

Neighbourhood Plan Update

Note for the Annual Town Meeting 2025

The Abingdon-on-Thames Neighbourhood Plan (2024-2041) has been shaped by valuable feedback gathered during the Regulation 14 pre-submission consultation process. This ran from Monday 16th December 2024 to Monday 10th February 2025 and attracted 1,146 responses.

A summary report has been prepared by Feria Urbanism that consolidates the strengths, key concerns, and recommendations based on those responses to ensure the plan aligns with the aspirations and needs of the local community. This note is a summary of that report.

Main Findings

Widespread Support for Key Themes

- **Active Travel & Sustainable Policies:** Strong approval for enhancing walking and cycling routes and creating walkable neighbourhoods to reduce car reliance. Environmental sustainability emerged as a priority
- **Redevelopment:** Support for revitalising neglected areas, such as the town centre and the Upper Reaches, to create a vibrant “cultural corridor”
- **Heritage and Green Spaces:** Abingdon’s historic assets and green spaces were highly valued by the community, with strong backing for their preservation
- **Economic and Community Development:** Acknowledgment of policies encouraging independent businesses, inclusive public spaces, and community hubs

Areas Identified for Improvement

- **Transport & Congestion:** Traffic remains a major issue, with suggestions for better public transport links, road improvements, and solutions for balancing active travel with car use, particularly for mobility-challenged individuals
- **Town Centre Decline:** Calls for proactive measures to revitalise the town centre, diversify retail offerings, and improve accessibility
- **Inclusivity & Accessibility:** Feedback emphasised the need for public spaces, transport, and infrastructure that cater to diverse groups, including the elderly and disabled

- **Clarity & Feasibility:** Concerns were raised about the vagueness of some policies, outdated data, and overly aspirational goals. Respondents sought clearer, measurable objectives

Summary of Policy-Specific Feedback

- **Abingdon Town Centre (ATC):** Agreement on regenerating central spaces, but stronger actionable policies were requested for underused sites like Upper Reaches
- **Transport, Access & Movement (TAM):** Support for walking and cycling initiatives, tempered by concerns about existing infrastructure safety and the exclusion of some demographics (e.g., car users with mobility challenges)
- **Walkable Neighbourhoods (WN):** Support was tempered by doubts regarding the feasibility of 15-minute access to services, particularly in less-connected areas
- **Local Green Spaces (LGS):** Praise for protecting green spaces but concerns about missing sites, including newer housing developments, and insufficient accessibility measures

Recommendations for Revisions

1. Policy Enhancements

- Strengthen measures for preserving heritage, including mandatory heritage statements for development proposals and enhanced mapping of historically sensitive areas
- Expand accessibility provisions, ensuring public spaces and pedestrian/cycle routes accommodate elderly residents and those with disabilities

2. Infrastructure Investments

- Enhance pedestrian and cycling infrastructure with better lighting, signage, and regular maintenance schedules. Include protected cycle lanes and secure bike parking in key areas
- Strengthen public transport connections, particularly to surrounding areas like Oxford, and integrate multi-modal solutions

3. Town Centre Regeneration

- Provide specific, actionable plans for key redevelopment sites, including the Upper Reaches, prioritising multi-functional spaces and mixed-use projects that balance heritage and modern needs
- Address retail decline by attracting diverse businesses and improving parking and pedestrian access

4. Green & Sustainable Development

- Ensure comprehensive mapping of all Local Green Spaces, including missing sites from the consultation feedback, with updated descriptions and maintenance plans
- Promote sustainable design practices, including retrofitting existing buildings, climate-resilient infrastructure, and biodiversity enhancement strategies

5. Inclusivity and Collaboration

- Engage residents in the ongoing refinement of the plan, prioritising the involvement of young people and underrepresented groups
- Collaborate with stakeholders, such as heritage organisations, conservation teams, and schools, to leverage local expertise

Next Steps

By addressing the feedback and refining the Abingdon Neighbourhood Plan, the town can build a framework that balances heritage preservation with modern sustainable development, ensuring a thriving and inclusive future for all residents. The next actions include:

- Revise the plan by acting on the recommendations from the Fera Urbanism report to address public concerns and ensure the plan reflects the community's priorities
- Add measurable targets to policies where appropriate, shifting ambitious goals into clear, actionable strategies
- Draft a Consultation Statement (CS) summarising the feedback received during the Regulation 14 stage, detailing how concerns have been addressed, and outlining revisions
- Draft the Basic Conditions Statement (BCS) setting out how the revised plan meets the regulatory requirements
- Prepare the Submission Package – the updated plan, the BCS and the CS – and submit to Vale of White Horse District Council
- Following the Submission Consultation, there will be an Independent Examination
- If minded, the Examiner will recommend a local referendum on the plan, subject to modifications to the plan
- If referendum vote is “yes” then the plan assumes statutory and legal force