

BARNSTAPLE TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of Community Development Committee

Thursday 23rd November 2023 at 7.00 pm

The Guildhall, Butcher's Row, Barnstaple

Present: Councillors:

V Elkins, L York, J Coates (Vice-Chair), I Williams, G Kennedy and C Horrell.

Also in attendance:

M Sanders, Assistant Town Clerk (Community)

L Scarrott, Heritage and Cultural Manager

Sadie Brown, Heritage Assistant

E McCann, Community Developer

Members of the Public: 0

Apologies for absence:

J Hunt, M Lovering (Chair), T Clarkson, Fowler, C Brown, L Dawson and K Stevenson.

21 To receive and approve apologies for absence.

Apologies and reasons for absence were received and approved (NC).

22 To receive any dispensations and disclosable pecuniary or other interests.

Cllr L York as a member of North Devon Council District Council, has a dispensation under SO66 to discuss and vote on any item on the agenda unless the item refers to a financial or legal agreement or dispute between the two authorities.

23 Minutes of the last meeting

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Community Development Committee Meeting held on 7th September 2023, are approved as a correct record and be signed by the Chairperson (NC).

24 Budget Monitoring Report

Cllr York questioned the overspend identified in the budget line known as Strategic Community Fund. The Clerk explained that was to ensure there was enough in the budget to cover strategic grants committed to in the previous financial year 2022/23 and would be covered by earmarked reserves.

The budget monitoring report was considered and noted (NC).

25 To receive and consider the Heritage Team update.

The committee received the following report from Lucy Scarrott the Heritage and Cultural Manager for Barnstaple Town Council.

Tours

Since the last report in September, we have had 3 private tours booked for the Guildhall. Totalling 39 visitors to the building.

Guildhall Private Bookings

In October the Guildhall was host to the University of Bolton Graduation Ceremonies, which was a wonderful use of the space. The organiser gave us the following testimonial, which we plan to add to the website to encourage more bookings and promote the Guildhall as a venue for these types of events.

'The Guildhall provided a wonderful historical venue in which to hold the graduation ceremonies for our students. The setting managed to be both elegant and intimate, enabling the events to have the formality they require, while providing a reflexed family atmosphere. The staff couldn't have been more helpful in assisting us to ensure our graduates, their families and friends, had a wonderful experience.'

In November the Guildhall was then also host to the Petroc HE Graduation receptions. In October there was also a wedding hosted in the Guildhall. This was a one-off booking as due to the potential building works which may take place. It is not proposed to offer the Guildhall as a wedding venue at the moment. We still have the licences and will consider options for offering the Guildhall as a wedding venue in the future, once all works have been completed.

An informal talk was held in the Guildhall in November, organised by NDC and part of their cultural plan. An exhibition was taking place in the Corn Store, and the artist came to discuss his works in honour of biosphere day in the Guildhall which has proven to be a good setting for conference and talks.

Children's Free Activities:

In October half-term we hosted a spooky storytelling session in partnership with the library in the Mayor's Parlour. It was a free session but attendees were encouraged to book beforehand using the Eventbrite platform.

We ran two half an hour sessions, with 20 tickets available for each. On the day we had a total of 36 in attendance, and we the feedback was all positive, with all wanting this offered in the Guildhall again. Worth considering more storytelling sessions in the future, perhaps seasonally themed.

We also held the usual free craft sessions over two days. We changed the timings from 10am-3pm to 11am-2pm, which proved to be a success and didn't effect numbers. 130 people attended on the first day and 54 on the second, this difference in numbers is possibly due to the weather, also on the first day no other events were going on in town. Last year, the Halloween Crafts were similarly well attended and it is proving to be one of our most popular sessions.

School's Programme:

Newport school visited in November with 64 children to come and explore the Guildhall. It was a full day visit, and saw them performing the mock trials.

We have another potential visit at the end of the month.

Both of these visits have come from schools we have worked with before, showing we are getting repeat bookings now and are building up a base of schools who use our services.

We are considering starting to charge for these visits, as was always the initial plan, it would be a small fee – either per child or a total cost – which would cover the cost of materials for the sessions.

Future Events:

Christmas Fair – Santa's Grotto at the Guildhall. Based on last year this should prove a popular event. Santa's gifts this year are childrens' christmas books wrapped with a candy cane.

Railway Exhibition: this will be held 16th-20th December, a Saturday through to Wednesday, including Sunday, 10am-2pm.

