



ABINGDON-ON-THAMES TOWN COUNCIL

STRATEGY DOCUMENT 2019-2023

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The Town of Abingdon

Abingdon has a rich heritage which is steeped in history. The town has been home to local residents since 700 BC/ BCE and can claim to be the oldest continuously inhabited settlement in England, with evidence of Iron Age, Roman and Saxon settlements found during excavations.

The town grew up outside the gates of the seventh century Abingdon Abbey which, at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII in 1538 in was the sixth richest in Britain. Little of the Abbey remained following the dissolution but the town continued to develop and prosper.

In 1556, Abingdon received its first Royal Charter from Queen Mary I. The Charter provided for the creation of the Borough Council and granted a number of rights and privileges to the town. Abingdon developed as one of the chief towns in Berkshire and was until 1868 the county town of Berkshire. During the 19th and 20th centuries the town grew considerably and became home to a number of major industries, including the MG Car Works, Morland's Brewery and the Pavlova Leather Company. Whilst these historic industries eventually disappeared the town continues to be home to many employers, with a bias to the scientific and engineering sectors, and nearby major employment sites at Culham, Harwell and Milton Park, which are now part of the "Science Vale".

The pace of growth in Abingdon increased from the 1960s onwards, with major housing developments and the population of the town grew from 18,575 in 1971 to 34,030 in 2016 (mid-year estimate).

Abingdon is often considered to be a typical market town based in a prosperous region. This is evidenced in many of the statistics in relation to the town:

- Average weekly household income is £1,014 compared with the average in England of £766 (ONS / 2013/14). After deducting housing costs this falls to £668 (average for England £495).
- There were 180 unemployment benefit claimants in October 2017 representing 0.8% of adults (aged 16-64) compared with the average for England of 1.9%.
- Recorded crime is roughly half the English average, based on 168 crimes in March 2017, representing five per 1,000 of the population compared with the English average of 10.
- There is a high level of satisfaction with the local areas as a place to live, at 86% compared with the English average of 79% (Place Survey 2008).

Although Abingdon has much to commend it, it also has its problems.

- There are significant areas of deprivation within the town. Abingdon has one area, within Abingdon Caldecott Ward, which is ranked within the 20% most deprived areas nationally (Abingdon Caldecott LSOA 008c). The area is within the 10% most deprived on education, skills and training. 38% of people have no qualifications (compared with Abingdon overall – 17%, National average 22%). The area is within the 20% most deprived in relation to income and employment (2015 Index of Multiple Deprivation).
- There are 680 children aged under 16 in low income families in Abingdon (Child Poverty Measure, HMRC August 2015). However the rate of children in low income families varies significantly with 2.6% in Abingdon Dunmore to 24% in Abingdon Caldecott. In the Abingdon Caldecott LSOA 008c area, 41% of children are living in poverty (compared with Abingdon overall – 12%, National average 20%).
- There are pensioners facing challenges without access to transport, who are lonely and who are in poverty. This varies considerably across the town. Taking one index in relation to poverty, 8.4% of pensioners in Abingdon claim pension credit (DWP May 2017). This is almost half compared with the England average of 15.6%. However in the Abingdon Caldecott LSOA 008c area, the figure is over double the national average, at 32.5% (DWP August 2016).
- Whilst most health and wellbeing measures in Abingdon are statistically similar to or better than the English average, hospital stays for self-harm are statistically worse than average in three wards, Abingdon Abbey Northcourt, Caldecott and Fitzharris. GP practice data also shows that prevalence in depression recorded by each of the four GP practices in Abingdon was well above the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group and England averages.
- In common with many towns housing is becoming increasingly unaffordable, particularly for younger people. The increase in house prices in Abingdon has been higher than the rest of England. From the year ending March 2012 to the year ending March 2017, the median price paid for semi-detached dwellings in England rose from £165,000 to £195,000, an increase of 18%. During this period house prices rose in the five Abingdon wards by between 42% and 71% such that for the year ending March 2017 the median price for semi-detached dwellings in Abingdon ranged from £282,995 in Abingdon Caldecott to £385,000 in Abingdon Dunmore.
- Large housing estates were developed at a time when local authority powers and priorities did not provide for what are now considered to be adequate community facilities and infrastructure.

- Abingdon operates within a national context of difficult economic circumstances and structural changes to retailing. However, with much of the town's development in the 1960s and 1970s, planning permissions were granted for out of town retailing and the town centre precinct which may not have been allowed today. This has had a detrimental effect on the town centre which is further limited by the constraints of the historic town centre with traffic negotiating narrow streets, a difficult pedestrian and cycling environment and poor air quality.

Consequently, whilst there is much to commend in Abingdon, the town has significant challenges and problems and the Town Council is determined to work with the community to exercise its powers in meeting the challenges and improving opportunities for *all* who live in the town.

Sources used in this section:

“Community Insight” profiles for “Oxfordshire Las only,” “South Abingdon Priority Community” and Abingdon Caldecott LSOA 008c” areas, 24th February 2017.

