



Abingdon-on-Thames Annual Town Meeting

Wednesday 26 March 2025, 7pm

Minutes

Present:

Cllr Gabby Barody	Mayor of Abingdon, Chair of meeting
Cllr Rawda Jehanli	Deputy Mayor of Abingdon
Cllr Elio Astone	
Cllr Penny Clover	
Cllr Margaret Crick	
Cllr Neil Fawcett	Chair, Community committee
Cllr Mark Giddins	Chair, Planning committee
Cllr Tom Greenaway	Chair, Environment and Amenities committee
Cllr Murali Gunarajah	
Cllr Jim Halliday	Chair, Finance, Governance and Asset Management committee
Cllr Pat Lonergan	
Cllr Leo Midwinter	
Cllr Lorraine Oates	
Cllr Colin Sanderson	Chair, Town Infrastructure committee
Cllr Andrew Skinner	

In attendance:

Patrick Bird	Secretary, Honorary Guild of Town Criers
PCSO Ali Blood	Thames Valley Police
Cherie Carruthers	Town Clerk/Chief Executive
Andy Crick	Democratic Services Officer (clerk to the meeting)
Roxy Elford	Abingdon Damascus Youth Project
Mark Fleishman	Abingdon Damascus Youth Project
Hester Hand	Friends of Abingdon Civic Society
Gary Hibbins	CEO, The Abingdon Bridge
Kevin Hickman	Head of Community Engagement, The Abingdon Bridge
Simon Hills	Chair, Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group
Sharron Jenkinson	Chair of Trustees, Abingdon Carousel
Joseph Mailler	Oxfordshire South and Vale Citizens Advice
PCSO Suzie Morley	Thames Valley Police

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Lucille Savin	Carbon Cutters
Daniel Scharf	One Planet Abingdon
Debbie Watts	CEO, Oxfordshire South and Vale Citizens Advice

27 members of the public

1 General Introduction

The Mayor, Councillor Gabby Barody, chaired the meeting and presented an update on her activities during the year. She thanked the Deputy Mayor and past Mayors Cllr Gwyneth Lewis, Cllr Jim Halliday and Cllr Lorraine Oates for their help and support over the year in representing the town at a number of events.

The Mayor made inclusivity her theme and this was reflected in the many activities over the year. The Mayor did not appoint a chaplain, instead opting for a number of faith and community leaders to highlight the town's diversity.

The Mayor nominated two charities for the year - One Planet Abingdon and Abingdon and District Volunteer Centre – and a range of events were held to raise funds for these two charities, including a quiz night hosted by the Crown and Thistle pub.

The Mayor mentioned the Remembrance commemoration with the Armed Forces and the Royal British Legion and noted that the town council was looking forward to the forthcoming VE and VJ Day commemorations which would be marked with equal dignity and gratitude.

Other events mentioned by the Mayor included the Christmas concert at John Mason School which welcomed local bands and performers. The Mayor hoped that other schools in Abingdon would host events in future. The Mayor attended the Christmas Day lunch at the Peachcroft Centre and she and the Deputy Mayor visited a number of residential care homes throughout the year.

A civic services was hosted by Our Lady and St Edmund's Church, which celebrated a number of local groups. The Mayor noted that the civic service was revived following an event hosted by her predecessor, Cllr Gwyneth Lewis and is expected to continue in future years.

The Mayor had met with representatives from Abingdon's twin towns in Europe and from Massachusetts, USA and Abingdon will shortly host a twinning conference.

The Mayor acknowledged the work of individuals and groups across the town.

2 Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting

It was noted that item 2 was incorrect. The minute stated that the minutes were from 28 March 2022; this should be 2 March 2023.

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It was **proposed** by Mrs Terry Boswell, **seconded** by Cllr Lorraine Oates and **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the annual town meeting that took place on 10 April 2024, as amended, be signed by the Chair as a correct record.

3 Reports by Town Council Committee Chairs

Reports were presented by the Chairs of town council standing committees:

Community committee – Cllr Neil Fawcett

A written report was provided to the meeting. Cllr Fawcett commented on the town council's approach of working with and supporting partners to deliver activities and services for the community. Cllr Fawcett noted the activities of many people in the meeting and thanked the organisations represented for their work.

Town Infrastructure committee - Cllr Colin Sanderson

A written report was provided to the meeting and Cllr Sanderson provided some updates. He noted that the town council has seven speed indicator devices which are moved periodically between 14 posts around the town. The town centre finger posts are currently undergoing refurbishment. The installation of cycle racks in the Market Place is proving to be challenging as there are many stakeholders involved. A meeting has been held and a plan is being developed.