We will have a working model of Barnstaple Town Station, Pilton Yard and the Lynton station and are working with several organisations for this event.

We will have a children's craft event, themed on the Polar Express, in the Shambles at the same time.

Visitor Numbers:

Our unofficial target for the Guildhall this year was to reach 3,000 visitors, as of the beginning of November we have exceeded this number – on the 10th November our total was 3,079 averaging 279 visitors a month.

By the end of the year, due to the number of events planned, we should reach 3,500 to 4,000 visitors in total.

These figures will provide a good benchmark for us moving forward, as this wasn't tracked before; it'll give us a good idea about how many people we can bring into the Guildhall over the course of a year.

Implications:

Financial:

Schools programme – in the new year, possibly starting to charge for the school bookings.

Railway Exhibition:

Most of the remaining Heritage Events budget for the year will be put towards this exhibition.

Donation boxes

It has been suggested that we have a Heritage Donation Box and a Mayor's Charity box at the exhibition. This will help contribute to future events and will hopefully raise some more money for the Mayor's Charities.

Resident / Access / Equalities

Access restricted – during the week before and of the Railway exhibition access to the Guildhall will be restricted as the space will be needed to set up for the event. As such the planned meetings have been moved to alternative locations.

RESOLVED: to note the report, and also congratulate and thank the Heritage Team for their hard work (NC).

26 To receive and consider the Community Development update.

The committee received the following written report by Rosie Mahoney, community developer for Barnstaple Town Council.

Introduction

Since the last Community Development Committee, the BTC Community Developers have been busy meeting residents, understanding what they are doing, and what feelings they have about Barnstaple.

We have also been continuing to build on our relationships with community groups and wider organisations. Petroc is one of these groups, with discussions on potential future projects as well as having more sessions with the Politics students.

We have been having initial discussions with the new members of staff employed by North Devon Council as part of the Cultural Development Fund, making sure that BTC are actively being involved and consulted and that we are keeping lines of communication as open as possible.

Report

Community Café and Elder Day

The monthly sessions at the Shambles continue to be popular, with between 10-20 people attending each month. We are continuing to invite guest groups/ organisations to attend, currently the TAW U3A are attending each month which has been lovely to see.

In October we had Devon Wildlife Trust attend, with people coming in specifically to meet them. This means that our advertising methods are working, although we are aware we need to ensure we are getting the message out there more and highlighting that Town Councillors are attending.

The Community Café continues to be part of Elder Day, and we are seeing more people come through because of this. We have had some people ask for soup, and from December we will be able to serve soup!

Youth Services Network

The Youth Services Network is expanding with a variety of members. We are having some really encouraging conversations about funding bids to bring more youth-related activities to the centre of Barnstaple with multiple partner organisations.

It has proved a beneficial group so far due to the networking opportunities it provides. Service providers have been able to access private rooms to see their clients in, for one example. The joined-up discussions on what our young people are saying is enabling organisations to link together and create better opportunities for the young people of this area.

Safe Places Network

We have sent membership forms to those who showed initial interest in the scheme and received two responses. We are planning to go and speak with local businesses to discuss the scheme to try and get more places signed up.

The committee also received the following report from Ella McCann, Community Developer for Barnstaple Town Council.

Introduction:

Since the move of the Community Developer assigned to One Barnstaple from NDVS to BTC, work has continued to focus on supporting OB members to communicate, connect and collaborate as a place-based team working for the benefit of the town and community. Work on the Community Action Plan ([link to appendix 1](#))

The networks (see appendix 2) are becoming better connected and more thought of as an asset in the bigger picture through platforms such as Barnstaple Regeneration Board and the Flourishing Barnstaple Project (Cultural Development Fund).

Projects and actions come through each network, making best use of partnership and collaboration opportunities and building the capacity and resilience of groups, organisations and services.

Report:

Wellbeing Wednesdays and Elder Days

Weekly Café sessions at Barnstaple Library continue to grow and evolve. With a Rota of regular community organisation/service/group guests each week, it connects in to the monthly BTC Community Café sessions and forms a solid part of Elder Day.

Continuation of Chair Yoga sessions in the Library on Wednesday Mornings, addition of free soup on occasional Wednesdays (12 – 1pm provided by Barnstaple Library), and the regular Wednesday Wanderers group which runs from the library all come together with the Wellbeing Café to provide a day each week of opportunities for our community members. An older people's network is about to launch in

December through the Wellbeing Wednesday Cafe.

