



Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council

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Abingdon-on-Thames Annual Town Meeting

Wednesday 1 April 2026, 7pm

These are draft minutes, subject to approval and they may therefore change

Present:

Cllr Rawda Jehanli	Mayor of Abingdon, Chair of meeting
Cllr Andrew Skinner	Deputy Mayor of Abingdon
Cllr Elio Astone	
Cllr Gabby Barody	Chair, Environment, Amenities and Infrastructure Committee
Cllr Penny Clover	
Cllr Carol Dunne	
Cllr Neil Fawcett	Chair, Community Committee
Cllr Mark Giddins	Chair, Planning Committee
Cllr Jim Halliday	Chair, Finance, Governance and Asset Management committee
Cllr Pat Lonergan	
Cllr Colin Sanderson	

In attendance:

Sgt Emma Birch	Thames Valley Police
Cherie Carruthers	Town Clerk/Chief Executive Officer
Hilary Green	Honorary Guild of Town Criers
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
Sally Hoodless	Abingdon Damascus Youth Project
Sharron Jenkinson	Chair of Trustees, Abingdon Carousel
Teresa Archer & Joseph Mailler	Citizens Advice Oxfordshire
Debbie Watts	CEO, Oxfordshire South and Vale Citizens Advice
Hannah Waugh	Be Free Young Carers
Katy Williams	One Planet Abingdon and One Planet Abingdon Youth

31 members of the public

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1 General Introduction

The meeting opened with an Act of Reflection led by Reverend Georgina Bondzi-Simpson, based on the hymn *Be Thou My Vision*, recently featured at the coronation of King Charles. The reflection highlighted themes of guidance, wisdom and hope. A prayer and blessing were offered for the Mayor, councillors and staff as they undertake their duties in the coming year.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Gunarajah, Barody and Crick.

There were no declarations of interest.

The Mayor updated members on her recent engagements and thanked the Deputy Mayor and past Mayor, Councillor Gabby Barody, for attending events on her behalf. She reflected on her term as an honour and noted the strong sense of community in Abingdon.

The Mayor highlighted the success of the Over 75s event, particularly the contribution of Mrs Frances Davids and students from John Mason School in creating a welcoming atmosphere. She also thanked those involved in the school's choir event, noting the students as representing the town's future.

The Mayor reported attending a carol service at St Mary Abbots Church in Kensington and Chelsea in support of the London Air Ambulance, where she read a lesson. The event raised at least £10,000, and she noted it as a proud opportunity to represent Abingdon.

The Mayor also outlined a proposal to plant a tree in Abingdon reflecting her Jordanian heritage. Initial discussions with the Jordanian Embassy have been positive, and arrangements are being explored.

2 Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting

The minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 26 March 2025 were agreed by the members of the electorate present and were signed by the Mayor.

3 Reports by Town Council Committee Chairs

Reports were presented by the Chairs of Town Council standing committees:

Community Committee – Cllr Neil Fawcett

Cllr Fawcett, having provided a written report, gave a brief overview of work of the Community Committee.

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Particular thanks was given to the Project Manager: Business and Community Engagement for her work.

Cllr Fawcett outlined proposals for the “Fun and Music in the Park” event. It was noted that initial concerns had been raised by the District Council regarding the use of Abbey Gardens due to its heritage status, but permission had now been granted.

An update was received on the Town of Sanctuary initiative. Progress was noted, and members were asked to support further development of the project, including partnership working with Host Abingdon.

Plans for Clubs and Societies Day were reported as progressing well, with significant interest, as for the first time it would become an annual event.

The Committee had agreed to continue grant funding for key organisations, including Abingdon Carousel Family Centre, Citizens Advice Oxfordshire, and Abingdon and District Youth Project. Funding was also approved for One Planet Abingdon to support fundraising activities.

Environment, Amenities and Infrastructure Committee – Cllr Gaby Barody

Councillor Gabby Barody, Chair of the Committee, explained that her committee was formed this year by combining infrastructure, amenities, and environmental functions for a more holistic approach. She thanked her Vice-Chair, Elio Astone, and key partners like One Planet Abingdon and co-opted member Lucille Saville.

Key achievements for the year include:

- **Play Area Enhancements:** The outdoor services team, led by Tim, upgraded play areas to cater to different age groups, including a toddler park at Elizabeth Avenue and a ninja trail for older users. Further amendments are planned for Caldecott and Box Hill.
- **Biodiversity Initiatives:** The committee continued its annual tree audit and launched a biodiversity competition, encouraging residents to cultivate green spaces, with the entry deadline extended to August.
- **Infrastructure:** A new, well-received notice board was installed, and two modern bus shelters with seating were placed on Stratton Way. The council has also begun transitioning its vehicles and machinery to electric power.

Future plans include reducing plastic use in the marketplace and hosting a large tree-planting event. The Mayor commended the committee and the "unbelievable" work of the outdoor team, singling out Abingdon's flower beds as among the nicest in Oxfordshire and stressing the importance of these public amenities for community well-being.

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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 explained that the Town Council provided and maintained key local services and assets including play areas, recreation grounds, cemeteries, the Guildhall and County Hall (Museum), Market Place and market, community events, public amenities, and support for policing, CCTV, and community groups.

Cllr Halliday highlighted the use of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), funds from new property developments. This year, £110,000 was spent on capital projects:

- £5,000 to Abingdon Rugby Club for ladies' changing rooms.
- £30,000 to the Abbey Buildings Trust for refurbishment.
- £25,000 on various play areas.
- £50,000 for new climbing frames at Box Hill and Caldecott.

The remaining CIL balance is £44,000. To protect assets and save on energy, the council is investing over £64,000 to refurbish the Guildhall windows with secondary glazing and allocating funds for photovoltaic panels on the cemetery depot roof.

Partnership funding has been a key success. A £200,000 pledge to the Abbey Buildings Trust helped them secure a Heritage Lottery Fund grant of over £4 million. A small grant to One Planet Abingdon enabled them to raise £20,000 to fund a volunteer. The council has also secretly submitted a bid for the Government's Town of Culture 2028, which could award up to **£3 million**. For the year, the council tax was increased by 4.73%, equivalent to £7.60 per Band D property.

Planning committee – Cllr Mark Giddins

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

The Planning Committee had a busy year, commenting on planning applications, consultations and major developments affecting the town, with the aim of ensuring residents' concerns were considered in decision-making. Where appropriate, the Committee supported applications in principle but raised objections to secure modifications.

A key example was the Bury Street Precinct redevelopment, where the Committee's concerns led to additional conditions being applied by the District Council, including planting maintenance, improved lighting, and enhanced public art.

Residents attended meetings and submitted representations, which were taken into account in Committee responses. The Committee also considered technical advice from relevant authorities and regularly commented on issues such as drainage, parking and overdevelopment.

During the year, the Committee met 15 times and reviewed 123 applications, alongside amendments, consultations and major development proposals. Members

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also engaged with District Council planning decisions and monitored key development sites.

The Traffic Advisory Committee met three times, progressing several long-standing traffic issues and considering new matters raised by residents.

Work on the Neighbourhood Plan had progressed, with responsibility transferring to the Town Council to move it to the next stage.

Cllr Giddins noted the ongoing high workload and recorded its thanks to Members and Officers for their contributions during the year.

The Mayor gave special thanks to Cllr Giddings for his expertise and effort, likening his role to a full time job.

4 Presentation by Abingdon's Neighbourhood Police

The meeting welcomed Sgt Emma Birch to provide an update on the work of the police in Abingdon. She had provided a written report but gave a verbal update to the meeting.

Sgt Birch reported that she had continued to serve within the Abingdon Neighbourhood Team, with responsibility for the town centre, in a role part funded by the Town Council. During the year, two smaller teams were merged into one, increasing Police Officer numbers, although there was a reduction in PCSOs.

The team covered Abingdon and surrounding areas, with priorities including violence against women and girls, retail crime and scams, and anti-social behaviour. Proactive work had been undertaken in the night-time economy, including partnership action that resulted in the closure of a problematic premises.

Strong engagement had been maintained with local businesses, supported by the Shopwatch Radio Link system. Work to address anti-social behaviour, particularly among young people, had included joint activity with schools, use of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts, and increased patrols.

Enforcement action had been taken in response to increased use of e-scooters and off-road bikes, including vehicle seizures. Regular foot patrols had been carried out in key areas to maintain a visible presence.

Community engagement continued through regular "Have Your Say" meetings and attendance at local events. The team also responded to ongoing operational demands, supporting emergency incidents across the area.

Sgt Birch noted the breadth of policing activity undertaken during the year and welcomed the continued partnership with the Town Council.

5 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.

- **Abingdon Against Domestic Abuse** – Cllr Lewis introduced PCSO Ali Blood as the new Domestic Abuse Project Worker for the town.
- **Abingdon Carousel** – Sharron Jenkinson, Chair of Trustees, had provided a written report on the work of the charity. It was reported that Abingdon Carousel Family Centre, established as a charity in 2017, continued to provide free recreational, educational and support services for families, particularly those with children aged 0–5, while also acting as a hub for partner organisations.

During the year, the organisation expanded following agreement with Oxfordshire County Council to take on additional space within the building. This enabled increased provision, including additional play areas, expanded “Stay and Play” sessions, parenting workshops and new activities such as sensory play for babies.

Registration increased from approximately 500 to 850 families, with around 100 families attending sessions weekly. Staffing levels were increased to support growth, alongside continued reliance on volunteers.

The Centre maintained strong partnership working with a range of organisations, including health services and community groups, and continued to provide wider family support, including individual assistance to families in need.

A three-year improvement plan was adopted, focusing on sustainability, leadership and management, and maintaining high-quality programmes and services.

Financially, the organisation reported income of £110,894 and expenditure of £91,725 for the year ending July 2025, resulting in a surplus and stable reserves.

The year included some staffing challenges, which were managed by the existing team and trustees. Ongoing support from funders and partners was acknowledged.

- **Abingdon Damascus Youth Project** – Sally Hoodless attended on behalf of the Charity and gave a verbal update as well as having provided a written report.

The Abingdon DAMASCUS Youth Project reported that it had continued to deliver youth outreach work in South Abingdon, with support from the Town Council, aimed at empowering young people and supporting positive community engagement.

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During the year, weekly youth drop-in sessions were held at Caldecott Recreation Ground in the summer and at Reynolds Way shops in the winter, engaging up to 50 young people per session. Activities provided a safe space for social interaction, access to youth worker support, and participation in sports, arts and media projects, alongside practical support such as CV writing and workshops on wellbeing, healthy living and substance misuse.

Creative projects included podcast production and music activities delivered in partnership with a local organisation.

Targeted one-to-one support was provided to vulnerable young people, including those at risk of exclusion, involvement in crime, or experiencing mental health difficulties. The project also worked in partnership with local schools and specialist services to ensure appropriate safeguarding and support

- **Be Free Young Carers** – Hannah Waugh attended on behalf of the charity and had submitted a written report. She highlighted that the charity supported young carers aged 8–17 and that the Town Council funding enables deep support with numbers increasing.

Services offered included six-week one-to-one emotional support; school holiday respite trips; sustained engagement aids mental health and reduced isolation.

Continued funding was critical for long-term support to growing cohort.

- **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** – Hilary Green, Secretary, presented the report. The

Guild supports the Mayor at events and provides Town Criers for civic, charitable, and community occasions within Abingdon.

In the past year, eight active Criers had delivered 75 cries across at least 59 events, representing an increase of 20 cries and 23 events compared to the previous year. The Market Place remained the primary location for activities.

Events covered included civic ceremonies, festivals, traditional events, and private celebrations (e.g. birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, christenings). Assistance is also occasionally provided to nearby towns. A notable event this year was the VE Day 80th Anniversary.

During the year, Hilary Green succeeded Patrick Bird as Secretary. The Guild continues under the leadership of Master Lesley Legge. Uniform maintenance

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was ongoing, including recent cleaning and consideration of new collars and cuffs.

The Guild operated on a voluntary basis and acknowledged the continued support of the Town Council, particularly in funding uniform upkeep and facilitating coordination for civic and public events.

- **One Planet Abingdon and One Planet Abingdon Youth** - Katy Williams attended to speak about the work of One Planet Abingdon (OPA). Katy gave an update on the activities and development of *One Planet Abingdon*, a volunteer-led sustainability group aligned with the Council's climate emergency objectives. The group operates from a Climate Hub provided free of charge by the Council, offering a space for learning, community engagement, and environmentally focused discussions.

- **Citizens Advice Oxfordshire** – Teresa Archer and Joseph Mailler spoke about the work of Citizens Advice, having provided a comprehensive written report. The top benefits issues were Personal Independence Payment (PIP), general benefit entitlements and council tax reduction. The top debt issues were council tax arrears, debt assessments and other debt. In Abingdon Wards alone Citizens Advice had facilitated £347,152 in financial outcomes for Abingdon clients. The CAB thanked the Town Council for its support.

- **The Abingdon Bridge (TAB)** – Gary Hibbins attended on behalf of TAB and had provided a written report. He thanked Abingdon Town Council members and officers for their continued support, noting that funding had enabled work with vulnerable young people while also supporting others to contribute positively to the community.

Over the year, the “Act, Belong, Commit” (ABC) approach had been embedded across activities, supporting young people to engage in positive actions, develop a sense of belonging, and take on responsibility within their community. Evidence showed that some young people who had previously received support were now volunteering and participating in peer support, including through Junior Youth Worker and Youth Ambassador programmes. This transition from support to contribution was identified as a key indicator of long-term impact.