Environment and Amenities committee – Cllr Tom Greenaway

Cllr Greenaway provided a written report. He noted the work done over the past year by the outdoor services team and thanked them for this. Cllr Greenaway mentioned in particular the 'Letters to Heaven' post box which had been very well used since its installation.

Finance, Governance and Asset Management committee – Cllr Jim Halliday

A written report was provided by Cllr Halliday, who outlined the main points at the meeting. Cllr Halliday noted the Town Clerk's work addressing a range of unexpected events over the past year and thanked her on behalf of the town council.

Planning committee – Cllr Mark Giddins

Cllr Giddins provided a written report and gave an update at the meeting.

4 Abingdon Neighbourhood Plan

An update on the Neighbourhood Plan was provided by Cllr Andrew Skinner and Simon Hills, chair of the Neighbourhood Plan steering group. The Neighbourhood Plan is an opportunity to shape the way the town will develop in the next 15 years.

The Neighbourhood Plan steering group has prepared the draft plan for the 'regulation 14' statutory consultation with residents which took place in recent months, ending in February 2025. Following the completion of this consultation, the plan is now officially in the hands of the council but SH hoped that members of the steering group would remain involved. The recommendations of the draft plan have been informed by a wide range of residents, local groups, focus groups and meetings.

The draft plan has made a number of recommendations, including:

- encouraging active travel, enhancing pedestrian and cycle routes into and through the town, while taking into account the needs of those people whose mobility is impaired and may be more reliant on motorised vehicles;
- expanding 'blue' and 'green' infrastructure and making sure that future developments are sustainable and do not negatively affect congestion and flood risk;
- developing small business and community shared use working hubs;
- requiring new buildings to be constructed to the highest architectural standards to enhance the visual appeal of the town and coordinate with local heritage;
- development of a pedestrian cultural corridor from Stert Street through to the river via Abbey Close as a local amenity and to enhance the attractiveness of the town as a tourist destination;
- requiring new housing to have appropriate play areas and outside space;
- setting a vision for the Upper Reaches site.

At the close of the consultation, 81 people had responded and there were around 1,250 different, useful comments received, including from statutory bodies such as Historic England and the district council. The comments received supported the vision set out on the draft Neighbourhood Plan.

Feria Consultants, the consultancy appointed to support the process, has collated the comments received and prepared a report with recommendations. The town council will review all the comments and recommendations and will revise the draft plan as needed, ensuring that it aligns with the council's strategic objectives and forward plan. A revised plan will be submitted to the district council, after which it will undergo further public consultation and then independent examination. The final plan will then be subject to a local referendum and, if successful, the Neighbourhood Plan will come into statutory and legal force and its vision and aspirations in relation to planning policies will need to be adhered to by developers.

A resident asked if the planned local government reorganisation would change the Neighbourhood Plan process. Cllr Neil Fawcett commented that there will be a change to local plans, which are currently developed by district councils, with some powers passing to a regional Mayor with more responsibility for strategic matters.

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The changes should not stop the Neighbourhood Plan process and it is still important to complete it.

5 Abingdon Green Forum

Lucille Savin provided an update at the meeting on the work of the Abingdon Green Forum. Lucille Savin is a co-opted member of the Environment and Amenities committee and acts as a liaison between the town council and local green groups. The Mayor thanked her for undertaking this role.

LS is a member of Carbon Cutters, a local action group designed to encourage a more sustainable way of living. Carbon Cutters holds monthly meetings and there are a range of other activities such as a regular repair café which meets three times a month, one session each for household items, sewing and bike repairs.

The Edible Abingdon group provides three areas around Abbey Grounds where they produce vegetables in demonstration beds, as well as a wildflower maze to encourage biodiversity, and perennial bee beds which provide pollinating plants as a demonstration.

Carbon Cutters collaborates with other groups including Oxford Recycling and One Planet Abingdon and organises events such as compost workshops and providing gardening advice, plant and seed swaps and Christmas wreath workshops.

Green forum activities take place through the year with a different topic every three months. The current topic is housing and this will be followed by sustainable food.

6 Presentation by PCSO Ali Blood

PCSO Ali Blood attended with PCSO Suzie Morley. A written report was provided and PCSO Blood made a presentation on the work of the police in Abingdon. PCSO Blood has worked in Abingdon for 17 years in a role supported by the town council. A small team in Abingdon covers a large area, including as far as the Oxford border, Kennington, Radley and a number of villages.

Priorities for Abingdon are violence against women and girls, retail theft, and anti-social behaviour. The team ran an operation around Christmas to address crime in the night time economy, working with partners in e.g. licensed premises. The work addressed safeguarding, with one arrest.

