

**Draft Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on Thursday 10th March 2020
In the Roysse Room, Guildhall, Abingdon-on-Thames.**

Present

Cllr Charlie Birks

Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames and Chair of the Annual Parish Meeting

Nigel Warner

Town Clerk (Clerk to the meeting)

85 residents of the Parish including Town Councillors and officers.

1. **General Introduction.**

The Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames, Councillor Charlie Birks, welcomed all those present to the Annual Parish Meeting. He stated that the Parish Meeting was a meeting of the electors of Abingdon organised by the Council each year, in accordance with statute, but was not a Council meeting. Whilst not a legal requirement, it gave the Council the opportunity to inform residents of its work and the progress being made, with the Chairs of the main committees presenting reports

The Mayor further outlined the Council's services, how the Council operated and how it made decisions, including its partnership working with other organisations.

The meeting gave residents the opportunity to ask questions of the Council and raise any matters relating to the town.

2. **Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of 12th March 2019**

It was **resolved** that the minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting of 12th March 2019 be agreed as a correct record.

3. **Reports by Committee Chairs**

The Mayor introduced the Chairs of each of the Council's committees, who then proceeded to give their reports to the meeting.

Members of the public had the opportunity to ask questions of the various Chairs and were given answers at the meeting.

(a) Amenities & Recreation Committee

The Chair, Cllr Jim Halliday, gave his report to the meeting. A copy of this report is on the website. Further to his report, Cllr Halliday proposed a vote of thanks to the Works Team for their hard work over the past year and to Steve Rich who was retiring in April after 19 years' service to the council.

(b) Community Services Committee

The Chair of the Committee, Cllr Neil Fawcett, gave his report to the meeting. A copy of the report is on the website.

Further to the report, Cllr Neil Fawcett, reported that there were at this stage no plans to cancel Fun and Music in the park due to Coronavirus, but that we would be taking advice from the government and would keep the public informed. If necessary, the event would be postponed until the risk had passed.

(c) Guildhall Committee

The Chair of the Committee, Cllr Margaret Crick, gave her report to the meeting. A copy of the report is on the website.

(d) County Hall Museum Management Committee

The Chair of the Committee, Cllr Patrick Lonergan, gave his report to the meeting. A copy of the report is on the website.

(e) Planning, Highways and Consultations Committee

The Chair of the Committee, Cllr Jeanette Halliday, had given her apologies for the meeting. She had sent a report, and this was read out by the Vice Chair of the Committee, Cllr Lorraine Oates. A copy of the report is on the website.

(f) Finance and General Purposes Committee

The Chair of the Committee, Cllr Samantha Bowring, gave a report to the meeting. A copy of the report is on the website.

4. **Abingdon Neighbourhood Development Plan**

The Chair of the meeting, Cllr Charlie Birks, welcomed Richard Eastham of FERIA Urbanism to the meeting.

Mr Eastham gave a presentation to the meeting as attached as an appendix to these minutes. Members of the audience had a chance to ask Mr Eastham questions.

What is the budget for this project?

- £28,000 net

What was the typical length of this process?

- This can vary depending on a number of factors, but we would expect it to be roughly 18 months to 2 years.

What schools and community groups would be included?

- The details of this plan are still yet to be worked out, so currently we are unaware of the precise details, but we would hope to include as many people as possible.

Will this plan be overtaken by the proposed diamond interchange and housing development in the north of the town?

- Again, the plan has yet to be drawn up, but these are the types of issues expected to be included in the plan.

Will the plan consider green issues and traffic issues?

- Absolutely, just because something does not require planning permission does not mean it cannot be included in the plan. Whilst planning issues are the primary issue, it is possible to include these things as part of the objectives, policies or projects within the plan.

What is a neighbourhood plan?

- A Neighbourhood plan is a statutory document covering a range of issues such as planning, traffic and environmental issues. The exact topics covered are flexible and can be catered to the particular needs and priorities of the town.

As Abingdon Town Council is not the local planning authority can it really make that much difference?

- Once the plan has passed referendum it is a powerful document, whilst it cannot prevent say housing applications it can influence shape and improve the outcomes. Once it has passed referendum it cannot be ignored by the local planning authority, The Vale of White Horse District Council, as it becomes a planning document and will be imperative to the planning process.

Will the plan include provisions for cyclists within Abingdon?

- Yes it will, the details of how are still yet to be decided. It could be about redistributing road space or making the public more aware of what is already available to them, but transport and cycling are important factors to the town and will be covered within the neighbourhood plan.

Can a neighbourhood plan document be updated if needed or is it unchangeable once created?

- You will certainly be able to amend the document if need be. You would expect a neighbourhood plan to have a “shelf life” of about 10-15 years but within that time there are certain ‘refresh’ mechanisms that allow for updates. It becomes a living document and providing the amendment are not material enough to warrant a new referendum, can be changed within the document.

Regarding the referendum, how do the percentages of this work?

- There is no minimum turn out required and the vote is based on percentages of those who vote. In previous experience the turn out figures have been good for neighbourhood plan referendums.

