

## Town Maps Redesign



Town Maps redesign: This project is almost in its final stages. A voluntary group drawn from Town Council, Friends of Abingdon and Vale Disability Access Group have been meeting regularly this year to work through the mass of detail that is part and parcel of developing new maps from scratch.

There was never any doubt that the old maps needed replacing as can be seen from some of the photos , but right from the beginning we were determined to produce maps that not only showed people how to get from one place to another, but also gave them inspiration and reasons to want to look round Abingdon some more. Abingdon is a town full of hidden gems and visitors should be encouraged to seek them out and explore. Visitors who spend longer in a town also spend more money in the local economy so this was not just something that was nice to do, but another small way in which local people could help the businesses in the town to flourish.

In April the Town Council supported our work by repainting the pillars that hold up the map cases as part of their maintenance schedule. Meanwhile the group had decided that each map site needed a map that was suited to the needs of the person standing at that place, so for example a visitor looking at the map on the river bank would want more information about the river bank walks than a person standing in the town centre. A base map would be designed but each map would have a section of the base map featured that suited the map site.

The group also made some other key decisions: we felt that we should be creating maps that would last and stay relevant for five years or more.

Therefore it was decided that no information about individual businesses should be included as this can change radically in a matter of a few months and would quickly make the maps out of date. This of course meant there was no option to ask businesses to contribute via advertising sales but the group were also keen that the maps should convey a quality image and interesting information which is hard to maintain when advertising space is sold.

However, even without businesses being involved, it was possible to gain some funding from the Community Safety Partnership who were delighted to be able to communicate safety messages to visitors through the information boards and also from the Abingdon Joint Environmental Forum who were keen to support small infrastructure projects that improved the look of the town.

Another decision was that the final design should be put onto aluminium substrate so that in future they will not buckle or bubble when damp attacks, and can be lifted out of the case and wiped down when the inevitable dust and spiders have made their marks.

In the meantime the work of local artist Peter Bellingham had caught the eye of the Partnership Manager, with the distinctive style that is both modern and yet also evocative of the great age of travel posters. Peter kindly agreed that some of his well-loved works could be used as part of the new “informational maps” and also accepted a commission to produce some brand new works specially for the project. “It was at this point that I suddenly felt this project was going to be something special and significantly beyond the normal information boards that are produced in most towns” says Heather Brown, Partnership Manager.” We accepted that we were working on a design that deserved all of our very best care and attention and that if that meant that we abandoned our original intention to have the new maps in place by the summer then so be it.” The artist and cartographer were given enough time to do the very best work and several weeks have also been given over to public consultation so that every detail of the maps can be checked. Whilst there are plenty of edits the overall reaction to the designs has been positive and the huge improvement over the previous designs acknowledged.

