ABINGDON-ON-THAMES NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN 2041

Prepared by Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council

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Boundary of the Neighbourhood Plan (as designated 23 March 2022)

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The Neighbourhood Planning Process

Summary

1. This pre-submission draft of the Abingdon-on-Thames Neighbourhood Plan 2041 has been prepared by Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council through a steering group and local consultations.

2. Neighbourhood planning was introduced by government in 2012 to allow local people to shape and influence development in the places where they live and work.

3. In Abingdon, the intention is to preserve the character of the town by sustaining both the community and our environment, built and natural. This is about finding ways to revitalise our town centre, as well as preserving the green spaces in the town that we value. The plan sets out a vision for the town through to 2041 in a set of planning policies.

About This Plan

4. This pre-submission consultation plan has been prepared by Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council on behalf of those who live and work within the town of Abingdon. The plan sets out a vision for the town through to 2041 and is supported by a set of planning policies.

5. This neighbourhood plan has been informed by the strategic policies in the adopted Vale of White Horse Local Plan, against which it needs to be in general conformity. It has also been informed by the emerging South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Joint Local Plan 2041. In accordance with the neighbourhood planning regulations, this plan has been prepared through extensive community consultation.

Pre-Submission Consultation

6. This is the Regulation 14 Pre-Submission consultation draft of the neighbourhood plan. Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council wants to know the views of the people who live, work or carry on business in the parish. **The statutory pre-submission consultation period runs from 9am on Monday 16th December 2024 until 5pm on Monday 10th February 2025.**

7. Please send your answers, views and opinions to the town council before the end of the six week consultation period. You can comment in the following ways:

    - Through an online survey accessed via a link on the web site https://www.abingdon.gov.uk/ that asks questions about each individual policy
    - By email to enquiries@abingdon.gov.uk
    - By post to the Town Clerk, Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council, Roysse Court, Bridge Street, Abingdon-on-Thames, Oxon, OX14 3HU

Revisions to the Draft Plan

8. Once the Regulation 14 consultation period is closed, the town council will gather together all the comments received and produce an official Consultation Statement, listing all the views and opinions and how the plan is to be amended, if appropriate, as a result.

Submission to the Vale of White Horse District Council

9. The revised neighbourhood plan, together with the Consultation Statement, a statement of the Basic Conditions and an environmental statement (if required) will then be formally submitted to the Vale of White Horse District Council, the local planning authority.

Independent Examination

10. The plan will then be published for a further six week period of consultation, after which an independent planning inspector will be appointed to examine the plan in a series of public meetings. Should the independent planning inspector find the neighbourhood plan to be in conformity with the basic conditions, then it will go forward to be the subject of a referendum, to be voted upon by the residents of the town.

Further Information

- 01235 522 642
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- Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council, Roysse Court, Bridge Street, Abingdon-on-Thames, Oxon, OX14 3HU

Vision

Our vision for Abingdon is that is becomes one of the most attractive towns on the Thames. Its rich historical heritage, place at the heart of a world class scientific technology hub and mix of residential, retail, commercial, leisure and tourist spaces makes it an attractive, sustainable place to live, work and visit.

So that future businesses and people can thrive and be healthy, mixed residential and commercial buildings are woven into green spaces. Vibrant communities are people centric, linked by safe walking and cycling routes to public transport hubs reducing the impact of private vehicles.

The town centre is easy to get around and serves as the centre for retail, tourism and socialising but is better linked by a cultural corridor to an arts, cultural and heritage quarter, on north bank of the Thames, with safer access to the south side of the river, connecting the town with its surrounding countryside.

New developments respect the town's character but are well-designed, forward-looking, and regenerative to reduce their environmental impact. Abingdon is continually improving, making it even better for generations yet to come.

Aims & Objectives

The Abingdon-on-Thames Neighbourhood Plan is directed by the following set of aims and objectives:

1. **Ensure that land made available for new developments that better facilitate and maintain a vibrant, connected, economically active and sustainable Abingdon without adding to congestion or flood-risk.**

2. **Create a convenient, robust, and flexible network of streets and spaces that promote all modes of active travel leading to reduced reliance on private vehicles. To support this, there is a need for enhanced public transport, walking and cycling links.**

3. **Improve connections of the outlying suburbs to the historic centre by foot, cycle and public transport which are currently hindered by highway barriers and gaps in the walking and cycling routes. Remove the barriers to easy movement created by busy roads by putting in place direct, street level crossings for pedestrians and cyclists.**

4. **Implement the walkable neighbourhood model across the whole of Abingdon through the development of safe, sustainable, liveable, and mixed communities with active transport to jobs and easy access to essential services that meet the daily needs of the community.**

5. **Facilitate a reduction in carbon emissions and contribute to achieving the national goal of Net Zero by 2050.**

6. **Improve the sustainability of both conversions and new build development property through use of low carbon materials, construction methods to facilitate low carbon running costs.**

7. **Minimise future flood risk by protecting and, where possible, extending the functional floodplain. Require new developments to provide multifunctional mitigation measures, such as sustainable urban drainage systems, to ensure that rainwater is attenuated within the site.**

8. **Maintain, protect, and enhance the distinctive visual character, views and heritage of Abingdon, its immediate historic setting and vistas, and its connections to the surrounding areas.**

9. **Protect and enhance low carbon economic activity, to encourage the promotion of innovative and high quality employment space. New employment venues should be part of both existing and new mixed use neighbourhoods, moving away from employment zoning, subject to respect for the character, scale, and appearance of such areas. The retention of existing skills, and the development of new ones through youth apprenticeships and placement schemes with local business and colleges will be encouraged.**

10. **Protect, maintain, and enhance the natural environment, including local green spaces, parks, trees and green buffers, habitats, and all wildlife corridors alongside their connection to the wider landscape, promoting biodiversity and by planting native species.**

11. **Protect existing, and deliver new easily accessible, community infrastructure, including for primary health care, skills development, recreation, sport, leisure, and cultural enrichment, to fill existing gaps and support the future of Abingdon and its population growth.**

1. History & Context

1.1. Abingdon-on-Thames' position on a gravel terrace, a dry site close to an important ford of the Thames as well as the rich fertile soil of the Thames Valley has always made it an attractive location, hence its claim to be the oldest continuously inhabited town in England. Archaeological discoveries have confirmed that the immediate area was inhabited during the Old, Middle and New Stone Age, the Bronze and Iron Ages and continued to be occupied during the Roman era and beyond.

1.2. Abingdon was established as an organised place of habitation in the Iron Age with the construction of an oppidum, with parallel ditches, enclosing an area of about 23 hectares which lies underneath much of modern Abingdon's town centre, including the Bury Street shopping precinct. These ditches were probably filled in during the Roman era but were still reflected in later mediaeval property boundaries.

1.3. It will be important that all future town centre development should include a full archaeological assessment with significant finds being conserved for display, in situ where possible, with provision made for adequate maintenance and signage. This will enable citizens of Abingdon to understand the socio-economic and cultural development of their town.

1.4. Habitation during the early centuries of the Middle Ages was centred on the western segment of the oppidum. In the 7th Century the foundation of St Mary's Abbey with its associated monastic buildings brought life to the eastern segment on the banks of the Thames. Having previously been used defensively, the River Thames gained importance as a transport route, with the river being navigable all the way to London until the mid-14th Century when the proliferation of weirs, mills, stake nets and dams, erected by millers and fishermen, prevented its use except by only the smallest of barges. The Abbey built two wharfs at St Helen's and in the Abbey's grounds as well as further landing stages between the two and dug out the Mill Stream bordering the current Upper Reaches site. The immediate area would have been a hive of economic activity then, in stark contrast to its derelict nature of the site today.

1.5. Abingdon Abbey dominated the town's socio, political, administrative, and economic development for most of the eight centuries between its foundation in 675 AD and its dissolution and destruction in 1538. The Abbey, particularly after its reformation in 950 AD as a model Benedictine house, became one of the largest landowners in the then Berkshire. It developed arable and dairy farming as well as rearing sheep in the Vale and on the chalk downs beyond, producing good quality wool for the local cloth industry. It also controlled, and raised revenue from, markets and fairs in front of its gates, in the Bury, now known as the Market

Place, which remains the focus of Abingdon's current town centre. As the town develops in the future the attractiveness of and access to the Market Place should be enhanced, rerouting vehicular through traffic where possible, supporting Abingdon's aspiration to become an important tourist destination, and ensuring that it remains the social hub of the town in years to come.

1.6. Until the modern era, the outside world identified Abingdon with the Abbey which developed the dependent town in line with its economic and administrative principles. This began to change with the formation of the Guild of our Lady, in the middle of the 13th Century and, two hundred years later, the Fraternity of the Holy Cross, both based at St Helen's, the town's parish church. These drove the growth of civic life over the next three centuries. Although in their early years these institutions made no formal impact on the Abbey's authority their collective achievements strengthened the town, arguably giving it resilience in the wake of the Abbey's dissolution and its rapid destruction in 1538.

1.7. Importantly for the town in 1416 the Fraternity of the Holy Cross embarked on a great civic undertaking – the building of bridges, replacing the existing ferry, across the river at Abingdon and Culham, which were also connected by a new causeway, all of which remain in daily use. Abingdon bridge is still the only entry point into the south of the town centre and is a particular traffic pinch point, riskily mixing vehicle, cycle, and pedestrian traffic, which could be alleviated by the construction of a parallel pedestrian and cycle bridge.

1.8. The completion of the bridges, without any financial input from the Abbey, placed Abingdon on a major trade route from London to the west. This was at once the result and cause of a great development in the town's trade, particularly the cloth trade, as well as grains and hides, and the provision of hospitality for travellers and stabling for their horses. In the 1440s a market cross, over 50' high was erected by the Fraternity in the market place, further emphasising its important position at the centre of the town's life.

1.9. With dissolution of the abbey, and later abolition of religious fraternities and chantries, the Fraternity of the Holy Cross reinvented itself as a secular organisation, Christ's Hospital. It supported alms-houses and the poor, repair of the bridges and was involved in the refoundation in 1563 and ongoing funding of Roysse's the local grammar school, now known as Abingdon School.

1.10. Christ's Hospital still functions today, through its 'Relief in Need' scheme and general financial grant support. It also manages the Long Alley and other alms-houses, although it is no longer responsible for the upkeep of the bridge.

1.11. Christ's Hospital played an important role in the government of the town, and its members were highly instrumental in successfully petitioning the Crown that Abingdon should become a Borough which was achieved in 1556, at which point the town had a population of about 1,400 people.

1.12. The Borough was granted a number of properties that had previously been owned by the Abbey, with a requirement that the Mayor and Burgesses should regularly walk the bounds of the parish, a practice that continues. The route of the walk today could be enhanced with better signage.

1.13. The 1556 charter granted the Monday market and its profits to the Corporation. Stallholders in the 16th Century included linen-drapers and woollen-drapers, tanners, ironmongers and smiths, and ropers. Malting continued to be an important trade in Abingdon, along with tanning. Both these activities continued well into the 20th Century. The Charter also granted five other fairs, the most important of which was the Michaelmas hiring fair, which continues to this day as the Abingdon Fair, running the full length of Ock Street and into the Market Place.

1.14. During the Civil war Abingdon was an important Parliamentary garrison town, given its proximity to Oxford, that hosted a Royalist headquarters. The town witnessed street fighting and manoeuvring associated with battles in the neighbourhood. There was much destruction of private and public property, including the pulling down of the market cross by Parliamentary troops. But Abingdon recovered rapidly from this unhappy period and prospered.

1.15. The growing importance of the town was reflected in the design of the County Hall which dominates the Market Place. Erected between 1678 and 1684, it was first known as the Sessions Hall as it was built as an assize court above, with a market hall below.

1.16. The design of building drew heavily on the work of Sir Christopher Wren, with whom its architect had worked on buildings in London. The cosmopolitan magnificence of the County Hall is a bold expression of the status of the town in its heyday as county town of Berkshire and indicates that Abingdon was not a rural backwater but strongly linked to the mainstream of cultural life, perhaps because of the busy barge trade running down the Thames to the capital. Through time it has been the site of the county assizes, a butter market, a venue for plays, concerts, political debates and is the location for the traditional – and unique in England – Bun Throwing ceremony marking important state events.

1.17. Today, the County Hall building still dominates the Market Place and is a museum housing local exhibits with interactive displays, rooftop visits and a programme of talks and workshops. It was extensively renovated in 2011 but at the time English Heritage refused permission for an external lift to enable those with mobility problems to access the museum itself, which otherwise can only be entered via multiple flights of relatively steep stairs. This decision should be re-evaluated at the earliest opportunity to enable all to enjoy the museum.

1.18. Although separated by only a short distance from the Market Place, the High Street and its complex road junction 50m to the east present a barrier to the County Hall's complete integration into the town's centre as well as access to the river. Traffic calming and rerouting measures would facilitate this.

