



# Access & Movement

Research so far has revealed that a crowd-sourced walking map of Abingdon could really help people move about in greener and more enjoyable ways. This map could be associated with new wayfinding and signage to direct people to safer and more direct routes into town.

There was a clear consensus that pedestrians and cyclists need to be separated from motor traffic if both active travel modes are to be considered safe and become a mode of choice. Shared use paths for cycling and walking were generally felt to not be a good solution. Sections of Audlett Drive were referenced in the research as better examples of cycling infrastructure due to width and separation while Twelve Acre Drive was mentioned as a poor example as being too narrow to properly give cyclists and walkers the space they need.

Workshop participants felt that many pavements needed to be resurfaced and better maintained. Specifically mentioned as needing surface improvement were Boxhill and Oxford Road. Overgrown vegetation making easy walking is also an issue although which organisation is responsible for cutting back varies from place to place.

Bins that block pavements also came up as an issue. In some places walkers also face nuisance caused by dogs. Around the Mill Road can sometimes be impassable due to flooding.

Priority access to the town centre seems to be given to motor traffic, while pedestrians and cyclists are given less direct, disconnected routes to follow, with a lack of safe crossing points. This often results in pedestrians crossing busy roads in awkward locations. A 20mph zone across the whole town centre, including the roads around the edge, was suggested to make the whole area safer.

Walking and cycling access to primary schools tends to be of a good standard for most people but not to secondary schools.

## Potential Policies & Projects

1. Establish a high quality walking and cycling map of Abingdon and link this to a wayfinding scheme.
2. Develop stronger active travel connections between the suburban areas and the town centre (inwards movement) and between the suburban areas and the surrounding countryside (outwards movement). All existing routes need to be better maintained signposted and mapped.
3. Design of the town centre, including access streets and roads, needs to prioritise pedestrians and cyclists much more.



# Leisure & Sports

There is a wide variety of sports and leisure opportunities in Abingdon, from the outdoor pool in Abbey Meadow and wild swimming opportunities in the River Thames to informal basketball courts and a BMX track.

The airfield at Dalton Barracks (due to close in 2029) is used to host British Cycling accredited races and as a training facility for triathlon events. Those involved with cycling and triathlon are keen to secure a long term future for these sporting activities. However, the airfield is located outside the boundary of the neighbourhood plan so cannot be directly influence by plan policies.

Research showed that the tennis courts on Audlett Drive are in a great location but they are not maintained as well as they could be. The former grass tennis courts located at Albert Park have gone, leaving Abingdon without any grass tennis courts. Otherwise, there is fairly good tennis provision across the town.

Abingdon has several football and rugby teams. Both girl's and women's football are booming and clubs are aware for the potential need to expand facilities.

The cricket club has a good membership roll but there is a lack of decent facilities. There is a lack of indoor training areas and outdoor pitches are prone to flooding.

Tilsey Park is used by local athletics clubs and the Abingdon Hockey Club. A youth football club uses this facility as an evening venue and the 400m track is used by the triathlon club for run training. However, land either side of Tilsey Park is allocated for new homes, making the expansion of this facility unlikely in future.

In term of missing facilities, a climbing wall and/or bouldering facility was suggested as something that could benefit the town.

## Potential Policies & Projects

1. Identify and safeguard expansion land adjacent to existing sports facilities to ensure future flexibility and investment as the town's population grows.
2. There seems to be a busy "sports village" in the south of Abingdon, that includes rugby, football and water sports on the Thames. Can this be supported and consolidated through further investment?
3. Can there be increased investment in sports provision in the north of the town to counterbalance the southern sports village and reduce the need to travel? Or are there other solutions, such as a "cycle super highway" from the north of the town to access sports facilities in the south?



# Families & Young People

Research to date has shown Abingdon to be a great place to live: a strong sense of community with a balance of people who have lived there a long time but also a sense of welcoming newcomers. However, some more recent housing areas can feel isolated. These areas need to feel better integrated.

Provision for young children is often through volunteers, charities and church groups. The Carousel group, active on the south side of the town, has filled the gap left by the closure of the local Children's Centre.

Older children and teenagers are often drawn towards the "bright lights" of Oxford. Relatively good public transport links for many people make this easy to access by bus.

