

SUBJECT TO CONTRACT

**Proposal for an
Arts and Community Centre
in Old Abbey House**



**Friends of Abingdon Civic Society
November 2020**



THE FRIENDS OF
**ABINGDON
CIVIC SOCIETY**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper proposes a flexible, multi-functional arts and community centre to serve residents from (and visitors to) a wide area of the Vale of White Horse. It takes advantage of the availability of Old Abbey House in Abingdon (owned by VWHDC and vacant since 2014). The paper:

- Sets out the background. This includes the growing population of the area, and the lack of community arts and cultural facilities in the area. It also includes the impact of Covid-19 on patterns of work and living, and on the sense of community in the area.
- Outlines the demand and need for such a centre. A range of needs has been consistently highlighted by potential users, including small meeting rooms, small performance spaces, rooms for classes and craft activities, music teaching and practice space, and short-let office space (e.g. for home-based workers). The Centre would operate in daytimes and evenings, on weekdays and weekends. Most users would come from Abingdon and the surrounding area, but some might come from further afield, including visitors and tourists.
- Identifies the characteristics of Old Abbey House which make it uniquely suited for the proposed use. These include the relationship with the commercial area of Abingdon to the west and the important linkage with the Abbey Gardens public park which immediately adjoins the building.
- Defines a series of principles intended to guide future decision-making.
- Discusses the potential governance arrangements for the Centre. Getting these right is seen as critical to the success of the project.
- Discusses options for the future tenure and ownership of the building.
- Considers finance (both costs and revenues). Our professional adviser considers that a financially self-sustaining operating model is perfectly possible.
- Considers the potential programme. The project is considered as a long-term programme, which can be undertaken in stages. Initial steps to secure the preservation of the building and to enable detailed investigation, design and planning are proposed.
- Outlines the potential advantages – to the community, to the local economy and to the VWHDC – of establishing this Centre.
- Considers the project in relation to the VWHDC Corporate Plan which has recently been the subject of a public consultation. There appears to be a good fit with a number of themes proposed in the Plan.