Food for Thought Project

We are continuing to work with Space Youth Services and Devon Community Foundation on "Food for Thought" which now moves into Phase 2 providing a year of research funding to grow on the ideas and activity from phase 1. We celebrated this in The Corn Store on Friday 27th October with 40 people in attendance.

Children and Families

With the success of the Youth Network, an opportunity has arisen for a Children and Families network to be explored. This is following feedback from One Barnstaple Members that those working withing domestic abuse, young children and families' projects and other supporting services would benefit from the opportunity to connect and collaborate.

With a new Community IDVA joining the NDADA team, conversations are taking place to establish if they would have capacity to begin facilitating this network.

Reporting and Communicating through the networks.

Introducing a summary sheet for each Network to complete at sessions will enable information to be shared between members of One Barnstaple and the wider community. Hopefully, these summary sheets will soon be available on the One Barnstaple website. These will also be able to collect system requests which can be fed back up to One Northern Devon and strategic leads and encourage the flow of communication across all levels (see appendix 3).

RESOLVED: to note the two reports and thank the community developers for their hard work (NC).

27 Dodderidge Room Fireplace.

The committee received the following report from Sadie Brown the Heritage Assistant for Barnstaple Town Council.

Introduction:

The Barnstaple Town Council Heritage team has been researching the Dodderidge Fireplace. It is a debated topic as to the age and provenance of this artefact. This report proposes that professionals are brought in to assess the Fireplace to determine the age and therefore the context of this item.

Recommendations:

Due to the specialist nature of the work only one supplier has been found who can undertake the work:

Supplier	Estimate
A	£3,300

Costs are broken down as such:

Analysis and report on the Fire Surround	£1,900
Paint sample analysis	£500
Comparative furnishing research	£900

All prices are exclusive of VAT.

The three subdivisions of the overall price would be paid to three separate consultants.

Supplier A, the main consultant, has conducted a preliminary overview of the Fireplace and recommended paint analysis and comparative furnishing research to complement their analysis and report (Appendix One).

Reason for Recommendation:

Correct knowledge about the items owned by Barnstaple Town Council is important for insurance, conservation, and care purposes. Complete knowledge about the age of the Fireplace would help contextualise the item and provide valuable insight into its provenance and significance. Tours offered for the Guildhall would benefit greatly with more information about this item. Public knowledge about this item would be augmented and supported with professional analysis. The age of items influences their valuation and insurance costs. It is important to know as much as we can about the items that Barnstaple Town Council holds for them to be properly valued and insured.

Report:

An initial report has been received by the proposed supplier, extracts of which can be seen at Appendix One below. The Dodderidge Fireplace is one of the main attractions within the Guildhall. Tours of the Dodderidge Room concentrate on the Fireplace as the centrepiece and most eye-catching feature.

It is linked to much of the history of Barnstaple and to other items with Barnstaple Town Council's collection. Having a full report with graphics and photographs will provide a valuable resource for current and future records. Paint analysis should provide substantial evidence for accurate dating of the item. Research into comparative furnishings around North Devon (and wider) would contextualise the Fireplace and may provide insight into the wider environment of its provenance and carving style. Supplier A has been recommended by Historic England as an international expert on historic woodwork and able to provide detailed assessments of this artefact. Supplier A has strong links with the consultants that would provide the paint analysis and comparative furnishing research.

Implications:

Financial

Financial Regulations requires expenditure in excess of £3,000 to be

approved by the appropriate committee.

Legal

To accurately insure the Fireplace, a detailed assessment of its provenance is required, in order to establish an accurate valuation.

(Appendix One)

The Guildhall, Barnstaple

Fire Surround

Brief report on my visit

“Jacobean” work seems to have been a favourite to be copied in the 19th century so one is always sceptical regarding the authenticity of carving of this style. In addition, the repetitive motifs in low relief as well as the poor modelling of human features and clothing are easy to copy so it is difficult to tell what is crude looking because it is original or what has been copied by a not very good carver at a later date. Judging the authenticity by style needs to be backed up with other examples of detail features.

The aspects that I shall be looking at are techniques of carving and joinery and details finish to the back of timbers and evidence of later interventions;

1. Traces of paint lodged in the carving.
 2. Setting out lines for carving etc
 3. Single line details in the carving
 4. The surface of the timber both back and front
 5. Extent of easily identifiable later interventions
 6. Punch marks used to give texture to the carving.
1. Paint

Throughout the carved surface there are signs of paint lodged in crevices in the carving. This is exactly what I have seen in many other instances where paint has been removed but not with the meticulous care that would be used today.

