



ABINGDON-ON-THAMES TOWN COUNCIL

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Minutes of the Meeting of the Council of Abingdon-on-Thames held on Wednesday 24 February 2021

Present

Cllr Charlie Birks	Mayor
Cllr Cheryl Briggs	Deputy Mayor
Cllr Gabby Barody	
Cllr Samantha Bowring	
Cllr Margaret Crick	
Cllr Neil Fawcett	
Cllr Andy Foulsham	
Cllr Alex Greenaway	
Cllr Jim Halliday	
Cllr Eric de la Harpe	
Cllr Patrick Lonergan	
Cllr Robert Maddison	
Cllr Lorraine Oates	
Cllr Helen Pighills	
Cllr Ulrike Rowbottom	
Cllr Andrew Skinner	

In attendance

Bryan Brown	Chairman of The Friends of Abingdon Abbey Buildings Trust
Andy Crick	Committee Clerk (Clerk to the meeting)
Susan Tibbles	Oxfordshire County Association of Trades Union Councils and Oxford & District Trades Union Council
Nigel Warner	Town Clerk
Susan Whipp	Deputy Town Clerk / RFO

C108 **Prayers**

The Rector, Rev Dr Charles Miller, opened the meeting with prayers. He left the meeting at 7.10pm.

C109 **Public Participation**

Bryan Brown, Chairman of The Friends of Abingdon Abbey Buildings Trust, provided an update on the activities of the Trust. Before lockdown, the Trust had raised almost all of the match funding required to obtain support from several local and national heritage grant providers. Support had been provided by bodies including the Architectural Heritage Fund and the Oxfordshire Buildings Trust.

During lockdown, the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) closed for all heritage grants to focus resources on emergency funding provided by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. The Abbey Buildings were required to close, with all bookings cancelled and zero income for twelve months. The Trust has two part-time staff who continued to work and the Trust had some success in obtaining emergency grants to meet its costs.

The NLHF has now reopened for grant applications and the Trust is working on this. The Trust is applying for round one development funding and has been asked to provide some indication of support for round two delivery funding, which Mr Brown has written to the Town Council about. Mr Brown noted that NLHF post-Covid guidelines reflect those of the Town Council closely. Mr Brown thanked the Town Council for its support.

The Mayor thanked Mr Brown for his statement.

C110 **Apologies**

Apologies were received from Cllr Grace Clifton and Cllr Andrew Coveney.

C111 **Declarations of Interest**

None were received.

C112 **Minutes**

It was **RESOLVED** that the draft minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2021 be adopted and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

Mr Brown left the meeting at 7.17pm

C113 Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames: Engagements and Announcements

There were no Mayor's Announcements to note for this cycle.

C114 Oxfordshire County Council

The Council received and considered the report from Cllr Neil Fawcett, County Councillor for Abingdon South Division, in relation to the above, as circulated ahead of the meeting. See Appendix 1.

Further to his report, Cllr Fawcett noted that the public consultation on the Lodge Hill interchange is due to take place online from 8-19 March 2021. The Mayor thanked Cllr Fawcett for his report and expressed disappointment that the Lodge Hill interchange would not be completed until 2023. He thanked Cllr Fawcett for representing the needs of cyclists in his work.

Cllr Bowring asked about the residents who may be affected by the lower increase in the County Council budget to fund social care. Cllr Fawcett said that adults with learning disabilities and the frail elderly with a mixture of social and health needs may be impacted. Thresholds for eligibility for support have increased as finances have got tighter and the lower increase in funding may make that worse.

Cllr Crick asked what the work on the roundabout on Wootton Roundabout would involve as she noted the lengthy timescale for completion. Cllr Fawcett said that the work would include the pedestrian crossing next to the roundabout followed by work on the roundabout. The work is expected to widen the central reservation so that it is clear there is one lane round the roundabout. The work will also increase one entrance to the roundabout from one to two lanes. The work was an opportunity to put in cycling infrastructure but this does not appear to be planned.