Abingdon Community profile of Health and Wellbeing evidence from the Oxfordshire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, October 2017.

“Community Insight” profile for “Abingdon” area, 26th January 2018.

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council

The current structure of local government in Oxfordshire dates back to 1974. In 1974 Abingdon Borough Council was dissolved and its responsibilities transferred to two new authorities, Abingdon Town Council (the parish council for Abingdon but with succession rights to the 1556 Borough) and the much larger Vale of White Horse District Council. At the same time Abingdon itself was transferred from the County of Berkshire to Oxfordshire and so is also served by Oxfordshire County Council.

The parish sector is diverse, with approximately 8,500 parishes in England and Wales with budgets ranging from £100 to £4,000,000. Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council is a large town council in terms of its population and budget, with a gross annual budget of £1,877,065 in 2019/20.

The Town Council comprises of 19 elected councillors, and these representatives are elected every four years. At the elections which took place in May 2019, 18 Liberal Democrats and one Green member were elected.

The town is also divided into seven different electoral wards for town council purposes, these being:

- Abbey (2)
- Caldecott (4)
- Dunmore (4)
- Fitzharris Ock (2)
- Fitzharris Wildmoor (1)
- Northcourt (2)
- Peachcroft (4)

The Town Council operates a number of services but in law only a few of these are mandatory duties; most services are operated under the Council's discretionary powers.

The Council currently provides the following services:

- Abingdon County Hall Museum and the County Hall
- Abingdon in Bloom
- Adverse weather assistance (salt bins and snow clearance)
- Allotments (three sites operated through allotment associations)
- Historic archives, treasures and works of art of which the Town Council is custodian
- Subsidised local bus services, the current bus service subsidised being the number 41
- Bus shelters and some other street furniture
- Two cemeteries and considering plans for a new cemetery
- Christmas lights
- Civic and ceremonial
- Closed churchyards

- Communications including the website www.abingdon.gov.uk , the Town Crier magazine and noticeboards
- Acting as consultees for Abingdon related matters in relation to transport and health services
- Events. Organising the annual Fun and Music in the Park and working in partnership with others in relation to events such as Heritage Day, Christmas Extravaganza and Abingdon Pride
- Fairs and Markets
- Grants to organisations. This includes a community grants scheme available by application and annual grants to organisations including the Citizens' Advice Bureau, Abingdon Carousel, the Abingdon Bridge and Christ's Hospital (in relation to the Albert Park)
- The Guildhall including leasing part of the premises to the Abbey Cinema
- The Information Centre
- The Market Place
- Planning, including conservation area appraisals and considering undertaking a Neighbourhood Development Plan
- Police Community Support Officer funding
- Publications including the Town Guide and Map and the Town Crier
- Recreation and open spaces including eight play areas, Boxhill and Caldecott Recreation Grounds, Boxhill Wood and the Ock Valley Walk
- Roysse Court Offices
- Residents' Parking Scheme (operated under an agency agreement with Oxfordshire County Council)
- The Guild of Town Criers
- The Works Depot

Abingdon is also served by the Vale of White Horse District Council. This council, based at Milton Park, has a gross annual budget of £15 million and the following services:

- Business (including business rates and licensing)
- Community advice and support (inc grants, community safety);
- Environment and local issues (noise, abandoned vehicles, AQ, street cleaning, public toilets)
- Housing;
- Planning & Building;
- Sport and Leisure;
- Recycling, rubbish and waste;
- Housing & Council Tax Benefits;
- Council Tax and Benefits;
- Transport (inc car parks)

The Town Council is also served by Oxfordshire County Council, based at County Hall in Oxford with a gross annual budget of £799.9 million. The County Council's services include:

- Business inc. Trading Standards;
- Children, Education and Families;
- Community and Living inc. Registration Service
- Environment and Planning inc., Strategic Planning and Waste and Recycling (not collection);
- Fire and Public safety;
- Leisure and Culture inc. Libraries Heritage and statutory duty for Museum Services;
- Roads and transport;
- Social and Health Care.

This Plan

The Town Council is funded by residents of Abingdon. The majority of the Council's income which is spent on services comes from the precept which is the council tax charge for the town. In 2019 /20 the Council had a precept of £1,549,608 which equates to a council tax charge of £126.33 for a Band D household. This represents 6.5% of the council tax, the average Band D total tax being £1,933.13. The remaining £1,806.80 relates to services provided by Oxfordshire County Council, Thames Valley Police and the District Council.

The elected members of the Town Council set the Council's policy and make the major decisions. The Council is supported by an officer structure with a small core team of staff employed to implement these decisions, help achieve the Council's priorities and ensure that the appropriate advice is given. That structure is headed by the Town Clerk. As at November 2019 the Town Council employs 11 full time staff and 14 part time staff, the full-time equivalent staff being 17.4. These are employed as follows:

Administration (Royse Court) – 6
 Works Team – 5
 Museum – 4.1
 Information Centre – 0.9
 Residents' Parking Scheme – 1
 Guildhall – 0.4

In addition, the Council is fortunate to have the services of its Honorary Archivist, an Honorary Mace Bearer and a number of volunteers at the Abingdon County Hall Museum.