1.19. Abingdon remained an important agricultural marketing and distribution centre and woollen cloth producer. The Wilts & Berks canal, promoted in 1794 and competed by 1810 brought cheap coal and new industries to the town in 1812. A new County Gaol was built beside the Abingdon bridge which was widened a decade later.

1.20. The pace of development in the Victorian period brought new houses and roads, churches, and a new location for Roysse's school in the Albert Park development. But rapid population growth also brought overcrowding in Ock Street with its 'courts' of tiny houses running back from the street frontage.

1.21. Abingdon developed a strong industrial base in the 19th Century. Although woollen cloth manufacture declined as a result of industrial developments this was partly replaced by the growth of large-scale cheap work clothing manufacturing in West St Helen's Street and the establishment of Morland's brewery. Minor trades included the manufacture of sail cloth, sacking and rope, mats, and carpets.

1.22. When Brunel was planning his railway linking London with Bristol it was hoped that the railway would be routed through the town, but a more southerly route was chosen in 1835. Construction of a branch line to Oxford was approved in 1837 but was delayed for seven years owing to objections by powerful local landowners and the University of Oxford who feared that students would 'go to Ascot to drink and gamble'. When the Oxford branch line was completed in 1844 it again bypassed the town. A broad-gauge branch line to Abingdon was finally completed in 1856, funded by the Abingdon Railway Company, a consortium of local business people and the Borough Council.

1.23. The delay in linking to the key railway artery led to gradual reduction in Abingdon's administrative status and by the end of the 19th Century this had led to a wider economic decline. Traditional industries of brewing, leather working, printing as well as light industry continued to flourish, alongside a wide range of shops and businesses, some serving the agricultural trade. But the town had not expanded, and overcrowding was rife.

1.24. The arrival of the MG car factory in 1929 and the establishment of RAF Abingdon in 1932 brought a welcome revival to the town. A programme of slum clearance in the 1930s moved residents to a newly built estate on Saxton Road to the south of the town, in the Caldecott area. This area itself is today the site of the greatest social deprivation in Abingdon and deserves better.

1.25. The establishment of the Atomic Energy Research Establishment (AERE), in 1946, headquartered at a former RAF base at Harwell, and the later creation of the Rutherford and Culham laboratories, created the need for high quality housing that would attract senior scientific staff to the area. They reinvigorated the town with an intake of highly educated new citizens arriving from all over the country.

1.26. Two housing estates were built in Abingdon to fulfil this need, starting with the Fitzharries estate built during the late 1940s and the later, 1950s Appleford Drive estate. The Atomic Energy Authority (AEA) ran their own distinctive fleet of blue buses, providing a commuter service to the Harwell and Wantage sites.

1.27. The estates provided attractive low-density housing with generous open spaces and about seven homes per acre (17 homes per hectare) and had a distinctive green feel to the estates. Roads have wide verges, and the houses have open front gardens. Mature trees were retained where possible and new ones planted so that every house had a tree in its front garden. Houses are clustered in a variety of street types such as closes and squares, enhancing the sense of community.

1.28. Houses were designed to balance tradition with modern aspirations and were constructed to a high standard with a consistency of design based on traditional four-square houses of four types, with some modern (for the time) features such as garages and large windows.

1.29. During the 1960s the AEA no longer needed a housing stock of its own to attract employees and the Harwell estate houses were largely sold to sitting tenants.

1.30. The overwhelming majority of the houses are still in single household occupancy and the original look and feel of the estates have largely been maintained. Future development should seek to maintain this harmony and avoid infilling or inappropriate extensions to individual homes or encroachment on green spaces or individual property front gardens.

1.31. This period also marked a period of rebuilding of Abingdon's town centre, with the development of the Bury Street shopping centre in the 1960s and the creation of the Stratton Way inner ring road to alleviate traffic congestion. These brought the most radical change to Abingdon's street pattern since mediaeval times. The addition of Peachcroft neighbourhood in 1980s and the North Abingdon development in the 2020s brings this almost concentric form of expansion of the town up to the present time. Whilst necessary, these changes altered the character of Abingdon's town centre which still struggles to find a coherent identity.

1.32. Abingdon's rich history has been influential as this Neighbourhood Plan has been developed. It seeks to retain and enhance its attractive existing buildings, riverside amenities and cultural heritage to establish the town again as a tourist destination, as it had been in mediaeval times before the closure of the Abbey.

1.33. At the same time, Abingdon seeks to catalyse a new business environment that attracts employers to the town, building on its existing science park and its location close to the Science Vale UK, with new developments being people- rather than vehicle-centric to increase the town's liveability and sustainability.

1.34. This is a table of relevant facts and statistics. They provide the context within which this plan has been formulated:

Category	***Key Data, Figures, and Statistics***
Demographic	- Population: 33,175 (2021 census)
	- Population Density: 4,173/km^2 (10,810/sq. mi)
	- Majority age group: 30-49 years
	- High percentage of residents with higher education qualifications
Geographical Area	- 9.09 km^2 (3.51 sq. mi)
Housing	- Median prices for semi-detached houses have increased over the past five years
	- Concerns: Traffic congestion and impact on green spaces
Transport	- Major roads: A34 (direct access to Oxford and M4 motorway)
	- Public transport: Regular bus routes to Oxford, Didcot railway station and other nearby towns
	- Issue: Traffic congestion during peak hours
Climate	- Average highs: 8°C in January, 22°C in July
	- Annual precipitation: Approximately 650 mm

Category	***Key Data, Figures, and Statistics***
	- Challenge: Increased flooding risk due to proximity to local rivers, Thames, Ock and Stert
Environment	- Focus on preserving green spaces and enhancing biodiversity
	- Initiatives: Abingdon Green Gym for community involvement in conservation
	- Efforts: Promoting cycling and walking, implementing energy-efficient building standards
Economy	- Key sectors: Education, healthcare, retail, technology
	- Proximity to Oxford provides employment opportunities
	- Resilience: Ongoing investments in infrastructure and business development
Culture	- Historical landmarks: Abingdon Abbey, County Hall Museum
	- Cultural events: Annual Abingdon Air and Country Show
	- Recreational facilities: Parks, sports clubs, arts venues

No 16
R&R

2. Abingdon Town Centre

POLICY ATC 1 – CENTRAL ABINGDON REGENERATION

Development proposals within the town centre that are in accordance with its designation as a Conservation Area and with the design and development principles described by the Central Abingdon Regeneration Framework (CARF) * will be supported.

** https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2023/02/CARF_Final_Document_LR_Feb23.pdf*

POLICY ATC 2 – TOWNSCAPE & HERITAGE

a) ***New development should reflect, reveal, and celebrate the rich layers of history of Abingdon***

b) ***Street sections and block sizes should reflect and reinforce existing mediaeval hierarchy found in the town centre***

c) ***Application of these street sections to the opportunity sites will ensure an appropriate response to the Abingdon context***

d) ***Narrow street sections to be used to provide shade as part of a response to climate change and to ensure a resilient town***

e) ***Proposals should bring out the different characters of the town centre, revealing hidden or obscured character areas and enhancing views to key buildings and landmarks***

f) ***Support will be given for proposals that balance environmental considerations with a respect for traditional scale and materials, in the Abingdon Town Centre Conservation Area***

POLICY ATC 3 – CONNECTIONS & PERMEABILITY

a) ***Any new network of streets and spaces should be prioritised for pedestrians and be connected, comfortable, convenient, convivial, and conspicuous***

b) ***Streets should be places to explore which are delightful, playful, shaded, beautiful and social***

c) ***New development should enhance permeability and connectivity within the centre and to the wider town including the River Thames***

d) ***Ensure that new development connects seamlessly with existing and neighbouring buildings, streets, and spaces to enhance the character of the place***

e) ***Provide off-street public vehicle parking at edge-of-centre or out-of-centre locations***

f) ***Provide new or enhanced pedestrian and cycle routes to and through the town centre, activated through a series of new spaces to form a new animated route, encouraging active travel***

g) ***Strengthen the arrival experience, building upon and enhancing the town's historic entry points***

POLICY ATC 4 – CONTEMPORARY SENSE OF PLACE

a) ***Layout and design should be of an exceptional quality and embody the highest standards in building and landscape architecture***

b) ***Proposals should show both a deep understanding of the defining characteristics of Abingdon and demonstrate how these qualities are expressed within the new urban form***

c) ***New development should respect the historic environment while purposely raising its profile and presence as an important aspect of the town centre's identity, encouraging people to visit and spend time there***

d) ***Encourage a contemporary interpretation of Abingdon's character, materiality and building form rather than a pastiche representation***

e) ***Making provision to enable modal shift in transport and movement around the centre and to the rest of the town including provision of a public transport use, discouraging dominance of motor vehicles***

POLICY ATC 5 – THE GREEN TOWN CENTRE

a) Developments should enable greater access to green and blue infrastructure

b) Existing quality trees to be retained supported by an expansion of the green infrastructure around existing trees to create intimate spaces which align with the preferred scale of streets, together with additional tree planting, will be expected as part of all new development proposals

c) Proposals should aspire to net zero carbon, to use renewable energy, and delivery biodiversity net gain

d) Embed sustainable construction principles and encourage modern methods of construction

e) New development should use materials, land, energy, and water efficiently and be designed for longevity, minimising pollution

POLICY ATC 6 – FLEXIBILITY & MULTI-FUNCTIONALITY

a) Building blocks should be flexible and allow a mix of uses (e.g. shape, depth, height, and general arrangement) to allow the appropriate increase in commercial, retail, education, leisure, housing, transport, and parking assets in response to changing economic models

b) The flexible design of buildings should enable changes of use and retrofitting without substantial alteration

c) Employ a retrofit first approach to existing buildings

2.1. Abingdon's town centre currently has a compact retail and commercial core with an emphasis on retailers, including a few independent retailers of exceptional quality, as well as professional offices and healthcare provision. There is a preponderance of charity shops and several retail units in prominent places remain empty, giving the centre a slightly run-down feel. Contrastingly, the Market Place is surrounded by thriving cafes and in the evening, pubs and restaurants trade well.

2.2. Its commercial offering is set around the Market Place, the Charter and Bury Street, the High Street, Ock Street, Stert Street, East and West St Helen's Street, Bath Street and Bridge Street. Residents of the large newer housing estates to the north, north east and south west of the town centre commute out of town for work, food shop at the edge of town and do not engage with the town centre to a great degree during the day.

2.3. So, like many former market towns the town centre lacks daytime footfall and hence commercial vibrancy. The town centre offer is mostly uninspiring and of basic quality. Re-energising and securing the future of Abingdon's town centre will mean reimagining it as a multi-functional space which will require it to be both a destination and a neighbourhood, enticing visitors, and being an agreeable place for people to visit, recreate and live.

The Market Place

2.4. With its Grade I and II listed buildings, including the magnificent 17th Century County Hall, Abingdon's vibrant Market Place is at the heart of the town centre. It is a meeting place, a market place, a destination, and a way through, a place of retail and a place of homes. Protecting and nurturing this diversity is central to the Neighbourhood Plan.

2.5. As it has been throughout its history, the Market Place remains a fulcrum of the community manifested today in its café culture, hosting of annual fairs and markets, such as the Michaelmas and Runaway fairs, the Monday Market, the Farmers' Market, the Local Excellence Market and visiting Continental Markets. Local clubs and societies are encouraged by the town council to use the area to promote their groups and to fundraise. It also is the venue for Abingdon's unique 'Bun-Throwing' which celebrates national events. The Market Place is the starting point for streets that snake down to the river.

2.6. The Neighbourhood Plan will support developments to the Market Place that:

- Expand the space usable by people
- Facilitate pedestrian access to the Market Place from the County Hall and routes from the river by providing traffic calming mechanisms, including flat top speed bumps, and pedestrian and cycle access to other routes
- Increase food and beverage locations, including communal space in which to eat
- Provide adequate public toilet facilities

The Charter & Bury Street

2.7. Like the Market Place, the Charter and Bury Street are pedestrianised but stand in stark contrast to it. The Charter and Bury Street development were built in the late 1960's replacing largely Victorian buildings built on a mediaeval street pattern. The Bury Street precinct provides a range of shops along with some flats and offices, with community services, including the health centre, and multi storey car park in the Charter.

2.8. At the time of its construction, the Charter was innovative and forward looking. Today, however, the Charter's environmental quality has declined, and it now has a very dated physical appearance. It is a blot on Abingdon's town centre. There is an underwhelming retail mix, with no anchor stores as its retail units do not meet the requirements of modern retailers. Older residents feel it is an unsafe place to be in the later evening. The multi-storey car park has been partly closed since early 2021 due to structural failings.