Cllr Skinner referred to the social care budget and asked if there would continue to be pressure on domiciliary care providers, which would make recruitment of staff more challenging. Cllr Fawcett mentioned discussions with social care providers which had confirmed these pressures on staffing in particular.

The report was noted.

C115 Vale of White Horse District Council

Members received and considered the report from Cllr Helen Pighills, District Councillor for Abingdon Abbey Northcourt Ward, in relation to the above, as circulated ahead of the meeting. See Appendix 2. Cllr Pighills was unable to contribute to the meeting due to microphone problems, Cllr Fawcett answered the questions raised by Councillors.

Cllr Birks asked what could be done if the prospective new owners of Old Abbey House decided not to use the property as a boutique hotel, as had been proposed. Cllr Fawcett said that it was for the owner of a building to decide on its use but he noted that the successful bid was from a business which has a track record of running boutique hotels and which had expressed an ambition to convert Old Abbey House for this purpose. The planning system would also provide constraints on possible future uses of the building in that location.

Cllr Birks welcomed the decision of the Vale of White Horse District Council to make the Charter available to the Yellow Submarine charity and asked on what basis they have been given use of the building. Cllr Fawcett reported that there had been a range of bids for use of the Charter including the Yellow Submarine charity and the Vale aimed to accommodate other groups in the town to increase the community offer in Abingdon.

The report was noted.

C116 Questions under Standing Order 10

Outdoor Services Team

Cllr Pighills asked the Chair of the Amenities and Recreation Committee to describe the extra workload that the Council's Outside Team have undertaken both during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, and the recent bad weather events.

The Chair of the Amenities and Recreation Committee, Cllr Halliday, responded:

During the whole of the Covid-19 pandemic the Outside Team of five staff have carried on working without any interruption. They have not only kept all the Council's public areas well maintained but have also ensured that the Council's play areas have been maintained to their usual high standard – each area has been checked daily and the litter bins emptied. Covid-19 notices have been displayed and updated as the restrictions have changed. The team have modified their working practices to minimise risk to themselves and the public – one result has been that some tasks have taken slightly longer to do than previously.

Covid-19 has had two direct impacts on workload – firstly, it is noticeable that there have been more visitors to the two cemeteries – it is estimated that during the Christmas period the number of visitors was in excess of 2,500 – this in turn has meant that the bins have needed to be emptied more frequently. Secondly, in recent weeks many more residents have been visiting the town centre coffee shops and purchasing take-away drinks - which in turn has meant many more used coffee cups are placed in the Market Place bins. Normally these bins are checked and emptied twice a day – this cleaning work has had to be increased to three times a day (and these days include every Saturday and Sunday).

The recent flooding caused the Team to have to close off the Ock Valley Walk and the Margaret Brown Garden, and to regular check other areas. During the very cold weather the Team salted the pavements in the town centre - not only

the Market Place, but around the County Hall and the Guildhall, and in the Ock Meadow and through the Boxhill Wood.

In conclusion, may I thank you for asking me this question as it has given me this opportunity to publicly thank the Council's Outside Team for all the work they carry out. What has been particularly noteworthy is that they have carried out all the extra work I have described despite the Team being one person short for many months.

Cllr Birks expressed the gratitude of the council to the Outdoor Services team.

County Hall Museum

Cllr Skinner asked the Chair of the County Hall Museum Management Committee to describe the actions that the Museum staff have taken in recent months to enable residents to view the Town's unique collection of exhibits despite the Covid-19 restrictions.

Cllr Rowbottom joined the meeting at 7.47pm

The Chair of the County Hall Museum Management Committee, Cllr Lonergan, responded:

We have increased posting social media articles about different objects in the collection throughout lockdown. We have started a museum blog designed to articulate aspects of the collection and Abingdon's rich history, the first being in May 2020 during the first lockdown. This is very popular and reaches North America and Australia among other places.

We have created a Museum YouTube Channel which has videos about the collection, which, though a work in progress, is becoming more established and populated with videos. We welcome more subscribers. We also hold Teams live events, streamed talks and events through Facebook live and have plans to accelerate production of such events.