PCSO Suzie Morley is working on problems with anti-social behaviour in the Precinct, which has involved work with The Abingdon Bridge. The team is also working to reduce the illegal use of e-scooters.

Regular 'Have your say' events are hosted to hear what residents think.

The Mayor thanked the PCSOs for their work.

7 Presentation by the Royal British Legion

Cllr Penny Clover, who is a trustee of the Abingdon Royal British Legion (RBL), provided an update on plans to mark the 80th anniversary of VE and VJ Days in May and August 2025. The town council was thanked for its support with a grant to help fund the programme of events. All events will be free, with donations to the Poppy Appeal welcomed.

National events will begin on Bank Holiday Monday, 5 May 2025 and the RBL invites all businesses and residents to decorate their premises or houses from this day.

VE Day is Thursday 8 May 2025 and events that day will include a short ceremony at the War Memorial at noon and an evening concert at St Helen's Church. Further events will take place on Saturday 10 and Sunday 11 May 2025.

VJ Day is Friday 15 August 2025 and the RBL is planning a community picnic.

8 Presentations by Community Groups

The town council gives several grants each year and the organisations which receive larger grants were invited to give a short presentation on their work.

- **Be Free Young Carers** provided a written report.

- **Abingdon Carousel** – Sharron Jenkinson, Chair of Trustees, introduced the report and spoke about the work of Abingdon Carousel, a family centre in South Abingdon which serves the whole town. Abingdon Carousel provides a range of services to the public, with three strands to their work:
 - o core family activities five days a week;
 - o rooms available for hire for Surestart-related activities - including health visitors, county council special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) groups, disability play groups, and foreign language play groups;
 - o individual case work, working with parents with problems they may have.

The previous manager left last summer but staff have successfully managed the facility and a new manager has now been appointed. The charity has recently signed the lease to take on the whole building to provide additional services. The rent deal includes working with the county council to provide some services. There are some questions over future costs but fundraising continues.

- **Abingdon Damascus Youth Project** - Roxy Elford, trustee, attended with Mark Fleishman, a volunteer. The charity is primarily based in South Abingdon and RE worked with it for 24 years. She has now become a trustee. RE thanked the town council for all their work supporting groups in the town. Damascus is

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based in the community, working mainly in Caldecott ward and using a gazebo to meet with young people, many of whom might be uncomfortable going into a building.

Mark works in multi-media, giving young people an opportunity to get involved in a range of areas, to improvise and develop skills working on podcasts, art and music projects.

- **Christ's Hospital** provided a written report.

- **Friends of Abingdon Civic Society** - Hester Hand introduced the report from the Friends of Abingdon and their ongoing work in the town.

- **Guild of Town Criers** - Patrick Bird, Secretary, presented the report. The Guild welcomed invitations to cry and he noted the range of events cried for, including commercial events for which they seek donations towards the Mayor's charity. New members are always welcome.

- **One Planet Abingdon and One Planet Abingdon Youth** - Daniel Scharf and Katy Williams attended to speak about the work of One Planet Abingdon (OPA). OPA has been based under County Hall for three and a half years and he thanked the town council for the use of the premises and continued support. DS mentioned the important contribution of Ann Smart, who worked on the Green Forum for a number of years. OPA representatives had recently had a very productive meeting with town council officers to consider future activities, including the One Planet Living Festival in September 2025.

Katy Williams is a university graduate who works part time at OPA on coordination of the youth programme. The aim is to create a welcoming space where residents can engage. KW mentioned events over the year, including a range of activities with young people. OPA welcomes young people and hopes to help them to develop responsibility and to ensure their inclusion.

- **Oxfordshire South and Vale Citizens Advice** – Debbie Watts and Joseph Mailler spoke about the work of Citizens Advice. DW noted that the financial support of the town council is vital to the charity. She thanked the Mayor for attending events and for her vocal support. DW and JM introduced the work done by the Abingdon office and the range of services provided. There is a small paid staff but the charity relies on volunteers. DW mentioned the health benefits of helping people with the problems they face, in particular mental health. Citizens Advice is always looking for volunteers.

DW advised that from 1 April 2025 Citizens Advice across much of Oxfordshire would combine into a single charity, Citizens Advice Oxfordshire. The office location and the service will remain unchanged.

- **The Abingdon Bridge (TAB)** – Gary Hibbins, Kevin Hickman and five youth representatives and ambassadors - Erin, Amber, Niall, Alyssia, Ben - presented their report. GH highlighted the importance of connection and thanked the council for its support. The young people shared their diverse experiences of receiving support from TAB and then working to support others. Kevin Hickman introduced himself and the work of colleagues and spoke about the experiences of volunteers. GH ended by mentioning the important collaborations between youth groups in Abingdon, highlighting the work between TAB and DAMASCUS in particular.