This Strategic Plan seeks to build on what the Council has achieved over many years but seeks to address more effectively the challenges which the town is facing in the 21st century. It sets out what the Council is seeking to achieve during the period to 2023 and includes the various initiatives and projects which the Council has approved in principle. These projects will be kept under review, monitored and may be amended or added to as circumstances change over the coming years.

Our Vision

To develop an inclusive community so that Abingdon is the place where everyone wants to live and where the wellbeing of residents is prioritised. In developing this community the town will be one which is environmentally sustainable, vibrant, resilient and safe.

The Council's Values

In pursuing its Vision, the Council will ensure that the following values are core to the way in which the Council works. We will always:

- Act with integrity and respect and will make sure we are fully inclusive of a diverse and changing community.
- Work effectively and collaboratively with all residents and community partners, consulting, communicating and ensuring that dialogue is truly two way. We will empower the community.
- Work in an environmentally responsible manner to ensure that the town is sustainable for current and future residents.
- Be cost effective, transparent and accountable.
- Be an excellent and exemplar employer.

The Council's Key Objectives

The Council has identified four corporate objectives:

1 To respond effectively and speedily to the climate emergency and

- 1.1 To ensure that the Town Council is carbon-neutral in relation to its own properties and land, subject to offset, by 2030.
- 1.2 To work with, assist and encourage the community to become carbon-neutral, subject to offsetting.
- 1.3 To lobby government, public and private sector organisations and landowners to become carbon-neutral, subject to offsetting.
- 1.4 To reduce the need to travel in the town and to decrease residents' dependency on cars, encouraging the use of public transport, cycling and walking.
- 1.5 To utilise our green spaces to promote biodiversity and tree-planting whilst creating spaces that the public can enjoy.

2 To develop a resilient, sustainable town which will provide a home for residents now and in the future.

In seeking to achieve this objective, the Council recognises that its powers are limited and most of the power and responsibility rests with other authorities, including the Vale of White Horse District Council and Oxfordshire County Council. However the Council will seek to exercise much more effectively those powers which it does have, principally in the area of representing the town's interest in relation to planning, and take on such additional powers as are and become available, including drafting and adopting a Neighbourhood Development Plan. The Council will use its powers and influence as effectively as possible to aim:

- 2.1 To ensure that everyone in the town can afford to live in their own home whether rented or otherwise.
- 2.2 That the town has a sustainable and mixed pattern of land use to promote economic activity and employment, leisure and retail.
- 2.3 To Conserve and protect the town's historic environment as the town responds and adapts to the challenges the 21st century, especially in relation to the business environment.
- 2.4 That where development takes place, that infrastructure is delivered, preferably ahead of housing.

2.5 That the town continues as a transition town, to plan for a town resilient to the decline of fossil fuels. This includes the reduced need to travel and the promotion of different types of travel other than the car.

2.6 Engage effectively with the community in relation to planning matters and with those organisations which make the decisions such as the District Council, the County Council, the Health Trusts and the emergency services.

3 To manage the Council's assets efficiently and effectively to meet for the needs of the community now and in the future and

3.1 To ensure that there is a robust system of corporate governance in place, including an effective Council's committee structure which meets the needs to have timely and effective decisions and scrutiny.

3.2 To be accountable, open and transparent in relation to financial matters.

3.3 To manage the Council's land and property to ensure that value for money is achieved, that assets are managed in an environmentally friendly and safe way and that they as accessible as possible.

3.4 To develop, implement and maintain an effective communications strategy.

3.5 To employ sufficient and capable staff to achieve its objectives.

4 To work with community partners to support those who are vulnerable and in need and to create opportunities to increase social inclusivity and

4.1 To assess the needs of the community in Abingdon and then to meet these needs in a proactive way by allocating resources to have highest impact, being guided at all times by best practice and where appropriate to be guided by expert advice.

4.2 To ensure that in delivering and developing services, the Council includes those who are excluded, lonely, marginalised or vulnerable.

4.3 To seek the best outcomes for residents in terms of physical and mental health, including improving educational and social engagement so that people can make lifestyle choices that will improve their physical and mental health.

4.4 To work with community groups, charities and local businesses to increase the number and variety of festivals and events, and to ensure that they are inclusive

CONTACT THE COUNCIL

You may contact the Town Council:

By email: enquiries@abingdon.gov.uk

By telephone on 01235 522642 or

By writing to the Town Council at Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council, Roysse Court, Bridge Street, Abingdon, OX14 3HU.

In person at our offices, Monday – Friday 9.00am – 5.00pm

You can follow us on:

Facebook: [@abingdononthamestowncouncil](https://www.facebook.com/abingdononthamestowncouncil)

Twitter: @AbingdonTC

Instagram: abingdontowncouncil