Of course, the whole collection is on view via the virtual tour accessed through the website. Virtual visitors can 'walk' around the whole museum and experience the collection. I will now briefly show you the tour and short parts of three videos.

- ['A View of Abingdon'](#) from heritage day live streamed event
- [This is the tour](#)
- This is another live streamed event - [a talk about WW2](#)
- ['Shimmer and Shine'](#) the latest kids craft activity.

Cllr Birks thanked the museum staff on behalf of the Town Council for their work.

Reports (minutes) of Council Committees, for adoption

C117 County Hall Museum Management Committee

It was proposed by Cllr Lonergan and seconded by Cllr Foulsham that the Council receive and consider the draft minutes of the County Hall Museum Management Committee meeting held on 28 January 2021.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes be approved.

C118 Planning, Highways and Consultations Committee

It was proposed by Cllr Oates and seconded by Cllr Greenaway that the Council receive and consider the draft minutes of the Planning, Highways and Consultations Committee meeting held on 1 February 2021.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes be approved.

C119 Guildhall Committee

It was proposed by Cllr Crick and seconded by Cllr Briggs that the Council receive and consider the draft minutes of the Guildhall Committee meeting held on 9 February 2021.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes be approved.

C120 Finance and General Purposes Committee

It was proposed by Cllr Bowring and seconded by Cllr Halliday that the Council receive and consider the draft minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee meetings held on 9 February 2021.

The Council considered the recommendations from the committee as follows:

Recommendations

Minute F140: Matters Referred

Flag Policy, referred from the Community Services Committee

It was **RECOMMENDED to FULL COUNCIL** that the Flag Policy be approved.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Flag Policy be approved by the Council.

Minute F142: Personnel sub-committee

It was **RECOMMENDED to FULL COUNCIL** that the Staff Handbook be approved.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Staff Handbook be approved by the Council.

Minute F143: Community Infrastructure Levy Policy

It was **RECOMMENDED to FULL COUNCIL** that the recommendations contained within the report of the Town Clerk be approved.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Community Infrastructure Levy Policy be approved by the Council.

Minute F144: Letter from Friends of Abingdon Abbey Buildings Trust

It was **RECOMMENDED to FULL COUNCIL** that a letter be sent by the Town Clerk to the Trust to offer support and good wishes for the project and offer to publicise the project using the Town Council's digital media and Town Crier magazine.

It was **RESOLVED** that the letter be sent by the Town Clerk.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes be approved.

C121 Green Advisory and Scrutiny Committee

It was proposed by Cllr Barody and seconded by Cllr Greenaway that the Council receive and consider the draft minutes of the Green Advisory and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 18 February 2021 and consider that the [single use plastics policy](#) (minute GR49) be adopted by the Town Council.

The Chair, Cllr Barody, commented that Cllr Coveney had developed the single use plastics policy as a project listed in the Town Council's Forward Plan, working in particular with Anne Smart of Abingdon Cuts Plastic and Abingdon Carbon Cutters. Cllr Barody acknowledged the work that went into the policy and commended it to the Council. Cllr Bowring read out a statement from Cllr Coveney, who had sent his apologies, asking the Town Council to approve the motion.

Cllr Halliday suggested that the Town Council approved the policy in principle as he had identified some corrections to be made in the document.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes and the proposed plastics policy, as amended after the meeting, be approved.

C122 Motions under Standing Order 8

The following motion was proposed by Cllr Fawcett, seconded by Cllr Greenaway:

The flooding in Oxfordshire over Christmas served as yet another reminder of the importance of flood defences as climate change makes flood events more common and more extreme. As well as planning policy needed to take increasing flood risk seriously, it is vital that the Environment Agency are properly funded to help them protect communities and the local economy from the devastating impact of flooding.

Council notes:

- That there is a Flood Alleviation Scheme already designed and costed which if built would help to protect parts of Abingdon around the River Ock. This scheme is unfunded.
- The increasing likelihood due to climate change of flooding on the scale that Abingdon experienced in 2007.
- The impact of flooding on our communities can be devastating – for residents personally effected, and the impact on our electricity and transport infrastructure which has a knock-on impact for businesses and the local economy.