2.9. Development that rethinks the Charter and Bury Street will be key to raising the quality of Abingdon town centre, particularly through the provision of new retail facilities. A large anchor store at the north end of the site could contribute to this to reduce 'expenditure leakage' to other towns and out-of-town centre shopping parks and bring greater footfall to this end of the town centre. But potential tenants of such an anchor store may require high levels of car parking, running counter to many of the other aims of this plan. Furthermore, the exit access onto Stratton Way can be difficult to navigate. The plan seeks to encourage linked trips to help maintain the viability of independent shops and the town centre as a whole.

2.10. The Neighbourhood Plan supports development within The Charter and Bury Street site that:

- Improves the retail attractiveness of Abingdon with an anchor store at the north end of the site
- Improves the library provision, perhaps as part of a wider community/youth space with facilities for other learning-based activities
- Re-provide an improved centralised healthcare hub
- Provide co-working and work near home spaces
- Provide affordable housing and increased assisted living accommodation

High Street, Stert Street, Ock Street, Bath Street & Bridge Street

2.11. The High Street, Stert Street, Ock Street, Bath Street, and Bridge Street all have a historic character, with a street pattern that reflects their mediaeval origins. Building fronts are tightly defining and enclosing the streets, creating a varied street scene with a vertical rhythm. They have a mix of residential and retail/commercial uses. Many are of historical and architectural importance dating from the 18th Century and earlier. The street pattern and many of the buildings, which are varied in character are of exceptional quality and should be preserved. However, there is a variety of shopfronts of differing design quality. Shop fronts and other commercial frontages can make the street attractive to shoppers as well as enhancing the street scene and the Neighbourhood Plan supports a cohesive 'look' for the streetscape.

2.12. The Neighbourhood Plan supports development in these streets that will:

- Provide affordable housing and increased assisted living accommodation
- Provide co-working and work near home spaces
- Preserve the rich variety of building styles
- Retain existing high-quality shopfronts and also to ensure a high standard of design in new examples, supported by a shop-front design guide

Looking Forwards

2.13. Many of the changes that could improve the vitality and viability of Abingdon's town centre are outside the scope of planning controls, for instance town centre management, improvements to markets, business rates and retail unit rents.

2.14. In considering planning applications the Abingdon-on-Thames Neighbourhood Plan recommends supporting developments in the town centre that will:

- Redefine the town and its identity as having a riverside location
- Increase the footfall in the town centre to ensure it remains an attractive public hub by improving retail attractiveness and promoting investment to reduce the number of vacant properties
- Encourage Abingdon's independent retail offer by maintaining the availability of small, affordable, premises suitable for start-ups
- Nurture new users and functions by supporting new retail opportunities, encouraging office and residential development above existing retail units
- Provide services that diversify use, such as health and wellbeing hubs
- Improve the visual appearance of the town by considering alternative, temporary uses for vacant shops, such as pop-up art galleries and community hubs, and enhancement of the Market Place as a civic space thereby sustaining interest in, and visitor trips to, the town centre
- Provide an attractive, coherent shop frontage
- Enhance the provision of green space in the centre, to boost attractiveness and aid the town's resilience to climate change
- Provide a trail that links and promotes Abingdon's rich culture and heritage

Other Site-Specific Recommendations

2.15. Development of the currently derelict Upper Reaches site will be supported. This signature site on the river front lends itself to a mixed-use development, blending residential with workshop facilities and leisure offerings. Community access to both side of the river could be improved by a foot bridge. The site provides the opportunity to re-purpose the Grade II listed building to the north-eastern part of the site, as well as provide complementary recreational open space and public access to the river in this location. New openly accessible public realm fronting the north side of the river with access off Thames Street for pedestrians should also be provided.

2.16. Public space development that improves connection to the town's river frontage will be encouraged. At present, public access to the northern river front between the bridge and Abbey Meadow is limited. Projects that nurture green infrastructure and promote opportunities for health and wellbeing by creating of clearer riverside walks will be encouraged.

2.17. Developments that reduce town centre vehicular traffic/pedestrian pinch points through and around the centre especially on Stert Street, Stratton Way, Bridge Street, High Street and Ock Street will be favoured. Public realm enhancements that minimise the dominance of cars will also be supported, such as clearer cycle ways, traffic calming, wider pavements and pedestrian/cycle-only route ways will be supported. These will improve opportunities for increasing town centre sustainable transport and associated travel modes.

Opticians
HOLLAND & BARRETT
WHSmith

3. Business & Economy

POLICY BE 1 – PROTECT & ENHANCE ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

a) ***Existing economic activity (including employment, tourism, and retail uses) and premises across the town centre will be protected and enhanced***

b) ***Existing economic activity in the neighbourhoods, particularly key local facilities, will be protected, and enhanced***

c) ***Any loss of employment uses, or premises will not be supported unless it is accompanied by clear evidence demonstrating that the site or premises is not currently viable and that an appropriate alternative site or premises can be identified within the plan area. The evidence required will be determined by the existing use and its site***

d) ***Flexible growth and adaptation of existing employment areas across the plan area through the sensitive introduction of new low carbon economic uses, technology and activities, will be encouraged***

POLICY BE 2 – PROVISION FOR INNOVATIVE WORK SPACES, NEW & SMALL BUSINESSES

a) ***Development proposals that provide innovative hybrid and/or mixed-use working spaces which encourage creative small businesses or community uses will be supported***

b) ***Support will be given for developments on sites that provide for:***

- ***Start-up businesses by enabling low cost facilities in cooperative clusters***
- ***Working from home, enabling extensions and small new buildings***
- ***Enabling microbusinesses***

POLICY BE 3 – SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

a) Development proposals will be supported where they provide opportunities for training, the obtaining of skills, and education

b) Proposals that will provide enhancements to existing skills and training facilities will be supported, including the encouragement of local apprenticeships placements

POLICY BE 4 – NEW EMPLOYMENT PREMISES & DESIGN QUALITY

a) Proposals for new employment development outside existing industrial and employment areas should, through its design, scale, and materials, provide an attractive business environment which takes account of the character and appearance of Abingdon

b) New employment and industrial proposals should demonstrate through a Design & Access Statement how they respect the character and appearance of the neighbourhood area. Where their location provides practical opportunities to do so, development proposals will be supported where, as appropriate to their scale and location, they provide clear and convenient sustainable transport connections with the town centre and create public access to the surrounding areas

3.1. For much of its history Abingdon has been a market town. In the 20th Century it was the manufacturing base for MG Cars and in the late 1940s welcomed an influx of new, skilled residents working for the newly established Atomic Energy Authority.

3.2. This has given Abingdon a highly educated population with 46% of school leavers going on to higher education and only 17% of the population, of about 33,000, having no qualifications. 48% of the population are in full-time employment with healthcare, education and retail being the primary employment sectors.

3.3. Many Abingdon residents commute to Oxford or nearby science and technology parks (e.g. Culham Science Campus, Harwell Science and Innovation Campus and Milton Park) with a significant minority travelling regularly to London which is easily and quickly accessible from nearby Didcot mainline railway station. There are good, frequent bus services to Oxford and Didcot.

Hospitality & Tourism

3.4. Abingdon could become more of a tourist destination in its own right, building on its current position as a gateway to Oxford and the Cotswolds, its attractive riverside location and its rich heritage. The centre of Abingdon has an existing high quality and visually pleasing pedestrian experience with high quality buildings and frontages but is poorly connected to the River Thames.

3.5. A "cultural corridor" would create an alternative pedestrian route between town and river via a series of pedestrian links and loops, connecting cultural attractions, existing and proposed. This would encourage holiday makers boating on the river to discover the town, increasing the footfall bringing increased revenues to retailers and hospitality operators. See Policy ACS 2.

3.6. The corridor would be achieved by a series of links between Stert Street via Abbey Close, Checker Walk, and Thames Street to Bridge Street and towards the River Thames. In combination with possible redevelopment of the derelict and vacant site at the former Upper Reaches Hotel, this would form a new and richly rewarding pedestrian route. Public realm improvements such as widening pavements, more and better crossings, improvements to surface materials, or additional street furniture provision would be required as would better multi-media wayfinding signs communicating the history of the area and its buildings.

3.7. A new pedestrian and cycle bridge is also proposed across the Thames to the east of Nag's Head Island which could further enhance pedestrian links on this part of the route and enable a pedestrian and cycle link to Culham connecting with the Science Vale Cycle Network, and beyond.

More Accommodation

3.8. In autumn 2023, a 30-bed boutique-type hotel opened in Old Abbey House, a sign of investor confidence in the tourism sector in the town. Notwithstanding this, the tourism offering could be improved further by providing more centrally located accommodation and a fuller range of tourism facilities to make the town a year-round visitor destination in a way that is manageable and sustainable.

3.9. This should be based on a range of hotel and B&B accommodation for holiday makers, larger scale accommodation for package tour operators as well as for business travellers, who are currently served by the hotels to the west of the town centre. Additional tourist accommodation closer to the town centre could be provided were Abbey House to be repurposed and the opportunity to develop over some of the associated car parking considered, creating a combined business and leisure travel accommodation hub, possibly with conference facilities.

3.10. The Upper Reaches hotel, closed since 2015, has the potential to also provide additional, higher end tourist accommodation as part of an ambitious, mixed use scheme to re-invigorate this now derelict site which is a dismal visual welcome to the town from the south over the bridge.

Upper Reaches

3.11. The Upper Reaches site, with its derelict hotel, could be transformed into a tourist, civic, cultural and heritage hub for the town adjacent to the river.

3.12. The derelict hotel sits on a peninsular surrounded by the River Thames and the Mill stream. It is an extensive site capable of a mix of uses, such as:

- High quality hotel accommodation
- Restaurant facilities
- An arts and performance centre
- Museum celebrating Abingdon and/or the peaceful development of atomic energy
- A wild swimmers' changing and sauna facility
- Artists' workshops
- Outdoor cafes
- Pop-ups temporary shops

3.13. The redeveloped site could also provide improved pedestrian access to the northern river frontage and better access to boats and moorings, promoting river-based activities, and providing benefits for the whole town.

Skills Shortage

3.14. The town has two main industrial and business estates, a business park at the western edge of the town providing office space and industrial units and a thriving science park to the east of the town centre, which is home to a number of tech companies. There are also smaller sites on the Radley Road and to either side of Ock Street which have a preponderance of smaller industrial units.

3.15. Significant employers include Sophos (cyber-security) and Penlon (medical devices). In line with the average for England, 85% of Abingdon's VAT registered business employ fewer than 10 people. These businesses and those in the wider South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse 'Science Vale UK' are home to a significant scientific, research and development facilities as well as high technology businesses.

3.16. There is a need to ensure that local people can access training to acquire the skills needed in town and in the nearby Science Vale UK, to attract larger businesses, encourage innovative start-ups and retain young talent. Abingdon and Witney

College should be supported in its apprenticeship provision so that important skills can be developed, which will also rely on employers providing placements or taking on apprentices, so they acquire and develop workplace skills.

Hub Based Working

3.17. In the town centre, and to an extent in small scale 'out-of-town' commercial centres too, there is under-used retail and commercial office space, some of which has been vacant for a long time. Such premises could be re-developed, either through the conversion of existing buildings or the provision of new build units.

3.18. These hybrid/mixed use/co-working spaces could provide 'third space' accommodation enabling residents to work near home, with all the synergistic benefits this offers, rather than working from home, benefiting particularly the 'out-of-town' commercial centres. They would also help micro and smaller businesses become established in lower cost facilities in cooperative clusters. In or near the town centre such diversification of use would beneficially bring back active street level footfall as the historically dominant function of the town centre changes.

3.19. In addition to the Upper Reaches site there are several brownfield sites close the town centre that could be redeveloped into low-car mixed use sites, providing business, retail and residential accommodation close to the town centre. One of these is the currently active Royal Mail site on Ock Street, with other smaller such brownfield sites being found elsewhere across the town centre.