Often one is grateful for the remains that survive as they may be the only evidence of past polychromatic schemes of great interest. Other remains of old paint can be found down the vertical edges of panels which have shrunk on their width revealing the thick build up that occurs in internal corners of joinery.

2. Scribe lines

Most old (pre-1700) joinery was set out with sharp scribes before pencils became ubiquitous. Many scribe marks can be seen on the fire surround, and it is most unlikely that 19th century copyists would have

gone this far to fake the date.

3. Carving detail

The leaves of the sprays of fruit and flowers in the frieze are etched with single line decoration perhaps to look like veins. In some cases, this work is developed to become quite a feature and is beautifully cut. I wouldn't expect to see this level of sophistication on a later copy.

4. Texture of timber

The surface is weathered and covered in micro splits, this only is found in ancient wood.

5. Later work

There are at least two items which have definitely been added in the last 100 years, and the difference between this work and the remainder is so marked that it can reliably be identified as later.

6. Punch marks

A very common practice for adding texture to the surface from the 15th to the 18th centuries was to punch it with little stabs of a pointed tool. This was done with punches of square metal section approx. 5mm x 5mm with sharp projections in lines or patterns. To have reproduced these marks, a later carver would have had to have a punch or two made with differing patterns. I think this unlikely.

I am persuaded that the sum of all these aspects provides strong evidence that this fire surround is original. However, I am not sure the top cresting is original to the fire surround. I had a brief examination of the wall panelling which may be of similar date and I noted a greenish tinge to parts of the carving on the pilasters.

Further research available

Commission report from a paint conservator

This may reveal types of paint or techniques particular to a certain date or known not to have been used after a certain date. This might well assist in dating the fire surround.

Examination of the back of the timbers

All hand-crafted finishes, whether planed or adzed will distinguish a date to before or after the 19th century when machine finishes prevailed.

Dendrochronology

If any timbers are suitable, this is the most likely technique to provide a firm date of before or after 1700. If the main panels are not held in grooves, these might be removable and could provide a date if they are quarter sawn.

Art Historical Assessment

You have had various opinions on the date and authenticity of the fire surround, I do not think you have one which compares this piece with other works of the same period both in Devon and the wider surroundings.

Most carvers have their own style and if another piece matches in style and can be dated, this might help confirm the authenticity of this surround. This should include ecclesiastical work as well as domestic.

RESOLVED: The committee approved that the report be undertaken by supplier A for the sum of £3,300 (NC).

28 A request for Paranormal Investigations to take place in the Guildhall

The committee considered a request to undertake paranormal investigations in the Guildhall, which would then be streamed on a dedicated YouTube channel. Staff and councillors discussed the proposal, and it was:

RESOLVED: to decline the request due to concerns that the reputation of the building could be harmed and the potential negative impact on children who come on school visits. The committee were also concerned with having the historical artefacts online on a site that was not managed by the Town Council (NC).

29 Town Council Community Grants

The clerk explained the item was included to ensure the committee had advance notice of the two grant meetings coming up in the new year. The meetings would discuss the small, annual, and strategic grants submitted to the Town Council.

The documents attached to the agenda were the current information given to potential grantees, and councillors were encouraged to review and consider the current processes for awarding grants.

The policies were currently under review, and any suggestions for improvements should be shared with the Assistant Town Clerk or the Town Clerk. All councillors will be invited to attend the working group on the 5th of February 2024, which will be the meeting to discuss annual and strategic grants.

RESOLVED: To note the grant information (NC).

30 Accessibility Working Group

Councillor L York discussed a potential working group which would focus on accessibility issues affecting Barnstaple. She has been working closely with groups such as Taw U3A and her own personal experiences has made it very clear to her there is a need for such a group.

The working group would be responsible for looking at ways to implement good practice, removing barriers, conduct surveys, raise awareness, and help local businesses to understand how to be

compliant. There are already several organisations interested in being part of the group. The committee agreed there was a need for such a group and discussed several issues already concerning them. The governance of the working group has yet to be determined.

RESOLVED: to form a working group who will work to improve accessibility in the town of Barnstaple (NC).

Meeting closed at 8.16 pm.

Chairperson.

Signed:

Dated: