

ABINGDON-ON-THAMES TOWN COUNCIL
FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY 27TH JANUARY 2021
AGENDA ITEM 15: REPORT OF THE TOWN CLERK

Forward Plan, Democratic and Governance Matters

Forward Plan

1. In the Council's [Strategic Plan](#) the Vision of the Council is set out as:

“to develop an inclusive community so that Abingdon is the place where everyone wants to live and where the wellbeing of residents is prioritised. In developing this community the town will be one which is environmentally sustainable, vibrant, resilient and safe.” The document goes on to detail the Council's values and then the key objectives as:

- (1) To respond effectively and speedily to the climate emergency.
 - (2) To develop a resilient, sustainable town which will provide a home for residents now and in the future.
 - (3) To manage the Council's assets efficiently and effectively to meet for the needs of the community now and in the future.
 - (4) To work with community partners to support those who are vulnerable and in need and to create opportunities to increase social inclusivity.”
2. During the cycle each Committee has been considering how it can deliver on the Council's vision and the key objectives. The approach of each committee has been slightly different but the objective the same: that we have an ambitious, achievable and realistic action plan for the next five years. As part of this process the committees have considered existing initiatives and projects within its terms of reference.
 3. There is some further work to undertake with a number of colleagues and Members in relation to some parts of the Forward Plan and therefore Members are for now requested to review the latest version in the SharePoint. When this work has been completed, ahead of the meeting, Members will be informed and the latest version will be uploaded to the website.
 4. The Forward Plan is a dynamic document and will be updated continually as projects are scoped, developed and delivered. At each committee will continually review its plans to monitor progress and amend as circumstances and priorities change. In this regard we will consider how best the Forward Plan can be presented so that progress is easy to track.

5. The oversight of the Forward Plan process is the responsibility of the Finance and General Purposes Committee and they will make a recommendation to the Council, who will agree the document.
6. At its meeting on 13th January 2021 the Finance and General Purposes Committee considered the Plan and:
 - (a) scrutinised how the projects suggested for inclusion in the Forward Plan meet the council's vision and key objectives to ensure that expenditure is commensurate with impact;
 - (b) examined the Plan to ensure that the overall scheduling of projects is reasonable and achievable having due regard to the council's resources and capabilities e.g. that the council does not attempt to take on too many projects at the same time with the result that they cannot be achieved;
 - (c) examined the Plan to ensure that the budgetary implications of projects are clear and understood and that where necessary additional budgetary provision is made.
7. The Council is requested to consider the Plan and adopt it for publication.

Neighbourhood Plan

8. A major item in the Forward Plan is the completion of the Abingdon Neighbourhood Plan.
9. Members are being kept informed of progress in relation to the Plan by Cllr Grace Clifton who is reporting directly to the Planning, Highways & Consultations Committee.
10. The plan is now at the stage where the Steering Group is being established from members of the community in accordance with the Council's previous decisions. It is important that this group has clear and effective terms of reference. Draft terms of reference are attached at Appendix A. These terms of reference were considered by the emerging steering group at its meeting on 21st January 2021 and members of the emerging steering group have been asked to give any further comments to the Council by 25th January 2021. The terms of reference require approval by the Town Council, and I **recommend** accordingly.
11. In accordance with standard practice and the draft terms of reference, the Town Council is required to approve the membership of the steering group and I will forward a list of the proposed members of the steering group ahead of the Town Council, together with any suggested further amendments to the terms of reference.

Democratic and Governance Matters

12. The Governance Review is scheduled within the Forward Plan for the period January to March 2021. As part of the review I have requested LGRC to consider appointments in relation to outside bodies which were last substantively reviewed by the 2011-15 Council.

13. I have reported previously regarding the Council's Standing Orders. I am of the view that Standing Orders are satisfactory in relation to legislative requirements. However they need to be updated so that they are in accordance with the model Standing Orders which are recommended by the National Association of Local Councils. The work to update them has commenced and will run alongside the Governance Review. I will take the lead in relation to this matter and it is my intention that I report directly to the Finance and General Purposes Committee at this point for them to consider any proposed changes ahead of adoption by the Town Council.

14. Note that in accordance with Standing Orders, any changes will first require tabling in at one Town Council meeting and then discussion and adoption at the following Town Council meeting. Subject to progress and the will of members, then this means that new Standing Orders could be adopted by the Council at its meeting on 28th April 2021, in time for the new council year.

Nigel Warner
Town Clerk
22nd January 2021

ABINGDON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN STEERING GROUP

Draft Terms of Reference

1. Purpose and preamble

1.1 The purpose of the Steering Group is to oversee the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan for Abingdon in order that it will then progress to Independent Examination, a successful community referendum and be adopted by the Vale of White Horse District Council to become planning policy.

1.2 Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council is the qualifying body for the purposes of preparing the plan. The steering group has full delegated authority to manage the process of preparing the plan as set out below and within agreed budgets; up to and including the publication of the consultation draft plan.

1.3 Regular reports will be made to the Town Council's Planning, Highways and Consultations Committee to ensure effective progress. It will be for the Town Council as qualifying body to approve the final draft Neighbourhood Plan.

1.4 The Steering Group will engage the local community to ensure that the Plan is truly representative of the ambitions of Abingdon. The Group will maximise support for the approach taken in the Neighbourhood Plan by ensuring high levels of community engagement throughout the plan-making process.

2. Principles

2.1 The Steering Group will undertake the process in a democratic, transparent and fair fashion, encouraging wide and diverse participation and giving equal consideration to opinions and ideas from all members of the community.

2.2 All decisions made shall be fully evidenced and supported through consultation with the local community.

3. Key Roles and Responsibilities

3.1. To act as adviser to the qualifying body (Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council) for the development and delivery of the Abingdon Neighbourhood Plan. To provide strategic direction for the project and ensure all milestones are met for the production of the Neighbourhood Plan.

3.2. To produce the Abingdon Neighbourhood Plan in as timely fashion as possible to further the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of individuals living, or wanting to live in the area as well as the business community.

- 3.3. Agree a position on specific issues to lead to an agreed policy approach.
- 3.4. Encourage and strengthen links between key organisations within the community and ensure they are informed of the work and progress with the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 3.5. To commission specific areas of evidence and analysis as required.
- 3.6. To agree the final draft Neighbourhood Plan prior to submission to all relevant bodies for consideration.
- 3.7. To recommend the final draft plan to the Town Council prior to the local referendum.
- 3.8. To act as the public face and principal contacts with the local communities and public authorities for the Neighbourhood Plan .

4. Aims

- 4.1 To provide strategic guidance to working groups in the production of the Neighbourhood Plan.
- 4.2 To bring together appropriate local expertise and facilitate joint community working in developing the Neighbourhood Plan for Abingdon.
- 4.3 To assist and help facilitate discussions with relevant and interested groups in the community to promote active involvement in the Neighbourhood Planning process.
- 4.4 To produce a Plan with due regard to the Council's Vision and Key Objectives (see appendix 1 below).

5. Relationship to Other Groups

- 5.1 The Steering Group will provide regular updates to the Town Council on progress being made with the Plan.
- 5.2 Close working links will be maintained with the Vale of White Horse District Council to ensure compliance with planning policy.
- 5.3 Further links will be maintained with other statutory and voluntary groups to maximise community engagement opportunities and maintain positive working relationships.
- 5.4 Meetings of the Steering Group will also be attended by any other relevant person/s or community representatives who may be invited to speak.
- 5.6 Minutes of the meetings will be available for inspection.

6. Meetings

- 6.1 The Steering Group will meet as required.

7. Membership

7.1 As per listing agreed by Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council.

7.2 Amendments to the Steering Group's membership to be approved by Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council.

7.3 For the avoidance of doubt, the Steering Group is an advisory body of the Council. To ensure correct procedures are followed Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council will co-opt members of the public to the Group in accordance with s.102 Local Government Act 1972. Such co-optees, when acting in that capacity, are bound by the same [Code of Conduct](#) as for Members of the Council and by the Council's [Standing Orders](#).

8. Delegated authority

8.1 Co-optees to bodies such as this have, in general, no voting rights and no rights or privileges not enjoyed by the general public (s.13 Local Govt. & Housing Act 1989), but at its meeting on 27th January 2021 the Council resolved that it will permit all members of the Steering Group to vote on issues within its remit, and to accept a non-Councillor as Chair of the Group.

8.2 Should a non-Councillor be elected to the role of Chair, the Council will extend to them the same rights to present reports to Council meetings and to speak and answer questions for that purpose in the same manner as would an elected Councillor, provided always that said Chair has signed a declaration, in the same manner as an elected Member, to accept that they are bound by the Code of Conduct for Members of the Council and by prevailing Standing Orders and policies of the Council.

8.3 The Chairperson is authorized to work in consultation with the Town Clerk, through their nominated contractor or officer, on any matter within the terms of reference of the Steering Group, in the same manner as would an elected Councillor.

APPENDIX 1: TOWN COUNCIL VISION AND KEY OBJECTIVES

To develop an inclusive community so that Abingdon is the place where everyone wants to live and where the wellbeing of residents is prioritised. In developing this community the town will be one which is environmentally sustainable, vibrant, resilient and safe.

Our key objectives

1 To respond effectively and speedily to the climate emergency.

2 To develop a resilient, sustainable town which will provide a home for residents now and in the future.

3 To manage the Council's assets efficiently and effectively to meet for the needs of the community now and in the future.

4 To work with community partners to support those who are vulnerable and in need and to create opportunities to increase social inclusivity.