Town Centre Manager

3.20. The promotion of a business-focused Abingdon may be enhanced by the recent appointment of a town council employee whose role is to:

- Promote Abingdon as a retail, commercial and entertainment centre
- Connect with large scale hi-tech potential employers to create a life science hub with necessary supporting infrastructure
- Engage with private commercial property owners as they consider redevelopment of their buildings
- Improve visitor appeal by developing a Sustainable Tourism Strategy to provide better, sensitively located day and night time retail and leisure offerings and accommodation
- Coordinate seasonal markets and other events
- Improve the appearance of the town centre

THE PUNCH

4. Built Environment & Heritage

POLICY BEH 1 – DESIGN QUALITY

a) ***The design of new buildings and their settings should be of an exceptional quality and embody the highest standards in building and landscape architecture. This creation of successful public realm spaces begins at the principal layout stage where the integration of open courtyards and their connection to pedestrian access routes, create animated social spaces with a legible and appealing sense of place***

b) ***Proposals will need to show both a deep understanding of the defining characteristics of Abingdon and demonstrate how these qualities are expressed within the new urban form. They should use materials, land, energy, and water efficiently and be designed for longevity and to minimise pollution***

c) ***New developments should enhance the local character, although this does not imply simply duplicating existing developments which, in themselves, may not be of good quality***

d) ***The design of new development should take into account the need to define and integrate the transition between areas of different character***

e) ***Where the corners of new buildings lie on sight lines and axial views, consideration should be given to the inclusion of architectural features that form focal points e.g. turrets, oriel windows and projected gables***

f) ***Buildings should incorporate publicly accessible pedestrian routes (and where appropriate, cycling routes) in order maximise permeability through the town. This applies particularly where existing routes can be linked***

g) ***New development should not be disproportionate in scale to adjoining buildings in the locality, unless warranted by its proposed use and position on the street***

h) ***Innovation in building design and materials in a way that supports local distinctiveness and the other objectives for good design and sustainable development will be supported***

i) ***Support will be given for proposals that balance environmental considerations with a respect for traditional scale and materials, in the town's three Conservation Areas.***

j) Development proposals in the different Conservation Areas should have regard to the relevant Character Appraisal and Management Plan, where these exist

k) All development proposals should have regard to the Joint Design Guide produced by Vale of White Horse District Council

<u>POLICY BEH 2 – CONVERSION & EXTENSION OF EXISTING PROPERTIES</u>

a) Due to the negative impact on the appearance and character of Abingdon and where planning permission is required, proposals for the conversion, merging or alteration of non-residential units will need to show:

- ***i. how the change will minimise any detrimental impact on Conservation Areas (if applicable)***
- ***ii. that the new tenant or occupier will be providing much needed services***
- ***iii. that redevelopment proposals will be supported where, through the design of the ground floor retail units, small, local, and/or independent traders are encouraged to locate in the town centre or local neighbourhood centres***
- ***iv. that the conversion to residential of under-utilised commercial upper floors across the town centre create a more vibrant and vital town centre, as appropriate to the nature of the development concerned***

b) Support will be given for conversion and extension proposals that are of a high design standard, respect the scale of neighbouring buildings and deliver a ground floor that provides an active and animated frontage onto the street

c) Front gardens should, wherever possible, be maintained as primarily soft landscaped areas. In instances where conversion to a hard space is deemed necessary, then permeable materials should be used so as not to increase surface water runoff

POLICY BEH 3 – QUALITY STREETS & SPACES

a) The network of well-established and successful streets, parks, gardens, and spaces across the town will be protected and enhanced. Development proposals that would have an unacceptable detrimental impact on the existing and successful elements of the street network will not be supported

b) Development proposals will be supported which use an agreed palette of materials, in particular in heritage areas

c) Where appropriate, new developments across the plan area should contribute to the delivery of projects that help implement this policy

d) Where appropriate, new developments will be supported where they provide for a clear network of well-designed social and civic spaces that can help support the cultural, social, and economic life of the town

e) Measures that enhance and distinguish the existing streets and spaces of the town will be supported

4.1 The quality of the built environment, including the public realm, is an issue for everyone: for those who live in a place, those who work or shop there, those who come as tourists and those who are simply passing through. A well cared for built environment can help to engender senses of well-being and pride in a place. It can also, by inspiring confidence and making a place somewhere that people want to live or spend time, be economically beneficial.

4.2 One aspect of the overall built environment is heritage. Broadly, heritage (or the historic environment, as it is called in planning policy) consists of things, such as buildings and places, which we value because they illustrate the past and are a focus for individual and communal memories. The built heritage can bring many benefits, such as creating a sense of place and identity, providing an attractive and interesting environment, and giving a sense of continuity. It can also have specific economic benefits such as attracting tourists, but heritage assets need to be well cared for.

4.3 There are three Conservation Areas in the Neighbourhood Plan area. These are Abingdon Town Centre, Abingdon Albert Park, and Abingdon Northcourt. Support will be given for proposals that balance environmental considerations with a respect for traditional scale and materials in the Conservation Areas. Development proposals in the different Conservation Areas should have regard to the relevant Character Appraisal and Management Plan, where these exist.

4.4 Abingdon has a generally attractive built environment, which includes a rich heritage. Traditionally, built heritage has been defined as comprising things which are old or of special interest and especially things which are protected by law (such as listed buildings and Conservation Areas). Nowadays, a much broader view of heritage is taken which recognises the interest and value of more ordinary buildings and places and of things from the relatively recent past.

4.5 The built environment and heritage of Abingdon can be described in terms of a series of broad zones reflecting the history and growth of the town described as follows: Historic Core, Nineteenth Century Expansion, Interwar Housing and Post-war Expansion

The Historic Core

4.6 The evidence suggests that the built-up area of Abingdon did not change (in terms of its extent) much between the late mediaeval period and the middle of the 19th Century. The town was focused on the Market Place, the Abbey and St Helen's Church, with occupation extending out along Ock Street, Bath Street and the Vineyard.

4.7 The mediaeval street pattern is largely intact, with Stratton Way being the only major change. The mediaeval pattern of plots (typically long narrow 'burgage' plots at right angles to the street) survives intact in places, such as on the east side of Stert Street.

4.8 The historic core contains buildings of a wide variety of dates and architectural styles, from mediaeval to 21st Century, representing successive phases of urban renewal. A large part of the town centre is a Conservation Area and there are many listed buildings, both within and outside this Conservation Area. Some parts of the historic core have seen more rebuilding in the 20th and 21st Centuries than others. For example, much of the Vineyard, the former railway station area, Ock Street and West Helen Street are characterised by buildings constructed then although some older buildings remain. In the heart of the town, the Bury Street shopping precinct resulted in the complete clearance and redevelopment of a large area in the 1960s.

4.9 There is a second historic core, which is the former hamlet of Northcourt. This was in existence in mediaeval times. It is a Conservation Area, with a number of listed buildings (including a very fine mediaeval barn, now a church) and still retains a sense of its rural origins.

Nineteenth Century Expansion

4.10 From about the mid-19th Century onwards, the built-up area of the town began to expand. The Albert Park suburb, with a range of housing types and a number of public buildings, was created from the 1860s onwards; almost all the houses in it date from before 1914, and there have been few demolitions since then. It is now a Conservation Area. There was also a significant amount of building on the west side of Spring Road, and some on Drayton Road, Radley Road and Oxford Road. By 1914, new roads for housing had been constructed between Oxford Road and Radley Road, and there had been some building at Northcourt.

Interwar Housing

4.11 There was significant building of new housing estates on what were then the outskirts of Abingdon between the First and Second World Wars. This included the Workhouse Estate off Oxford Road, housing on Caldecott Road, council estates at Boxhill Road and Saxton Road, ribbon development along Radley Road, Oxford Road, Faringdon Road and Wootton Road, and the start of development to the north of Northcourt.

Post-war Expansion

4.12 From the late 1940s onwards, the built-up area of Abingdon expanded enormously, almost all as a result of housebuilding. Early estates included the AERA 'Harwell' Fitzharris and Appleford Drive estates and the St Mary's Green estate. Progressively, areas to the south of Saxton Road, off Drayton Road, off Wootton Road and Faringdon Road, and off Oxford Road and Radley Road were developed for housing.

4.13 The construction of the Dunmore Road-Twelve Acre Drive-Audlett Drive peripheral road provided a boundary to development up until about 2010, although housing is now being built on the north side of the peripheral road. The post-war period (from the 1970s onwards) also saw the creation of an industrial estate, retail park and business park on the west side of the town, extending out to the A34 (Fairacres, Tesco, Nuffield Way, Wyndyke Furlong) and another employment area at Barton Lane Science Park.

Character in the Built Environment

4.14 Each of these zones, and each development within each of them, has its own distinct character. This is seen in the road layouts, the pattern of plots, the way buildings are sited within plots, the form and architectural styles of the buildings (including materials) and the amount, character and treatment of public open space. These differences in character reflect changing fashions in development and architecture. They also contribute to the sense of place and identity of different parts of the town. A more detailed analysis of these variations in character can be found in Appendix 2. It is important that these differences in character are taken into account when new development is proposed.

4.15 Very broadly, character in Abingdon falls into two categories: (1) the three historic cores – the Town Centre, Albert Park and Northcourt – where buildings of many different dates and styles exist side by side, as a result of successive demolitions and rebuilding over many centuries; (2) all the other areas, in each of which the vast majority of the buildings date from a single phase of construction (on what was formerly open land), so that each has its own homogenous character.

4.16 Differences in the character housing estates reflect changes through time in the way that housing has been provided, as well in trends in planning, design and architecture. There is increasing recognition of the importance of character and of relatively recent heritage, including everyday areas and buildings, and some areas of 20th Century housing in Abingdon are of historic interest.

4.17 The 'Harwell estates' were very high-quality development built immediately after the Second World War, with the aim of the attracting the best scientists to work at AERA Harwell as part of Britain's post-war nuclear programme. Examples include the Fitzharris and Appleford Drive estates, very high-quality developments built immediately after the Second World War to attract the best scientists to work at AERA Harwell as part of Britain's post-war nuclear programme. The area around St Mary's Green, built as social housing in the early 1950s and with very generous open spaces is similarly interesting.

Local Centres

4.18 There are a number of small 'local centres' within the spread of residential development around the historic core. These may include shops, services and community facilities. Examples include Peachcroft, Hadland Road, Preston Road and Northcourt. They are not generally architecturally distinguished, but they are very important to local residents (and to the concept of the walkable neighbourhood) and it is important that they thrive and are well cared for.

5. Walkable Neighbourhoods

POLICY WN 1 – WALKABLE NEIGHBOURHOODS

a) ***Development proposals which contribute to the walkable neighbourhood model will be supported. The contribution made should be in proportion to the scale of the associated development***

b) ***New developments should make key services available within 15 minutes' walk of their residents.***

c) ***Development will be supported that fills in the gaps in services available to residents in existing walkable neighbourhoods***

d) ***Proposals that remove barriers to cycling and walking across the plan area will be supported***

e) ***Measures designed to help remove the barriers created by busy roads, including the provision of safe, direct, street level (at-grade) crossings will be supported***

f) ***New development should offer a genuine choice of sustainable and active travel in accordance with the agreed travel hierarchy, both within the new development and beyond the boundaries as it connects with the surroundings***

g) ***New developments that incorporate or contribute in proportion to the scale of the development to the walking and cycle routes within the town boundary and identified in the agreed Abingdon Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) will be supported***

h) ***Street designs which provide direct, good connections to the existing or future neighbourhoods bordering the development will be a requirement of all development proposals***

i) ***New residential areas will be designed in a way that keeps traffic movements at or below a safe speed***

5.1 Abingdon faces challenges as it seeks to improve air quality in the town centre and accelerate progress towards carbon neutrality.

5.2 More locally, the town centre is burdened by significant volumes of through traffic as well as local traffic accessing the shops and services located there, which are used by the monocultural housing-only estates on the edge of town.

5.3 The walkable neighbourhood concept can contribute to solving these challenges by keeping its jobs local, keeping its inhabitants healthy and engendering a sense of community spirit by placing destinations and services within a short distance from home and accessible on foot, cycle, e-sooter or public transport as well as, but decreasingly so in the future, by private car.

5.4 Future planning decisions about additional residential developments should promote the walkable neighbourhood model to decentralise the provision of commercial, retail, and community services as well as employment opportunities. This will support the localisation of Abingdon's sub-communities to enhance the quality of life of citizens and relieve pressure on the town centre.

5.5 Walkable neighbourhoods typically have a range of facilities within a fifteen minute walking distance of residential areas which residents may access comfortably on foot. That walk should be pleasant and easy, avoiding traffic fumes, complex road crossings and narrow pavements.

5.6 During the consultations conducted in preparation for the Neighbourhood Plan, the benefits of the walkable neighbourhood model were strongly supported. Inhabitants wanted easy access to sustainable liveable neighbourhoods with shopping, schools, community and healthcare facilities, places of work, green spaces, and opportunities for local food production.

5.7 Abingdon's Neighbourhood Plan seeks to promote and implement the benefits walkable neighbourhoods can bring across the whole of Abingdon. Opportunities for more localised living are particularly needed in the housing estates to the east and west of Drayton Road and at Peachcroft built during the 1970s and 1980s and, to a lesser extent, the Appleford Drive estate.

