

Abingdon Town Council Planning committee

Report to the Annual Parish Meeting 2025

This year a town council Planning committee was reintroduced. The committee consists of five Councillor posts, with 6 Councillors nominated as we operate a work share post. As with all town council committees the Mayor and the Chair of Finance have a standing invitation to attend but most important residents may attend or submit written statements regarding items for review as outlined on each agenda.

Abingdon Town Council is a statutory consultee for any planning applications made to the Vale of White Horse District Council as local planning authority within our town boundaries. The district council, Oxfordshire County Council, government, and others will also consult with us when making decisions on large scale projects that are judged to impact Abingdon.

As we are a consultee, not the planning authority, the council has to comment appropriately within planning regulations to ensure our concerns are taken into account when the final decision is made. Sustainable drainage, loss of off-road parking provisions and overdevelopment are very common areas for comment.

In 2010, government made a significant change to the emphasis of the National Planning Policy Framework that all Planning Officers have to adhere to when judging applications. This was to 'a presumption in favour of development unless clear reasons for refusal'.

Government's further changes last December to this framework changed this to 'strong reasons for refusal'. This is why the committee aims to work with the process in a way to influence and modify applications to maintain Abingdon's character and balance, such as in the Northcourt area.

It is also the reason why committee members attended planning training to ensure that we can comment effectively.

Applications we review vary in complexity covering:

- adding a garden office
- replacing windows, gutters or roofing on a historic building
- change of business use on retail and commercial buildings
- one or two storey home extensions
- conversion of property to flats or houses of multiple occupation
- smaller in-fill plot developments, e.g. 2 houses, 4 or 6 flats
- major applications e.g. north Abingdon strategic sites, Lodge Hill slips, Culham Science Village and Dalton Barracks developments

There is a permanent flow of applications, so to ensure they can be reviewed and replied to within required timescales the committee meets every 3 weeks, the most frequent of any committee, meaning that to date this year there have been:

- 15 meetings
- 144 applications reviewed, most householder applications have no objections but committee do object with reasons where required on valid grounds
- 2 or 3 amendments to applications, a similar number of lawful and permitted development applications plus planning condition discharge notices are also noted at each meeting
- 3 applications where committee members have either spoken at or submitted comments to the Vale Of White Horse District Council Planning committee on applications they called in for decision.

- Consultations ranging from parking, street trade permits, Dalton Barracks redevelopment and the South East Strategic Reservoir Option. The latter generating detailed replies to public engagement sessions and Environmental Impact Assessment scoping plus writing to the Secretary of State at Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for confirmation there will be no short cuts offered to Thames Water in the planning process.
- Ongoing monitoring of all the activities on the Dunmore Road and Twelve Acre Drive developments, attending developer liaison and site meetings organized by the district council.

Abingdon's Traffic Advisory committee now reports to the Planning committee. Chaired by Cllr Greenaway, it has the benefit of bringing together Abingdon's town, district and county councillors with a County Highways Team leader and Thames Valley Police representative online.

Meeting three times a year it takes questions submitted in writing or person from residents, business or councillors to see how we can best address traffic management and safety within our increasingly busy town.

It is incredibly useful being able to have the Highways and Police guidance and advice to immediate hand and actions or further actions agreed on the spot. Traffic surveys, enhanced Active Travel and safety all have impacts that affect the whole town and residents and our other committees and some of their decisions.

Summary

The Planning committee meetings schedule during the year, combined with all the local developments and national planning changes, places a continuous workload on councillors and officers.

This year has added a significant level of major scheme consultations on top and with those schemes ongoing it is likely to stay that way.

I want to sincerely thank all involved for their hard work and help during a very busy year but especially to our Committee Clerk, Jo Blackmore, who has had a mountain of papers to work through.

Mark Giddins
Chair, Planning committee
Abingdon Town Council