Council will:

- Ask the Town Clerk to write to the Secretary of State for DEFRA and the Chief Secretary to the Treasury asking for the Environment Agency funding for flood alleviation schemes to be increased significantly and for the Abingdon Flood Alleviation Scheme specifically to be funded as part of the government's next budget round.
- Ask the Town Clerk to write to the Environment Agency asking for regular updates on the Abingdon Flood Alleviation Scheme
- Continue to work through our partnerships with other authorities, to highlight the importance of flood alleviation in Abingdon.
- To consider flood alleviation and natural water course management as part of our Neighbourhood Plan.

Cllr Fawcett referred to the serious flooding in 2007 which affected several hundred Abingdon residents. Following this event, a major flood alleviation scheme was proposed. The Environment Agency does not now plan to proceed with the proposed scheme for Abingdon. This is due to funding not being available for every proposed scheme, which requires the Environment Agency to have to choose between different schemes based on the level of benefit they deliver. The motion requests funding to proceed with the planned scheme or a similar scheme if it adopted a more natural approach to reducing flood risk in Abingdon.

It was noted that the calculation of value which informed Environment Agency decisions on investment is focused on financial considerations. The risk of flooding to the health of residents and the cost to private properties are not taken into account. Flooding of a public resource such as the A34 is given more weight.

The motion was agreed unanimously.

Exclusion of the Public, Including the Press

RESOLVED:

“That in accordance with section 1 (2) of the Public Bodies (admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, the public, including the press, be excluded from the meeting because of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted as summarised below.”

The meeting adjourned at 8.23pm
The meeting reconvened at 8.33pm

SECTION II (Confidential Agenda)

C123 Confidential appendices to the minutes of meetings

The confidential appendices to the minutes of the following committees and the recommendations contained therein were agreed:

- (i) Guildhall Committee meeting of 9 February 2021
- (ii) Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting of 9 February 2021

C124 Financial Matter – Market Place

The Town Council considered a recommendation from the Town Clerk, which was agreed as amended by the Town Council.

See the Confidential Appendix to these minutes.

The meeting rose at 9.04 pm.

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Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames

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Date

Minute C114: County Council report

County Councillor Report to Abingdon Town Council
Cllr Neil Fawcett, Abingdon South Division, Oxfordshire County Council

County Council budget

The Conservative administration proposed a budget that did not take the full 5% rise they were allowed (2% general, 3% specifically for Adult Social Care). This is out of step with neighbouring County Councils and Unitary authorities, most of whom believe that Adult Social Care desperately needs extra funds. This means £8m less for social care in Oxfordshire next year than was possible.

Relatively small amounts of extra funding were put into some services, but nowhere near enough to undo the damage to local services such as Children's Centres, Youth Service, rural bus services etc. that has been done during the last 16 years.

All three Abingdon County Councillors voted against the administration budget.

Lodge Hill

After years of pushing, it does now look like plans for the Lodge Hill interchange are moving forward.

Briefings for local councillors have started and there will be a public consultation happening soon, during March, all online of course.

All three Abingdon County Councillors raised questions about the initial design due to concerns about cycle and pedestrian safety.

We would encourage all local councillors and the public to respond to the consultation. If the current plan is delivered, the expectation now is that the junction will be finished by the Summer of 2023. (But that is a full year later than when I last reported on this to the Town Council.)

Wootton Road roundabout

Work is underway on the Wootton Road roundabout, being done by the housing developers as part of the package they have to deliver.

The work took your County Councillors by surprise as it had not been included in our regular briefings by county officers.

Once again, the needs of cyclists and pedestrians are not being provided for properly.

Reporting potholes, faulty street lights etc.

The most effective way to report potholes, faulty street lights, drainage problems and other similar issues is through the 'Fix My Street' website. Some improvements have been made to the system recently and I have certainly had more useful responses on issues I have reported.