5.8 A significant challenge is to overcome the barrier effect of local highway infrastructure through the provision of direct, safe, street level walking and cycling routes so that local neighbourhoods become more interconnected to each other as well as to the town centre area, reconnecting it to its outlying housing estates so that they can be accessed on foot or by bike, albeit that this may take more than 10 minutes. This will require the provision of improved direct, safe, street level walking and cycling routes including along the A4183 Oxford Road, the A415 Ock Steet and B 4017 in both Bath Street and Drayton Road, as well as the Stratton Way inner ring road, with improved crossings, footpaths and cycle ways.

5.9 The Abingdon-on-Thames Neighbourhood Plan does not aim to restrict how residents and visitors travel around, into and out of the town but to add attractive options to the journeys they currently make.

5.10 An array of interventions is needed to support walkable neighbourhoods to ensure that they are better connected places to live, work and play for people of all ages. These include active travel interventions, including putting the recommendations of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) in place, traffic reduction measures, green space enhancements and improved service provision based on the demographics of individual neighbourhoods. There needs to be recognition that higher population densities and taller new residential buildings may be required to create a walkable neighbourhood critical mass, so that they become better places to live, work and play for people of all ages.

5.11 Interventions could support provision of new services in areas currently deficient in them or encourage more residential development, for instance in the town centre in areas that are already well-served. Car dependent out-of-town retail and leisure developments that are not close to populated areas may also be discouraged.

New Developments in Abingdon

5.12 A strategic housing allocation within the plan boundary for up to 900 new dwellings and 50 retirement homes, together with an associated school, community hub, green spaces and other shared assets including shops, a care home and a public house/restaurant has been approved. This new housing development could become an exemplar of localised living for future new developments in Abingdon itself and learnings from the experience of developing this site should be deployed in Abingdon.

5.13 There is little opportunity for such large-scale developments in Abingdon itself, but brown field sites do exist in the town centre, for instance to the south of Ock Street on the site of the Royal Mail sorting office, the Charter, Upper Reaches site, Abbey House and land freed up were car parks to be consolidated. All new development should be in accordance with the walkable neighbourhood model by ensuring the services residents use each day are within a short walk or cycle ride.

The Town Centre as a Walkable Neighbourhood

5.14 The town centre developed in the Middle Ages as a walking neighbourhood. Abingdon's centre is thus quite compact and sits just north of the River Thames. It is a designated conservation area, so it already exhibits many of the recognised characteristics of a walkable neighbourhood, which should be preserved. These include a range of shops, and the facilities currently located in the Charter development comprising a library, health centre and central car park.

5.15 Although there is no bus station, bus stops that serve Oxford and Didcot and their mainline railway stations, as well as outlying villages, are easily accessible. Any future developments to the centre's road layout to alleviate congestion should preserve and enhance this easy access to public transport.

5.16 There is little residential accommodation in the centre of the town. Given the current level of provision of shops, leisure and community services, as well as the presence of currently vacant buildings on Stert Street and Bury Street, consideration should be given to increasing the provision of residential accommodation in the town centre.

Localising Living Outside of the Town Centre

5.17 Although much of the town of Abingdon is within a relatively short walk or cycle ride of the centre of the town there is merit in implementing a localised living model in each of Abingdon's neighbourhoods. This would provide access to core services and opportunities, with everyone able to meet their everyday needs within a short walk or cycle ride, reducing the environmental, travel and access burden on the town centre.

5.18 Future improvements within existing neighbourhoods or future residential developments should include mixed-use residential, commercial and community support buildings providing:

- Healthy food grocery shops
- Outdoor space for café seating or market stalls
- All-age gyms and communal gardens
- Shared working spaces
- Healthcare and pharmacy facilities
- Shared community and faith rooms
- Short term car-club rental bays
- Driverless taxi bays
- Local cash access and deposit facilities
- Micro-logistic centres with facilities for multi-brand e-commerce parcel shops and lockers and night time deliveries
- Support for future delivery systems such as autonomous guided trucks and drones

5.19 Mixed use buildings may require increased minimum ground floor heights or depths and acceptance that buildings may be taller to accommodate a higher planning density. Where change of use is contemplated, developers should aspire to incorporate state-of-the-art greener building features.

Summary & Recommendations

5.20 Future planning decisions about additional residential developments should promote the walkable neighbourhood model to decentralise the provision of commercial, retail, and community services as well as employment opportunities. This will support the localisation of Abingdon's sub-communities to enhance the quality of life of citizens and relieve pressure on the town centre.

THE
CROWN & THISTLE
HOTEL
THE
WISTERIA
PUB
THE BRIDGE ST.
RESTAURANT
JT 6565

6. Transport, Access & Movement

POLICY TAM 1 – THE PEDESTRIAN EXPERIENCE

Support will be given to a range of coordinated measures designed to enhance the pedestrian experience across the plan area, by:

a) ***Decluttering streets and removing obstacles***

b) ***Widening footways and improving surfaces***

c) ***Enhanced street design including high quality surfaces, street furniture, and tree planting and other greening initiatives***

d) ***Town Centre management, including curation of events and festivals***

e) ***A new signage and a wayfinding strategy***

f) ***Rationalising and management of vehicle parking***

g) ***Moving most parking to the perimeter rather than the centre of the town***

h) ***Implementing changes to operation of street network to remove unnecessary through traffic from the town centre***

Policy TAM 2 – Cycling Networks

a) ***New development should prioritise and support existing safe, direct cycling routes, car-free where possible and including safe routes to schools***

b) ***Proposals which safeguard and expand cycling networks will be supported***

6.1 The objective for transport in Abingdon mirrors the vision of Oxfordshire's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) that is an inclusive and safe net-zero transport system that enables all parts of the county to thrive. The Abingdon-on-Thames Neighbourhood Plan aims to support the LTCP by enabling a fulfilled life for residents based on sustainable transport.

6.2 In Abingdon, as elsewhere, we see there are problems of poor and unequal public health, with physical inactivity and air pollution two significant causes. The climate emergency is causing rising levels of harm through fire, storm and flood, and the transport system that is a major cause of these does not even function well for users, being highly congested at many times, particularly in the centre of Abingdon. The approach must change. Vehicular traffic must reduce, not grow, and this plan seeks to assist that.

6.3 This Transport, Access and Movement chapter builds on other standards and guidance that should be considered, including Manual for Streets, Inclusive Mobility, Cycle Infrastructure Design (LTN1/20), Oxfordshire Street Design Guide, South and Vale Joint Design Guide, Oxfordshire Walking and Cycling Design Standards, the Oxfordshire Strategic Active Travel Network (SATN) and the Abingdon Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), and any subsequent updates to them.

Local Context: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats

6.4 Abingdon residents' support for sustainable transport was shown through consultation input for this plan, where demand for active travel was a frequently mentioned topic. There was also encouragement for the Abingdon LCWIP, the election of councillors who support sustainable transport policies, and thriving walking, cycling and environmental groups such as Abingdon Community Walks, The Ramblers, Abingdon Freewheeling, Abingdon Liveable Streets and Abingdon Carbon Cutters.

6.5 Abingdon is well suited to walking and cycling (both modes known as active travel) as everywhere in Abingdon is within 1.5 miles of its centre, and it is essentially flat. Just about anywhere in Abingdon can be reached by cycle in 10 minutes. Cycling links to Didcot, Oxford, and the nearby station at Radley are reasonable for experienced cyclists. Perhaps because of this, the Vale of White Horse, of which Abingdon is the largest town, has the second highest cycling rate for a non-city local authority in the UK.

6.6 This has been achieved despite a lack of facilities for cycling and it is worth noting that while cycling rates are high for a UK district they are low compared to neighbouring Oxford or many countries in mainland Europe.

6.7 Walking infrastructure is mixed. Pavements are provided on most roads but there are many places in need of better crossings, greater width, dropped kerbs, benches or other improvements, including two crossings which are safety critical (Bridge St/High St and Stratton Way/Bath St). For wheeling (using a wheeled mobility aid such as a wheelchair or mobility scooter), Abingdon is averagely useable. Distances can be reasonable, and most dropped kerbs are present. However, pavement quality is poor in many places, some kerbs and crossings are poor, and sometimes they are blocked by motorists.

6.8 Abingdon is a good example of walkable neighbourhoods in practice – see earlier chapter – with six local centres putting almost all of the town's residents within a fifteen to twenty minute round-trip walk of many frequently used services.

6.9 Abingdon also has good bus services, with frequent services to Oxford, and regular services to Didcot, Wantage, Witney, and around the town. The main central bus stops on Stratton Way are functional but unpleasant and not well connected with the town centre.

6.10 As in many towns, a large amount of space is used for roads and car parking. Traffic congestion is a major problem. Motor traffic is growing in volume and size. With more housing being built, inaction will lead to increased congestion.

6.11 Abingdon is mostly built on 'low traffic neighbourhood' principles, with many potential 'rat-runs' already removed and the few remaining ones not currently causing major traffic volume problems. However, driving behaviour such as speeding, noisy exhausts and obstructive parking can be problematic.

6.12 Ock Street, Bridge Street, Vineyard and the central triangle are frequently congested, which also delivers high levels of pollution. These streets are in Air Quality Management Areas. The 600-year old Abingdon Bridge has suffered structural problems due to the weight of traffic and was reduced to single lane tidal flow for over a year, causing even more congestion. The Bridge dangerously mixes vehicular, cycle and pedestrian traffic.

6.13 Electric vehicles are an opportunity and a threat. They will reduce climate impact and other emissions, although they still emit tyre and brake dust, and their increased weight can accelerate wear and tear of the roads. Their lower running costs and relative lack of user guilt is also likely to lead to increased traffic, road congestion and casualties.

6.14 There is strong demand for development in the area. Abingdon had until recently escaped the 'cowpat' or 'severed community' developments that lead to car-dependency, with development being well-connected extensions to the town. The current North Abingdon development risks being severed from the rest of town by the ring road but has positive features including an on-site active travel network and several walking and cycling crossings/connections to the town.

Implications for New Development

6.15 The following design principles should inform all new developments:

- Development should contribute to the goal of an inclusive and safe net-zero transport system enabling fulfilled lives for residents and promoting successful appropriate business based on sustainable transport.

- Existing and new development should be seen as a route to improve transport infrastructure and transport usage/behaviour. Exacerbating health and climate problems Abingdon is congested already, and development needs to contribute to a reduction in central traffic rather than an increase.

- Active travel and public transport should be designed-in from the outset of major development. Local active travel and public transport stakeholders should be consulted in the pre-application stage to identify the major opportunities and concerns, so they can be included in masterplans and designs from the start.

- Active travel and public transport measures should have regard for the provisions contained in Chapter 5: Walkable Neighbourhoods.

Implications for Strategic Development & Master Planning

6.16 The following design principles should inform all strategic and master planning decisions:

- Development should be permeable on the site and well-connected beyond the site, with active and public transport as the priority following the LTCP transport user hierarchy.

- New development should take the form of more streets and local services organically added to the town, with multiple points of connection, rather than isolated bubble communities that require a car to access key services.

- Development should be on walkable neighbourhood principles to put most frequent-use services in an easy round-trip walk of most residents e.g. green spaces, shops and schools, with good walking and wheeling routes between them.

- Major developments should contribute to active and public transport links e.g. those described in the LCWIP. In prioritising, consideration should be given to links from the development to the town centre and local neighbourhood centres; schools; areas of relative multiple deprivation; transport hubs and other links beyond Abingdon.

- Significant developments on LCWIP routes should deliver parts of those routes and not damage the potential of those routes e.g. but not limited to crossings, cycle tracks, signage, cycle parking.

- Significant developments on bus routes should improve bus stop infrastructure on those routes (e.g. but not limited to shelters, seating, bins, signage, walking/cycling routes to bus stops, bike parking – see OCC Mobility Hubs Strategy 2023)

- Without a complete ring road, a comprehensive circulation plan to remove traffic from the centre of Abingdon is not possible. This plan does not recommend a new road to complete the ring to the southeast, as this would have large environmental damage and create more traffic. Rather, traffic reduction should be the focus.

- Any development connected to the A415 south of Abingdon should report on their potential impact on traffic congestion and pollution in Abingdon and on damage to Abingdon Bridge.

Specific Access & Movement Plans

6.17 The Neighbourhood Plan supports the transport proposals of the Central Abingdon Regeneration Framework (see Policy ATC 1) with the exception that an additional foot/cycle crossing of the river slightly east of Abingdon Bridge is proposed.

6.18 The development of a mobility hub including bus stops closer to the town centre, perhaps adjacent to the Charter, is encouraged.

6.19 Infrastructure should be designed to be inclusive for all ages and abilities, following current best practices and design guidance. Designs should be mindful of all five of the Core Design Principles of active travel infrastructure: Coherent, Direct, Safe, Comfortable and Attractive (where attractive is interpreted in the local context of Abingdon, which aspires to a high quality of public realm). Essential ancillaries should be included in the hub, such as signage, benches for rest, water fountains and cycle parking.