What if big planning decisions are made in the meantime?

- The local planning authority cannot hit pause simply because we have started this process. We will work as quickly as possible and capture as much as we can.

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Presentations by Community Groups

The Council gives a number of substantial grants each year and the following organisations provided two-minute verbal presentations to the meeting:

- Abingdon Carousel
- The Abingdon Bridge
- The Friends of Abingdon Abbey Buildings Trust

- Be Free Young Carers
- Abingdon Citizens Advice bureau

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To discuss Town (Parish) affairs

Q1. Mrs Vicky Jenkins from Cameron Avenue:

Can you tell me when the lift in the cinema will be repaired?

Answer: Town Clerk stated the hydraulic lift to Abbey Hall had been regularly serviced and maintained but was old and unreliable. The Abbey Cinema did not wish to use it due to its unreliability and so the only option would be new lift, a significant financial cost to the council. It was also in the wrong place, at the back of the building and accessed by a lane shared with vehicles. Short term the council are looking to install a platform lift from the foyer up to the cinema, as previously in place. Longer term solution would be to the council are looking at having a lift at the front of the building with the aim of improving access across the whole of the guildhall building. We hope to make progress on the platform lift in the coming months.

Q2. Local resident

Has previously attended a meeting in 2015 and raised a concern about the state of the grass verges in Northcourt Road Abingdon and the destruction caused from vehicles being parked here. Please can you provide an update on this situation.

Answer: Town Clerk confirmed that the particular grass verges in question fall outside the authority of Abingdon Town Council and as a result there are limits on what we can do. Matter had been raised formally with the responsible authorities; this was a problem in other areas too. We will raise this again with the relevant authorities to investigate.

Q3. Resident from Willow Brook:

Resident seconded the concerns raised regarding the grass verges and the state of the ground as a result of parking here. Felt this issue should be resolved prior to work being carried out on a neighbourhood plan.

Q4 Terry Boswell – Local resident

Can Abingdon Town Council do anything regarding the upcoming housing development north of the town and the diamond interchange, to ensure diamond interchange is built before any housing?

Answer: Town Clerk confirmed that Abingdon Town Council shared these concerns and Council had objected to the planning application because the diamond interchange would not be built before the houses. Matter for County Council but Town Council would continue to make representations. A member stated that the interchange would be built but not before housing started to be occupied.

Q5 Local Resident

Can you tell us what plans there are for trees on Boxhill?

Answer: Cllr. Jim Halliday as Chair of Amenities and Recreation Committee replied that the Abingdon Carbon Cutters had requested that trees be planted on areas of the Boxhill recreation ground however this would cause the council some concern as the area use to be a land infill site for household waste which would cause problems if disturbed and that the area was also leased to a football club. He informed the

meeting that the Council's Tree Survey had reported the trees on the northern edge of the recreation ground were not in good health and would be felled in the next few months and replaced in the autumn with semi mature trees and it may be possible to increase the number of trees that were originally there.

Q6. *Mr Stevens, local resident*

What is being done about the Upper Reaches as this is a major eye sore in the town?

Answer: Town Clerk understood that this building is on a long lease from District Council to private company and that we are not aware of their plans. We have previously expressed our concerns to The Vale and will continue to do so, but as we do not own the building, we have no authority regarding its future.

Q7. *Vicky Jenkins from Cameron Avenue.*

Can you tell us what is being done about Old Abbey House?

Answer: Town Clerk confirmed that this building is owned by the Vale of White Horse District council and that we are not aware of their plans. We have previously expressed our concerns to the vale and will continue to do so, but as we do not own the building, we have no authority regarding its future.

Q8 *Hester Hands, local resident*

Does Abingdon Town Council have any plans to improve the Information Centre facilities and the signage in the town?

Answer: Town Clerk explained that the Information centre is currently located in what will be the reading room once the archives are returned to the council. As a result, a permanent home for the information centre was being discussed, a potential permanent home had been identified and the council hoped to be able to provide future updates in due course. Regarding the signage for the information centre, these are portable structures and were taken down due to recent weather issues but would be back up when weather conditions permitted it.

Regarding the signage on a wider level –fingerposts originally installed by the Joint Environmental trust and did not pass on to either town or district council after Trust was wound up.

Q9. *Terry Boswell, local resident*

Is the name of the town 'Abingdon' or 'Abingdon-on-Thames'? Royal Mail have refused to accept the change. She had heard that this was because road/ street signs said Abingdon and not Abingdon-on-Thames.

Answer: Town Clerk confirmed that as per a motion passed in 2011 the name of the town was 'Abingdon-on-Thames'. We wrote to the Vale of White Horse District council at the time who endorsed this and would then have informed other relevant authorities including Royal Mail.

The town entry signs installed reflected the new names, but it would not be a cost-effective project to remove perfectly good signs simply to replace them with the new name.

We did not have any information regarding Royal Mail's position.

He considered the two names were interchangeable as in Henley/ Henley-on-Thames.

The Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames, Cllr Charlie Birks, thanked all the residents, including councillors, who had attended the meeting.

The meeting rose at 9:05 pm