The website is here: <https://fixmystreet.oxfordshire.gov.uk/>

Councillor Priority Fund

So far this year, Priority Fund allocations have been made to the following groups and more are in consideration:

Abingdon Bridge, Abingdon Foodbank, Be Free Young Carers, Citizen's Advice, Earth Trust, FarmAbility, Maggie's Oxford, SOFEA (Abingdon Community Fridge), bell bollards in Abingdon, Covid emergency support, presents for care leavers, Abingdon Carousel Family Centre, IT equipment (Covid), Good Neighbours scheme.

Information about how to apply is here:

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/councillorpriorityfund>

Local Transport & Connectivity Plan

Residents and organisations across Oxfordshire are being offered the chance to help shape the transformation of transport and digital connectivity across the county in a new consultation from 15 February to 28 March on a draft blueprint for the future.

This consultation will offer residents a chance to give feedback on the content of the plan.

The areas of focus for the new plan are:

- Commitments to de-carbonise the transport system by 2050
- Reducing the need to travel
- Discouraging unnecessary individual private vehicle use by promoting use of public transport and active travel such as walking and cycling
- A push towards quality digital gigabit and/or full fibre connectivity for all
- Enabling the economy to develop, supporting the Oxfordshire local industrial strategy agreed in July 2019
- Public transport operations and network changes amid the impacts of COVID-19.

URL : <http://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/consultation-ltcp/>

Neil Fawcett
County Councillor for Abingdon South

Agenda item C115: District Council report

VALE DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT TO ABINGDON TOWN COUNCIL

GARDEN WASTE COLLECTIONS

Following my report to council last month, I can now report that Biffa was able to resume Brown Bin collections last week (week commencing 15th February) and also picked up leftover Christmas trees. The service usually provides 25 collections per year, with a one collection pause at Christmas. On top of that there are double collections on the extra garden waste weeks in Spring and Autumn. However, the service is not currently taking on new customers.

COMMUNITY COVID 19 TESTING

This week The Beacon in Wantage has opened as a Covid 19 testing site for public facing workers and volunteers who are not displaying symptoms. People in these roles who cannot work from home and do not have access to workplace testing will be able to book a weekly test at the centre. The Lateral Flow tests take only 15 minutes with results available within an hour.

South and Vale district councils have worked closely with partners across the county to set up this rapid symptom free testing site to help stop the spread of the virus. This centre will remain open for as long as required.

COUNCIL MEETING 10/2/21

At the meeting of the 10th February, Council approved the budget and set the council tax for 2021/22. District Council tax rises are capped at £5 on a band D property. Council also considered the recommendations of the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel and decided not to implement an increase in Councillor allowances at this time, however Council did agree to introduce a Special Responsibility Allowance for the Chair of the Climate Emergency Advisory Committee, the only committee chair who is not already receiving an SRA.

Motions were passed related to Oxfordshire's 20 is Plenty initiative, on calling for funding for the Abingdon Flood Alleviation and a motion related to the re-allocation of S106 funding previously allocated by the previous administration to the ill-fated Wessex Leisure centre at Grove.

The minutes for this Council meeting have not yet been published, however, if you missed the meeting it is still available to watch on Youtube (along with other formal council meetings include the Planning committee) – just go to Youtube.com and search for Vale of White Horse Council

OLD ABBEY HOUSE

The sale of Old Abbey House has been completed. Oxfordshire building company Ede Holdings Ltd intend to turn the building into a 20 bedroom hotel. The new hotel will create jobs locally and they will also be looking to work with local companies, eg laundry provider, baker for fresh morning goods and cleaning staff. Ede estimates that the hotel could bring in around £430,000 per year of spend into Abingdon in retail, food, drink and local attractions.

During the bidding process for the sale of the building, Vale officers had discussions with a number of community results. As a result of this we are excited that the **Yellow Submarine charity** will be moving into The Charter later this year. The charity, who supports young people with learning disabilities and autism, plans to provide training opportunities, support and to open the building to other support groups.

HELEN PIGHILLS

Cabinet Member for Healthy Communities

Vale Councillor for Abingdon Abbey Northcourt ward

February 2021