9 **To discuss town affairs**

Questions received in advance

1. **Mrs Terry Boswell, Jackman Close**

- 1 I would like to ask if the Town Council can do anything to accelerate the road works that are (or were) taking place at the roundabout on Oxford Road, where it meets Dunmore Road and Twelve Acre Drive. These works appear to have been suspended for over 15 months and, with the forthcoming works due to take place to create the 4-way interchange just a few yards further up the road, it would seem to be imperative that these works are completed. I appreciate that the Town Council does not usually get involved in matters to do with Highways, but this has gone on for so long that someone, somewhere needs to break whatever impasse has created the suspension of the works.

Cllr Mark Giddins responded to advise that the town council has been consulting with representatives of the developers. There are two parts to the junction works: 1. To improve traffic flows at peak hours, 2. Connection for foul water sewage for the nearby David Wilson Homes development. Thames Water is therefore involved with David Wilson Homes and Oxfordshire Highways, which grants permission for works and specifies the nature of the work and traffic management. The developer started work but Thames Water identified a problem arising from historical works. This resulted in the county council roadwork permission ending before completion. Oxfordshire Highways is working with the developer to try to find a solution which does not interfere with the significant Lodge Hill project, which will begin shortly. Lodge Hill will always have two way access and work will mainly take place overnight, the aim being to minimise disruption. Town and county councillors are working together to monitor progress and Cllr Giddins noted that county council officers are working hard to minimise disruption.

- 2 Why is there a speed indicator sign on the 30MPH section of the Oxford Road heading South, several yards before the new 20MPH comes into force? This

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sign tells drivers that they are going too fast if they are travelling at more than 20 MPH when the limit on this particular stretch is still 30 MPH! Is the sign in the wrong place or what is its intent? Having recently attended a meeting in Oxford (about the future of bus transport in the area) and spoken to a bus driver who regularly drives a route that comes down this road, I was advised that many bus drivers take a positive delight in driving at a speed in excess of 20 MPH when passing this sign as they think that it is in the wrong place. My question now is to ask if it is in the wrong place or, if not, what is its intent?

Cllr Elio Astone advised that the sign in question is in the right place, as advised by the county council. The issue is that the 20mph signs were installed after the SID posts were put in place. The speed indicator signs are advisory and are intended to encourage good behaviour so the location of the sign is considered to be appropriate.

2. Hester Hand, Abbott Road

Regardless of which option is adopted, the proposed move to a Unitary Authority will make management of many aspects of local affairs even further removed from Abingdon. I would be interested to know whether the Town Council sees this as a threat or an opportunity?

If the latter, what responsibilities do you think should be devolved to Town/Parish level?

Would you consider setting up a forum – maybe a Citizens Assembly – to enable interested community members to contribute to the discussion?

My suggestion would be to start by thinking about what the community thinks you already do and seek to take ownership of some of those tasks.

For example:

- roundabouts, footpaths, litter clearance etc.
- all parks and gardens
- car parks
- General town “housekeeping” - getting rid of street clutter and inappropriate signage, reinstitute the “shopfront improvement” scheme

But the big one would be the whole business of promoting the town - proper visitor information, available 7 days a week and well signposted, a decent visitor website etc etc. At present this falls between the Town and District, and neither ever seems to have any budget for it. And promoting the town also includes its business and commercial life....

Cllr Neil Fawcett advised that current plans are for large unitary authorities and there is a risk that decision making will be moved away from towns like Abingdon. Town Councillors have been discussing this and have developed some ideas to consider with the current authorities, for example there may be potential for the town council to have more control over outside spaces in the town. The town

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council is keen to ensure that local councils are still listened to by the new, larger authorities.

Cllr Jim Halliday noted that the town council must ensure that if it takes on new responsibilities it is given the appropriate financial support.

Ms Hand asked if some form of community forum would be considered to discuss ideas and this suggestion was welcomed by the Mayor and other councillors.

3. Cllr Jim Halliday

Cllr Halliday advised that Mr Steve Rich wanted to ask through him about his suggestion at the previous meeting that the town council considers a solar and wind array on Abingdon Common. Cllr Halliday noted that the site is poor in terms of wind and legal challenges exist in releasing the land for such use from a secure agricultural tenancy. The idea may be considered in future if such issues could be resolved.

At the end of the meeting, the Mayor thanked attendees and the organisations which had given presentations. She noted that her year as Mayor had been a great honour.

The meeting closed at 9.23pm

Signed: _____

Date: _____