6.20 All designs and proposals should prioritise shared vehicle use over private vehicle use, for example planning car club parking and charging bays. New schools should be planned to maximise active travel and minimise use of private cars for pupil delivery.

6.21 Construction should be considerate of all road users, especially those who are vulnerable, and minimise blocking of pavements and cycle lanes. Constructors should be registered with CLOCS, the standard for construction logistics, which manages work-related road risk.

6.22 Developers should contribute to behaviour change relating to sustainable travel, recognising that moving to a new home or job is the ideal time to change travel habits e.g. by providing personal travel planning or information packs, possibly in collaboration with local groups.

Summary

6.23 Study after study demonstrates the benefits that active and sustainable travel brings. A healthier population means less demand on health services. Less congestion means a less polluted and more welcoming environment, which will encourage more footfall for local businesses and services. The residents of Abingdon are already demanding this, and this plan aims to deliver it for them.

7. Arts, Culture & Sport

POLICY ACS 1 – ARTS & CULTURAL FACILITIES

a) ***Existing arts and cultural facilities will be protected from change of use or closure***

b) ***The loss of existing arts and cultural buildings (Use Class F1) will be resisted unless it can be demonstrated that demand within the locality for the facility no longer exists***

c) ***Flexible multi-functional spaces that allow for the widest possible use and activity, particularly those daily community needs which are missing, will be supported***

d) ***Development proposals will be required to demonstrate the provision of arts and cultural infrastructure in proportion to the increased population brought about by that development***

POLICY ACS 2 – CULTURAL CORRIDOR / CULTURAL QUARTER DEVELOPMENT

a) ***In combination with future redevelopment of the sites at Abbey House and the Upper Reaches derelict hotel, the development of a new and richly rewarding pedestrian route known as a "Cultural Corridor" comprising a series of links between Stert Street through Abbey Close to Bridge Street will be supported***

b) ***Support will be given for proposals that seek to widen and enhance the cultural offer around this linear, cultural corridor route to establish a cultural quarter***

c) ***Public realm improvements such as widening pavements, more and better crossings, improvements to surface materials, or additional street furniture provision, including multi-media wayfinding signs communicating the history of the area and its buildings, as required to enable the corridor will be supported***

POLICY ACS 3 – HERITAGE TRAILS & WAYFINDING SYSTEMS

In so far as planning permission is required, proposals for heritage trails, wayfinding systems and the improved signposting of existing pedestrian and cycle routes within the town will be supported. Proposals that would facilitate better connections between the town centre, surrounding areas and the wider countryside will be particularly encouraged

POLICY ACS 4 – SPORTS FACILITIES

a) Existing sporting facilities will be protected from change of use or closure

b) The loss of existing sports buildings (Use Class F2) will be resisted unless it can be demonstrated that demand within the locality for the facility no longer exists

7.1 Research and outreach during the development phase of the Neighbourhood Plan suggested that the citizens of Abingdon are mostly content with the existing facilities for Arts and Culture in Abingdon, although not all of them are being used to their full potential. There was strong support for the development of a riverside hub including more provision for arts and culture activities.

Abbey Buildings

7.2 The mediaeval abbey buildings are owned and managed by the Friends of Abingdon Abbey Buildings Trust. They include the ninety-two seater Elizabethan-style Unicorn Theatre which is used as the venue for its productions by an active Drama Club alongside a number of other local theatre groups. The theatre also hosts musical productions of all genres, film showings and is a venue for local schools to showcase student productions of drama or music. The Abbey Buildings are also a venue for an annual craft fair, as well as weddings, public meetings and exhibitions.

7.3 At present they are one of only two buildings available for civic and community gatherings in Abingdon town centre, but the Abbey buildings are not currently fully accessible or weather-tight and lack adequate modern services to allow for all-year use.

Guildhall Complex

7.4 The other community use building is the Grade II listed Guildhall complex that dates back to Mediaeval times and has seen much redevelopment and changes of use over the ensuing centuries. The site is at the heart of the Town Centre Conservation Area and the Cultural Quarter/Corridor described in Policy ACS2.

7.5 In 1966 a dominant extension, the Abbey Hall, was built towards the east, to replace the Corn Exchange which had been the centre for the town's social life since Victorian times. Until recently it housed a small, well-used, independently run cinema but is otherwise underused compared to 50 years' ago when it was the venue for, for example, classical subscription concerts, antique fairs and the like.

7.6 The complex is owned by Abingdon Town Council which has long-standing, but unfunded, plans to refurbish the Abbey Hall, which is currently being managed on a care and maintenance basis following the identification of reinforced aerated autoclave concrete, which is at risk of structural failure, along with some low grade asbestos. Realisation of these ambitious plans to use Abbey Hall for the widest possible community use and bring it up to acceptable modern standards may however require partnership with other public-sector, and private partners.

7.7 Proposals for the future development of the site will be supported if they support the aspirations in policies BE1, BEH3, and ACS1 and ACS2 and the environmental considerations in the ATC policies.

Amey Hall

7.8 Abingdon School's well equipped Amey Hall theatre/cinema facilities are available for public hire and present live cinema viewings of theatre and opera performances open to the local community. It is also the preferred performance venue for Abingdon Operatic Society.

7.9 There are a number of church halls and community centres away from the town centre, one of which, the Northcourt Centre is used by Abingdon Artists. St Ethelwold House in East St Helen's Street also hosts local artist exhibitions from time-to time.

Improvements to Venues

7.10 Improvements to existing community use buildings will be supported where they sympathetically improve accessibility and usability.

7.11 A single point of contact website, facilitated by the town council, should be created to enable groups to book space in the community centres and performance spaces in Abingdon.

7.12 An arts and cultural quarter adjacent to the river should be developed. Public consultation confirmed support for the Neighbourhood Planning group's vision for a riverside arts and cultural centre at one end of a heritage trail, which could become an attractive tourist destination, providing:

- Open-air performance/exhibition spaces
- Artist studio and related gallery/retail spaces
- A central tourist information hub
- A visitor and heritage centre showcasing the importance of the area in developing peaceful uses for atomic energy
- Sport and leisure facilities, including a riverside boardwalk, climbing wall and water sports facilities
- A micro-brewery
- Hotel and riverside residential accommodation
- A pedestrian and cycle bridge to the south side of the river

7.13 Proposed development of existing riverside sites, including the Upper Reaches, should include public access, leisure and open-air performance spaces, with small scale workshops for local artisans.

A Heritage Trail

7.14 Abingdon's historic town centre benefits from a number of paper leaflets, also available online, self-guided walks as well as some somewhat tired but informative information boards. These should be upgraded in a more resilient material to include QR code links to the self-guided walks, creating a trail celebrating heritage and culture given the wealth of historic buildings and history in the town.

7.15 Opportunities should be taken to create similar, leisure walks, with a natural history focus, for outlying areas of Abingdon.

7.16 The town council should work with the Civic Society and developers to refurbish and improve the town centre information boards.

7.17 The town council should collaborate with developers to improve sign-posted walks, both in the town centre and in areas of Abingdon outside the town centre.

The Museum

7.18 Abingdon's Museum, located on the first floor of the 17th Century Baroque County Hall raised on arches over a market space is a successful small-scale museum. It is currently inaccessible to less able visitors due to the absence of an appropriate lift. As well as telling the story of Abingdon it can host social, cultural and educational events. Future development of the County Hall should include the installation of a lift for less able people.

Michaelmas Fair

7.19 The Michaelmas Fair has its origin in a mediaeval autumn hiring fair and is the longest street fair in Europe, running from the Market Place, through the High Street, the Square and the full length of Ock Street. Traffic is diverted as the fair, and the subsequent smaller Runaway fair, take place, causing even more significant traffic congestion than usual in the town centre. Alterations to Abingdon town centre's traffic flow patterns should take into account the annual three day closing of its streets to vehicular traffic.

Sport

7.20 There are many opportunities for sport and recreation within Abingdon, with the opportunity to play for clubs for all of the major sports. The concern of those that play (or are involved) with sport within the town is that the standard of teams are weaker than any other similar sized town within the country.

7.21 For instance, Abingdon United Football Club play in step six of the national pyramid. The other two senior teams – Abingdon Town and Saxton Rovers play in the Oxfordshire Senior League Division One. The cricket club currently play in Cherwell Cricket League Division 3A, which is the fifth level of cricket that they can play. Abingdon rugby club play in the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Division North. Abingdon Hockey Club men's first team plays in the South Central League: North Division 1, whilst their women's first team plays in XI South Central League: North Division 3.

Football

7.22 The town's major football team is Abingdon United AUFC. As well as the first team, the club currently have a development side. AUFC's main challenge is to develop a long-term training base for their teams. Currently they are using a pitch at Tilsley Park or the former North Abingdon Cricket Club pitch next their Northcourt Road home.

7.23 Saxton Rovers play on the recreation ground adjacent to Caldecott Road with the first eleven playing in the Premier division of the Oxfordshire Senior League and their reserves in the second division of the same league. With the demise of Abingdon Town Women's team in summer 2024, Abingdon Abbots are looking to return to the Culham Road stadium using their original name of Abingdon Town for first football team going forward in Division One of the Oxfordshire Senior League. The remainder of the teams based there will still remain as Abingdon Abbots. Abingdon Town FC is the fourth oldest club in the country (established in 1870) which also runs a development side and a junior side.

7.24 Abingdon also hosts two main youth based football clubs with Abingdon Youth FC running twenty-seven boys' teams from Under 7 to Under 16, as well as Under 17 and Under 21 teams, ten girls' teams from Under 6 to Under 16. St Edmund's FC run eighteen youth sides between Under 7 to Under 21. They have joined together with Kennington FC to run a team for people with disabilities.

Cricket

7.25 Abingdon Vale Cricket Club has 60 senior members and 120 junior members playing from their Hales Meadow base. The club run four Saturday senior league teams and six junior sides, including an Under 13 girls' team. In the last couple of years, the club has worked to try to develop a women's section in association with Abingdon Hockey Club and they won the first competition they entered. The club is looking to become a disabled champions' cricket club which will extend some disabled cricket sessions run weekly in the summer in conjunction with Abingdon and Witney College.

7.26 The main medium term challenge for the cricket club is infrastructure. With the development of women's and girls' cricket and having four teams playing at Hales Meadow on a Saturday, the three changing rooms available are insufficient. Also the club is looking to develop their practice facilities in the next eighteen months to two years.

Hockey

7.27 Abingdon Hockey comprises of seven adult teams (three women's teams and four men's teams) playing at Tilsley Park and a growing junior section with about 100 juniors turning up for training each week. As the seasons progress a number of juniors remain at the club and progress to the senior teams.

7.28 Due to the increase in membership numbers over the last two years, a fourth men's team will be added with the hope that the turnout will soon increase to five teams.

7.29 Abingdon Hockey's main aim (as well as playing successfully and enjoyably) is to secure a home base for the club, with ongoing discussions with the cricket club exploring the viability of allowing the hockey club to have use of its pavilion over the winter.

Rugby

7.30 Abingdon RUFC play at Southern Town Park, off Lambrick Way. They have two Saturday 15s and a veterans' team. In 2023, they played their first women's team game. The club runs sixteen junior sides from Under 6s through to Under 17s. The club hosts an annual sevens tournament, which is the oldest in England although this did not happen in 2023, due to works required on the ground.

Tennis

7.31 Abingdon Lawn Tennis Club (ALTC) was founded in 1914 at Albert Park on grass courts and relocated in 1986 to Southern Sports Park, now featuring six tarmac courts and a small clubhouse. Over time, the club has added two more courts, extended the clubhouse and upgraded the floodlighting.

7.32 The club has around 400 members, including nearly 100 juniors from the local area. It offers an active coaching program for juniors and adults, led by four LTA-accredited coaches. On Saturday mornings, supervised play sessions for juniors are provided free for members, with a small fee for visitors.

7.33 ALTC fields 20 teams (men's, ladies', and mixed) in the Oxfordshire Summer Tennis Leagues and fewer teams in winter (without a mixed league). These matches, while competitive, include a social aspect with post-match teas hosted by the club.

7.34 The club hosts various social events and an annual open tournament in August for both juniors and adults. Within the community, ALTC has supported local events, such as a Wimbledon-themed event at Bridge House Care Home and provides storage for the junior parkrun in South Abingdon. It also coordinates with neighbouring Rugby and Youth Football Clubs on scheduling.

7.35 ALTC aims to grow its membership and is considering adding either two more tennis courts or establishing a padel tennis facility with three courts. Padel tennis, a fast-growing and accessible sport, is something the club is eager to introduce in Abingdon. Both options would require significant investment, but space is available.