All outputs outlined in the original grant application had been delivered, with several areas exceeding expectations. Engagement had increased significantly, with over 150 young people reached weekly through outreach, open access provision, one-to-one support, workshops, and diversionary activities. This had enabled the development of trusted relationships with young people across Abingdon, including those at risk and those progressing into positive roles.

A priority during the year had been to strengthen youth voice. A number of engagement events had been delivered, enabling young people to share

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experiences, discuss local issues, and contribute to future planning. Feedback indicated that young people increasingly wished to play an active role in shaping solutions within their community.

Progress had been made towards delivering the Abingdon Youth Summit, which would bring together young people, partners, and community leaders to inform future youth provision. The event, titled "Our Town, Our Future," was scheduled for 5 June 2026 at Sophos, and councillors and officers were invited to attend.

It was concluded that the year's progress demonstrated both the need for and impact of sustained youth engagement, with confidence expressed that continued support would enable further development of youth provision in Abingdon.

- **Christ's Hospital** – did not attend the meeting but had supplied a written report.

9 To discuss town affairs

Questions received in advance

1. **Local Resident, Alexander Close** I am writing ahead of the parish meeting on 1st April to raise a matter of growing concern regarding road safety across Abingdon, particularly in relation to the enforcement of 20mph speed limits. There appears to be a consistent lack of adherence to these limits, especially in areas near schools. Radley Road is a clear example, where vehicles frequently travel at excessive speeds and pass dangerously close to children cycling to and from school. This creates an unacceptable level of risk for young people and other vulnerable road users. I would like to understand what specific actions are currently being taken to enforce the 20mph restrictions, and what further measures are planned to ensure compliance, particularly in school zones where the consequences of inaction could be severe. Given the current situation, it feels as though enforcement is not keeping pace with the level of risk. Action needs to be taken sooner rather than later to prevent serious injury or potential fatalities. I would appreciate it if this issue could be addressed at the meeting, and if you could provide clarity on both current enforcement efforts and any forthcoming initiatives aimed at improving safety.

Cllr Giddins passed this question over to Sgt Birch from TVP, who responded that road policing teams are regularly conducting speed checks and encouraged residents to get involved in the "Community Speedwatch" program. The resident who had sent in the question was not present at the meeting.

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2. **Local Resident, Virginia Way** – Anne & Peter Dodd

More than 30 people from Argentan, one of our twin towns, are coming in August to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the twinning of Abingdon and Argentan, Will the Town Council be including a visit to the Twin Towns estate in Caldecott Ward, in particular the Twinning Stone, on the junction of Bergen Avenue and Preston Road, as part of the programme for the Argentan visitors? The Twinning Stone is, at present, illegible. Can it be cleaned before the visit in August?

Cllr Astone confirmed the council would bring the matter to the Works Team's attention.

3. **Local Resident, Thornely Close** – Akansha & Sumon Bhattacharyya

I would like to participate in the parish Council meeting along with my Husband Sumon.

I have concerns about the increasing verbal and violent racism attacks once the peaceful and friendly town of Abingdon.

At the meeting, the resident from Thornley Close shared distressing experiences of racial comments directed at herself, her husband, and other members of the Indian community, including a taxi driver. **Cllr Jehanli** (the Mayor), and **Sergeant Birch** offered strong support, urging that all such incidents be reported to the police. The Mayor, who is not a UK native, reassured the resident that Abingdon is a welcoming and diverse community that stands against racism, and that no one should have to justify their place in the town.

Questions Received at the meeting

1. **Terri Boswell, Abingdon**

Why has the Post Office not officially recognised "Abingdon-on-Thames"? Has the old idea of a north circular road been lost now that a four-way interchange is planned for North Abingdon?

Cllr Fawcett replied that major new roads are financially unfeasible and that the focus is on improving walking, cycling, and public transport infrastructure. He was unsure what the process would be to persuade the Royal Mail to change the postal name of the town, but he suspected it could take some time.

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2. Peter Dodd, Abingdon

Why are the bus shelters, particularly on Western Road, not lit? Some of the bus shelters he been to, particularly the one on Western Road, Saxton Road, is incredibly dark and thinks it is dangerous. Why can't we have lighting, even sort of solar panels on top of the bus shelter? Definitely some sort of lighting. Even advertisements, Oxford have advertisements, some sort of lighting I think is needed in bus shelters. We have new bus shelters, gardens on top of bus shelters, but no lighting.

Cllr Jehanli confirmed the point was well-taken and would be noted for future review.

At the end of the meeting, the Mayor thanked attendees and the organisations which had given presentations.

The meeting closed at 9.15pm

Signed: _____

Date: _____