a peppercorn payment would require approval from General Purposes Committee to a less than best consideration.

The Chairman reported that Local Member, Councillor Peter Brown, was fully supportive of this proposal.

During discussion, members made the following comments:

- queried why the Town Council would not accept a 999 year lease. The CFO reported that the Town Clerk who had been unable to attend the meeting had confirmed that it was Town Council policy to only accept an asset with a freehold rather than a lease. Any transfer would still be subject to a covenant restricting the use of the property.
- queried why the Town Council was only prepared to accept the freehold. There was real concern that the proposal did not safeguard the future of the Museum. The Trust had not yet been established and the Museum had not received its re-accreditation. It was felt that the County Council should only be paying the Town Council a contribution of £5,000 towards immediate maintenance work rather than £20,000. The value of the building at £45,000 was also queried and there was

concern that the Council was giving away £1,250 in income rights as well as providing archive storage at nil rent. There was particular concern that there was nothing to stop the Town Council changing the venue to a cultural asset resulting in the need for the Council to remove its collection.

- queried whether the covenant safeguard could be breached. It was noted that it was possible to take legal action to enforce a covenant but there were risks. It was easier to take action in relation to forgoing on a lease.
- reported that Cabinet had wanted to dispose of the Museum. There was a need to avoid a silo mentality in order to allow one public authority to transfer an asset to another public authority for the benefit of local people. It was noted that the Town Council was trying to acquire different properties for storage, which would remove the need for the County Council to provide archive storage. In response, a former member of Cabinet reported that there had been no discussion about giving the Town Council the freehold.
- queried whether the Council would still have to pay maintenance costs if it agreed a leasehold. It was noted that a long lease of over 99 years would result in maintenance obligations passing to the Town Council. In response to a query, it was also noted that an incentive package had been offered to the Town Council with a long lease.
- reminded the Committee that the Town Council was not prepared to accept a leasehold. It was felt that the Council should not test the Town Council further as it could lose patience. It was a good arrangement for the use of the building in order to provide a benefit to the people of Huntingdon and beyond.
- expressed concern that if the Town Council refused to take on the leasehold it could result in the closure of the Museum.
- queried the costs involved in negotiating access rights with the purchaser of the former probation offices. It was noted that the costs related solely to time at the moment but there could be legal costs in the future.

Given the concerns about guaranteeing the Museum's future, Councillor Bailey proposed an amendment, seconded by Councillor Schumann, to remove "freehold" and add "999 leasehold" and add at the end "in consultation with the Chairman of General Purposes Committee". On being put to the vote the amendment was carried.

It was resolved to:

approve a transfer of a 999 leasehold of the Cromwell Museum building to Huntingdon Town Council at less than best consideration for continued use as a public museum on detailed terms agreed by the Head of Strategic Assets in consultation with the Chairman of General Purposes Committee.