White Horse Leisure Centre

7.36 Managed by Better Leisure, White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre is a state-of-the-art leisure centre located off Audlett Drive. The centre offers a variety of facilities including: a gym, fitness class studio, an eight lane swimming pool, teaching pool, two squash courts, eight badminton court sports hall, sauna and steam room, six indoor tennis courts and four artificial grass courts. The centre provides highly reputable junior and adult sports courses and also offers a variety of kid's activities including soft play, children's birthday parties and swimming lessons.

Tilsley Park

7.37 This facility was opened in the early-2000s. Abingdon School took over the management of the facility in 2014. Housed here is a full-sized athletics track, two full sized hockey pitches and a number of 3G floodlit pitches. As well as Abingdon School teams, Tilsley Park is home to Abingdon Hockey Club, Abingdon and Radley Athletics Clubs and Oxford Saints American Football Club.

Sporting Use of River Thames

7.38 The River Thames hosts three clubs: Abingdon Rowing Club, Abbey Sailing Club and Kingfisher Canoe Club. The rowing club on Wilsham Road was established in 1958 and caters for rowers of all ages and abilities. They host their own Head of the River event every April. Abbey Sailing Club, also on Wilsham Road, runs races twice a week. Kingfisher Canoe Club moved from Wilsham Road to a purpose-built facility adjacent to Abingdon Lock in 2021 and has around 150 members from age seven to seventy. Abingdon School also has its own Rowing Club on Wilsham Road.

7.39 New and improved entry/exit points for the Thames should be identified and delivered to enhance the public enjoyment of the river including for wild swimming.

Parkrun

7.40 There is a weekly 5km Parkrun on a Saturday morning on Rye Farm Meadow. These are free events run by volunteers and there have now been over five hundred of these runs. After the runs, there is a social meet-up in the Market Place.

Abbey Meadow

7.41 The Abbey Gardens and Abbey Meadow are a valuable outdoor space near to the town centre and next to the river, providing excellent quality outdoor play space. At Abbey Meadow, there is an outdoor heated swimming pool, managed by Better Leisure, which is open for up to two months in the school summer holidays. It must be booked in advance. Previously, there was a paddling pool, tennis courts and a pitch and putt golf course located on Abbey Meadow, but this site is now a large, well-used children's playground.

7.42 A proposal for the Abbey Gardens would be to ban informal ball games from the gardens and, due to its proximity to the centre of town and its sandwich shops, install a few benches and tables to develop a lunchtime hub to encourage town centre workers to use this area as a location for their lunch break. Banning ball games from this field could be seen as controversial but there are a number of other locations that may be used for the playing of ad-hoc games, including the nearby Abbey Meadow.

Looking Ahead

7.43 The town's cricket and hockey clubs are in discussions about the use of the cricket club's pavilion all the year round. This would formalise an unofficial link they have had for a few years regarding the sharing of players. In the Southern Town Park, it would be good to have some link between the rugby club, Abingdon Youth football and the tennis club, where after a tennis match or a youth football game, it would be possible to use the facilities of the rugby club for refreshments. Were this successful, a southern Abingdon sports complex comprising shared changing facilities, kit storage rooms and after-match entertainment and social facilities could be contemplated.

8. Families & Young People

POLICY FYP 1 – ACCESS TO YOUTH-FOCUSED SPACES

a) Developments of greater than 10 houses should provide appropriate play spaces for the site size, easily accessible to all users, which are maintained as part of ongoing social management plans

b) The development of new fitness trails and outdoor gyms in open green spaces, where appropriate, will be supported, especially those that connect different green spaces across the town

c) Play areas should be appropriate for both boys and girls, recognising that they have different aspirations

d) Proposals for purpose-built spaces, both indoor and outdoor, will be supported for children and young people (up to age of 18)

8.1 One of the main aims of this plan is to ensure that the developmental policies are designed to meet the needs of people of all ages and abilities and to make Abingdon a more welcoming place for children and young families.

8.2 Consultation feedback makes it clear that children and young people would like a wider variety of activities all set within a greener, safer, and more diverse environment in which they can develop independence. In particular:

- The development of child-friendly places and venues though investment in existing facilities and the creation of new ones
- Improvements to walking and cycling routes including for walking and cycling to school
- Well-lit parks for safety in the wintertime
- Supporting a greener and cleaner environment
- Traffic speed reductions in the centre and climate change emergency were also raised in the public consultation

Development Of Child-Friendly Places & Venues

8.3 Development of child-friendly places and venues will be supported by the Neighbourhood Plan. This will include but not be limited to new adventure parks or playgrounds, places for teenagers to sit and chat, and venues for sports and activities such as swimming, outdoor table tennis and a trampoline park. Planning applications for such activities will be looked upon favourably where they have consulted with local children and/or families as relevant and where they contribute to making Abingdon a more child-friendly place.

8.4 All play areas should specifically cater for girls as well as boys. Parks, play equipment and public spaces for older children and teenagers are currently designed for a default male mode of play. It is observable that Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) and skate parks tend to be predominantly used by boys. Green spaces and play areas should be more inclusive for all. Girls might favour a less intimidatory space, including swings, a bench under a tree, or a grassy bank.

8.5 The library in the Charter was particularly mentioned in the research as a place that could be developed more as a welcoming space surrounded by a cleaner and greener environment and a hub for activities for all ages. Playful street furniture and pathways on the way to it would be an added attraction.

Improving Walking & Cycling Routes

8.6 Creating more a convenient walking and cycling environment, as well as discouraging car use, was considered particularly important by children. Therefore, the Neighbourhood Plan will promote development where it supports the following:

- More pedestrian crossings
- Wider pavements
- The introduction of segregated cycle routes

Play On the Way

8.7 "Play on the way" interventions will also be supported to encourage children and families to walk to school or into town instead of taking the car. These playful objects and designs are integrated into the streetscape to create interest and diversity. These will be supported through planning policies on key routes into town and other key locations. Where appropriate, the supported interventions could include:

- Unique paving elements
- Stepping stones
- Stepping logs
- Wider green medians and open spaces
- Small play areas
- Public seating

8.8 Development will be supported where it enhances the walking environment, including through more planting and colour, and more places to stop including at cafes.

Supporting Creation of a Greener & Cleaner Environment

8.9 It has been shown through the research phase that protection of our natural environment is a key issue on the minds of young people. Therefore, interventions will be supported that support a greener and more environmentally conscious Abingdon through the introduction of:

- Water fountains
- Recycling bins
- Reverse vending machines for the return of plastic bottles
- Increased tree cover
- Electric vehicle charging points

9. Landscape & Green Spaces

POLICY LGS 1 – EQUAL ACCESS TO GREEN SPACES

a) ***Development proposals should accommodate the needs of all users, including those with mobility needs, in the design of public spaces***

b) ***Access to new and existing green infrastructure should be provided through well-connected paths of appropriate widths, smooth non-slip surfaces, planting, and navigation aids such as signs***

POLICY LGS 2 – BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN

a) ***Development will be expected to demonstrate, in accordance with the Environment Act of 2021, and the National Planning Policy Framework, as updated, a minimum 10% biodiversity net gain on site or replacement as near to the development as possible***

b) ***As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals should maintain and enhance the local biodiversity, including the maintenance and creation of wildlife corridors***

c) ***Proposals should be accompanied by surveys which assess the impact of the development on local biodiversity***

POLICY LGS 3 – WILDLIFE CORRIDORS

a) ***Development proposals should maintain the integrity of existing wildlife corridors whilst creating new opportunity to connect areas of habitat through planting and links***

b) ***Existing wildlife corridors within the town should not be separated or fragmented by changes to green infrastructure and habitats without justification and compensation with new connections***

POLICY LGS 4 – GREEN & BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE PROTECTION & ENHANCEMENT

a) ***Development proposals should protect the existing green and blue infrastructure of Abingdon alongside creating new opportunities, connections, and extensions***

b) ***Green and blue infrastructure opportunities and requirements should be considered at the earliest stages of all new development planning proposals as an integral part of the town's provision, taking into account the most suitable locations and types***

c) ***The removal of existing green and blue infrastructure within the town will be resisted and must be justified and compensated for with appropriate replacement if permitted***

d) ***Developers will be required to justify the removal of any area of highway verge to create or extend vehicle access to property and land***

e) ***Private households will be encouraged to avoid replacing lawns with hard landscaping***

f) ***As appropriate to their scale, nature and location, development proposals should maintain and enhance the local biodiversity including the maintenance and creation of wildlife corridors. Proposals should be accompanied by surveys which assess the impact of the development on local biodiversity. Development proposals should seek to deliver a minimum biodiversity net gain of 10%, having regard to the requirements of section 15 of the National Planning Policy Framework.***

POLICY LGS 5 – LOCAL GREEN SPACE DESIGNATIONS

a) ***Local Green Spaces in Abingdon identified in Appendix 1 will be protected from built development except in very special circumstances.***

b) ***Community green or open spaces that contain a building which needs improving or removing will be allowed to be developed if the proposed work is for the benefit of the community and will preserve the local significance of the space for which it was designated.***

9.1 Green spaces are important as places for people to exercise, play, walk the dog and to observe and listen to nature. They have benefits for both physical and mental health and wellbeing.

9.2 Public green spaces in Abingdon amount to about 10% of the total area of the town, while playing fields belonging to schools and sports clubs add another 5%. They are distributed throughout the town, though sparsely in the north-east. The larger green spaces comprise nature reserves, parks, cemeteries and woods, which often follow valleys of rivers and streams. Smaller areas within housing estates are sometimes designated as play areas. Trees cover about a third of the green space area.

9.3 In relation to global warming, green spaces and their trees are vitally important as areas for carbon sequestration. In addition, trees provide cool shade, which will be of increasing benefit as summers become hotter.

9.4 The combination of increasing population and climate change make these spaces increasingly important, and it is imperative that they are retained and when possible new areas added where possible.

Health & Wellbeing

9.5 Spending time in open green spaces provides many health benefits and the need for such places has been demonstrated on grounds of both physical and mental health. A study by Exeter University found evidence that:

> *"Spending time in the natural environment – as a resident or a visitor – improves our mental health and feelings of wellbeing. It can reduce stress, fatigue, anxiety and depression. It can help boost immune systems, encourage physical activity and may reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as asthma. It can combat loneliness and bind communities together."*

9.6 Dog walking, recreational walking and jogging are the most frequent uses of the Abingdon's green spaces. Running on grass has the benefit of reducing the impact on joints. Grassland and woodland areas are appreciated by walkers because of the sense of openness and freedom they engender. Their scenic quality, enhanced by trees, wildflowers and birdsong provide relaxation and help to get away from life's cares and worries.

9.7 Volunteering to care for green spaces is also beneficial to physical and mental health. Groups which care for green spaces in Abingdon include Abingdon Green Gym, Barton Fields Green Team and Earth Trust Volunteers.

9.8 At the 2021 census the population of Abingdon was 33,175. As the area within the town boundary is about 853 hectares this gives a population density of 39 persons per hectare. Of this area, public green spaces amount to approximately 91 ha in total, 10.7% of the town area. This provides each person with an area of 27.5m^2 of green space, just short of the UK average of 30m^2 per person, according to the Fields Trust. This organisation has produced a map showing the percentage of population within 10-minute walking distance (800 m) of a green space. Abingdon meets this criterion for 100% of its population, because it has a large number of relatively small green spaces.

Biodiversity

9.9 The Wildlife Trusts say: *"The green spaces of our towns and gardens bring nature into our daily lives, brightening our mornings with birdsong and the busy buzzing of bees. Together, with the UK's gardens are larger than all of our National Nature Reserves combined, making them as important for wildlife as they are for our own wellbeing."*

9.10 The Government target for biodiversity is to ensure that by 2030 at least 30% of areas of degraded terrestrial, inland water ecosystems are under effective restoration. Key areas in Abingdon are Abbey Fishponds and Barton Fields nature reserves designated by Oxfordshire County Council as Local Nature Reserves. Barton Fields is managed by volunteers from Abingdon Naturalists Society and Abbey Fishponds by the Earth Trust, who use volunteer help. The aim with both is to preserve and enhance their wildlife.

9.11 The Ock Valley Walk and the large green spaces area west of Ock Bridge, together with Boxhill Wood, Long Furlong, Southern Town Park, and Marina Park are wild areas of significant size providing habitat for many species. The green spaces in Abingdon tend to follow river courses, forming green corridors along which wildlife can spread.

9.12 Fox, badger and muntjac deer inhabit many of the green spaces and there is at least one badger sett within the town boundary with three or more within 500 m of the boundary. Otter have been recorded in the rivers Thames, Ock and Stert. Their numbers have been increasing in the UK over decades, however they are not often seen because of their nocturnal habit.

9.13 Hedgehogs are still common in gardens in Abingdon, though less so in some green spaces where they are predated by badgers. Notable among the bird species are song thrush, nuthatch, long-tailed tit, great spotted and green woodpeckers which can be seen and heard. Grass snakes are common in Barton Fields though their presence elsewhere is unknown. Slow worms were introduced to Barton Fields in 2017 and thrive there now.

9.14 Flowering plants are found in profusion on the two nature reserves but are less prevalent elsewhere due to frequent mowing of most of the grassland. Some rare plant and insect species have been recorded in Barton Fields.

9.15 Wildflower meadows have been created in Barton Fields, Abbey Meadow and South Town Park, the most extensive is in Barton Fields where many perennial and annual species have been introduced. The rare alkaline fen habitat in Abbey Fishponds is being restored by the Earth Trust. Some areas such as on the Ock floodplain are dominated by nettles, which have become prevalent due to nutrients from the river water which is carried in during periods of inundation and seeps into the groundwater.

9.16 Ponds have been created in Barton Fields and Abbey Fishponds which abound in aquatic life. Detention and retention ponds used to mitigate floods can also be excellent habitat for aquatic flora and fauna.

Climate Change

9.17 By 2050, the predicted average UK temperature is likely to have risen significantly and the incidence of extreme weather such as droughts, floods and storms will be even greater than at present. These issues need to be considered in relation to green spaces. The UK Environment Change Network estimates the projected temperature rise by 2070 will be between 0.9 °C to 5.4 °C in summers and 0.7 °C to 4.2 °C in winters. Oxfordshire County Council's report of April 2024, "Extreme Temperatures and Rainfall in Oxfordshire" summarises climate predictions:

> *"The probability of extreme temperature and heavy rainfall is increasing every year; the chance of a 100-year temperature extreme occurring in the 2020s is likely to increase fourfold under a 'medium' scenario and eight-fold under 'high' scenario by the 2050s. The chances of heavy rainfall are not evolving as rapidly, and increases are likely to be 1.25 times and 1.4 times greater than historical averages under the same scenarios by the 2050s. Changes in heavy rainfall risk increase markedly by the 2080s"*

9.18 In Abingdon, green spaces cover about 76ha, of which trees cover is around 30ha, providing estimated carbon sequestration of 22,000 tonnes. In play areas and other recreational areas, trees play an important part in cooling the air and providing shade. They also have a significant role in reducing flood risk. Further tree planting in appropriate areas should be encouraged.

Flooding

9.19 Green spaces bordering the Rivers Thames, Ock and Stert are in Flood Zones 2 or 3. Barton Fields and Abbey Meadow in particular are subject to frequent flooding from the Thames, while the Ock Valley green spaces also flood regularly. These

sites provide vital storage capacity, reducing risk to nearby properties. This role could be enhanced by constructing bunds around some green spaces such as those on the Ock floodplain to retain more water, thereby reducing the risk to nearby and downstream houses.

9.20 Climate change will undoubtedly raise flood risk, and the role of these flood-prone sites will increase in importance in the future. Trees on the floodplain lower the water table in summer by transpiration. Also, tall vegetation, hedges and scrub act to slow and hold back floodwater. The Met Office UK Climate Projection (UKCP) 18 report states that:

> *"Despite overall summer drying trends in the future, new data from UKCP Local (2.2km) suggests future increases in the intensity of heavy summer rainfall events. These increases in UKCP Local (2.2km) are typically greater than those in the Regional (12km). For urban areas particularly, this will impact on the frequency and severity of surface water flooding"*

9.21 In housing areas detention and retention ponds might be dug to protect nearby properties from flash floods. As well as reducing flood risk, these would soon be populated by aquatic creatures and plants, adding to the biodiversity and they would become features of interest to the public.

Threats and Legislation Protecting Green Spaces

9.22 Local Green Spaces (LGS) can relate to one or a more of a selection of uses of land that benefit the local community. The designation provides protections in line with Green Belt policy. Local Green Spaces found in local and neighbourhood plans have more weight to them than any local landscape designations.

9.23 Not all Local Green Spaces necessarily have right of access for the public as the green areas may be valued because of their wildlife, historic significance and/or beauty. This designation of Local Green Space does not in itself confer any rights of public access over what exists at present. Private land can be designated as a Local Green Space, but the landowner would have the right to make their views known on this through the plan making process and would need to give permission for any new rights of access to be created.

9.24 Though there is considerable government pressure to provide more housing, hopefully councils will resist the temptation to build on green spaces or to squeeze in a few more houses on small greens on housing estates.

Biodiversity Net Gain

9.25 Biodiversity net gain (BNG) is a way to contribute to the recovery of nature while developing land. It ensures the habitat for wildlife is in a better state than it was before development. This will apply from November 2023 for developments in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and should be promoted in future developments.

9.26 Biological recording is vital to establish what is there and subsequently to monitor the effects of management. Citizen Science is very important in this respect and there are a number of groups and individuals who regularly record flora and fauna of Abingdon's green spaces. Included in these are members of Abingdon Naturalists Society. There are also individual surveyors both amateur and professionals engaged in such recording.

9.27 At present these records are held in disparate locations, the main one being the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) and iRecord. Recording has been assisted recently by mobile phone apps such as iRecord, iNaturalist and Google Image Search, which can help in identification and certification as well as database storage.

9.28 A number of botanical surveys of the larger green spaces have been undertaken in recent years by Abingdon Naturalist Society members. UK Butterfly transect monitoring has been undertaken in Barton Fields and other sites for more than a decade. Bird surveys are also undertaken regularly.

9.29 An important ambition is to collect together these disparate data sources into a single entity containing all records from Abingdon's green spaces accessible to the recorders and other interested individuals. This will help inform future management

Management Recommendations

9.30 Management involves decisions on tasks such as mowing, tree care, path maintenance and waste bins. Account must be taken of provisions for disabled people in particular. Benches should be provided at suitable sites and the seat height should be convenient. Paths should have adequate width for wheelchair use and free of overhanging branches and potholes.

9.31 In most cases grassland areas are mowed to achieve short turf throughout the growing season. These lawn-like areas are needed for sports and play activities, however in other grassland areas the mowing frequency could be reduced considerably to allow perennial flowering plants to establish and bloom.

9.32 Paths can be mown across these areas for the convenience of walkers and interpretation boards used to explain why the grassland is being left uncut. To enhance these areas floristically, Yellow Rattle can be sown to stunt the growth of tall grasses (which it parasitises). This plant has been sown in Barton Fields where some areas do not need mowing at all, yet the grasses do not become lank.

9.33 The council has a policy of pollarding Crack Willows beside paths which would otherwise drop large branches across the path. With diseased trees such as those affected by Ash Dieback some restraint should be exercised. Standing timber with cavities is of great benefit to wildlife providing nest holes for Woodpeckers, Nuthatches and Stock Doves. Also, it is home for a wide variety of beetle species and saprophytic fungi. Clearly there is a risk where trees overhang paths and branches should be lopped, or the tree felled if judged to be at risk of falling across a path. To put this in proportion, the risk of death from trees per year in the UK is just one in ten million.

9.34 Where paths get muddy people side-step onto the grassy margins which then become trampled and muddy too, leading to further creep of the path width. For example, along the Ock Valley Walk in muddy areas, the path has widened to about five metres due to avoidance of muddy areas by pedestrians. The cure is to relay the path using self-binding hoggin, bounded by treated timber planks. An example of this is the path linking the Sustrans Track with the Thames Path in Barton Fields where a muddy path which had become several metres wide was re-laid with a 1.5 m width of hoggin. It is now dry year-round, with no side-stepping needed onto the now vegetated edges. This treatment has been applied to the eastern part of the Ock Valley Path and should be extended to the other part.

9.35 Provision of signage, benches, dog-waste bins and litter bins should be reviewed for each site. Interpretation boards on Barton Fields, Abbey Fishponds, and the Ock Valley Walk give information on the important flora and fauna found on site. On most larger sites dog-waste bins are provided at the main exits to the site, though often they are not emptied frequently enough.

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10. Monitoring & Implementation

10.1 Monitoring is an essential and continuous part of the planning process. If successful at examination and referendum the Abingdon-on-Thames Neighbourhood Plan will become part of the statutory development plan once it has been made (i.e. brought into legal force by the planning authority, the Vale of White Horse District Council). Applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

10.2 The plan will be monitored by both Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council and the Vale of White Horse District Council to assess whether it is supporting and delivering the aims of the Local Plan strategy.

10.3 The monitoring indicators identified here are a mix of relevant indicators drawn from a number of sources including the National Planning Policy Framework and local indicators identified in respect of key policies of the Local Plan.

10.4 The key indicators for the Abingdon-on-Thames Neighbourhood Plan will be on delivery of community infrastructure, employment, housing and positive environmental change.

General Delivery Indicators

- Coordinated development on allocated sites with planning permission
- Percentage of completions on previously developed land, including planning permissions implemented involving planning condition(s) for remediation.

Environmental Indicators

- Quality and quantity of new open space provided especially natural/semi-natural green space
- Change to number of buildings on national and local lists of buildings at risk
- The amount of open space/facility established by type relative to the standard
- The number of permissions granted and implemented for low-carbon schemes
- The number of developments which use sustainable drainage systems
- The number of applications which do not receive approval for water supply and wastewater connection from the appropriate water company
- The amount of new habitat created especially natural/semi-natural green space
- Any monitoring undertaken of biodiversity, including habitats created

Housing Indicators

- The number of dwelling completions that are provided relative to the Council's estimated provision
- Change in the total number of households
- Average densities on permitted housing sites
- Starter and affordable housing completions
- Objective measures to determine the quality of design

Employment Indicators

- Changes (up or down) in the number of companies/businesses (no. of VAT registered) located in the area
- Employment land lost or gained compared to other uses

Other Indicators

- Sport England Active Lives Survey (this provides data on active travel and sport for the Vale of White Horse where Abingdon is the largest town, although only 25% of the population), for walking (both travel and leisure), cycling (both travel and leisure), football, cricket, hockey, canoeing etc
- Traffic Counts from Oxfordshire County Council
- Visitor numbers to Abingdon Museum

Next Steps

Pre-Submission Consultation

1. This is the Regulation 14 Pre-Submission consultation draft of the neighbourhood plan. Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council wants to know the views of the people who live, work or carry on business in the parish. **The statutory pre-submission consultation period runs from 9am on Monday 16th December 2024 until 5pm on Monday 10th February 2025.**

2. Please send your answers, views and opinions to the town council before the end of the six week consultation period. You can comment in the following ways:

    - Through an online survey accessed via a link on the web site https://www.abingdon.gov.uk/ that asks questions about each individual policy
    - By email to enquiries@abingdon.gov.uk
    - By post to the Town Clerk, Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council, Roysse Court, Bridge Street, Abingdon-on-Thames, Oxon, OX14 3HU

Revisions to the Draft Plan

3. Once the Regulation 14 consultation period is closed, the town council will gather together all the comments received and produce an official Consultation Statement, listing all the views and opinions and how the plan is to be amended, if appropriate, as a result.

Submission to the Vale of White Horse District Council

4. The revised neighbourhood plan, together with the Consultation Statement, a statement of the Basic Conditions and an environmental statement (if required) will then be formally submitted to the Vale of White Horse District Council, the local planning authority.

Independent Examination

5. The plan will then be published for a further six week period of consultation, after which an independent planning inspector will be appointed to examine the plan in a series of public meetings. Should the independent planning inspector find the neighbourhood plan to be in conformity with the basic conditions, then it will go forward to be the subject of a referendum, to be voted upon by the residents of the town.

Further Information

- 01235 522 642
- enquiries@abingdon.gov.uk
- Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council, Roysse Court, Bridge Street, Abingdon-on-Thames, Oxon, OX14 3HU

Glossary of Terms

- **Active Travel:** A mode of travel that involves physical activity, such as walking or cycling, rather than using motor vehicles. Active travel is encouraged for its health benefits and its role in reducing carbon emissions and traffic congestion.

- **Walkable Neighbourhood:** An urban area designed to allow residents to meet most of their daily needs within a short walk from their homes. Walkable neighbourhoods often feature pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, mixed-use developments, and accessible public spaces.

- **Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDS):** A collection of methods and strategies used to manage surface water and minimise the impact of urbanisation on natural water cycles. SUDS include techniques such as permeable pavements, green roofs, and constructed wetlands that aim to mimic natural drainage processes.

- **Blue & Green Infrastructure:** Networks of natural and semi-natural areas within urban environments that provide multiple environmental, economic, and social benefits. Blue infrastructure refers to water-related elements like rivers and lakes, while green infrastructure includes parks, gardens, and green roofs. Together, they enhance biodiversity, reduce urban heat, and improve residents' quality of life.

- **Biodiversity Net Gain:** A principle that ensures development projects leave the natural environment in a better state than before. Biodiversity net gain involves creating or enhancing habitats to offset any potential loss of biodiversity caused by development activities.