Abbey Meadow is appreciated by all and seen to be a green space where all generations could meet.

Workshops included a discussion about "inter-generational cross-over" spaces. For example, creating play areas that are also public spaces for all ages to meet. By extension, these spaces could support pop-up activities, like small festivals or fêtes. All areas of Abingdon should have such spaces within the local neighbourhood.

## Potential Policies & Projects

Specific points of improvement could be included in the neighbourhood plan:

1. Cycle routes to enable children and families to cycle to safely to school and into town.
2. All new developments to include community infrastructure (e.g. local shop, cafe or meeting place) to provide a sense of focus.
4. New homes need walking access to community, green spaces and local shops – the criteria of the "15 Minute Neighbourhood".
5. Through the neighbourhood plan, local people should be able to map potential sites for future new homes and establish a set of design criteria to be applied.
6. Future design codes should be based upon well-loved and successful local characteristics.
7. Consider how "schools streets" could be applied to Abingdon, an initiative that prevents car access to the last approx. 200-300m around the school gates at drop-off and pick-up time to encourage walking and cycling.



# Culture

It was noted in the workshop events that Abingdon can feel “overshadowed” by Oxford in terms of access to culture. That said, there was enthusiasm around the ideas of creating a “Cultural Centre” or “Cultural Network” for Abingdon that was specific to the town.

This network could use the river to connect venues and people to walk between venues, experience public art and open-air culture and supported by food and drink land uses. There are a cluster of venues and spaces in the southern part of the town centre, including the Unicorn Theatre. This project could include a sculpture and/or history trail, perhaps with the involvement of local visual arts students.

The site of the defunct Upper Reaches Hotel right on the riverbank, urgently needs to be redeveloped for civic, public or cultural uses and become a key part of this network of venues and spaces. Likewise, the council building could temporarily or permanently be used for cultural activity. The museum may put on an open air exhibition to reflect community resilience. This exhibition could start a more established pattern of open air culture to be supported by the neighbourhood plan.

It was agreed that the riverside should be used more often for events, especially the north bank, adjacent to the town with its south-facing aspect overlooking the open land south of the town. The land on the south side of the river has a history of events, such as horse trials.

As with many towns, Abingdon now perhaps has too much town centre retail space. Re-purposing excess retail floorspace to a cultural and/or innovation hub could bring live events and culture right into the heart of town.

There was some confusion and debate in the workshops over the number of bookable venues across the town and the quality and/or suitability of these for a range of events. It was agreed an audit of cultural spaces is required to better understand the situation. The audit results can then inform the need or otherwise for new venues.

## Potential Policies & Projects

1. Establish a “Cultural Corridor” between the town centre and the north bank of the Thames, threading together outside and indoor spaces. This is where Abingdon culture can be showcased to local people and visitors alike.
2. Develop a broader “Heritage & Arts Quarter” to give linked identity to the historic and cultural assets in central Abingdon.
3. Regenerate and open-up privately held sites on the riverbank for civic and/or cultural use. The site of the defunct Upper Reaches Hotel should be a priority target.
4. Undertake an audit of cultural and social venues to better understand existing assets across the town.



# Healthy Town & Outdoor Recreation

The pandemic lockdowns over the past year have alerted people to the need for outdoor exercise and the benefits of access to green space. Both the town centre and the more peripheral areas have many little alleyways and “secret” footpaths that form connected walking loops, but many people are unaware of them. Therefore, a walking map to alert people to the potential of the hidden network could become very valuable.

Some walks can already be found on websites, but this could be expanded and connected to create a walking strategy for the whole town. Specific weak points in the network include:

- The route along Ock valley is good although the Ock valley floods at times and gets muddy. Year round surfaces are needed.
- The Culham Railway Bridge needs a parallel pedestrian and cycle crossing as this would open up further good walking and cycling routes.
- Convenient and direct walking routes are essential. In the Albert Park area, several paths have barriers that make access by wheelchair users difficult.

The Dunmore Road was originally built as a bypass but when Abingdon expands, it will become a main road running through the town. It could block successful integration of future development with the existing town unless it is downgraded or redesigned.

Informal outdoor activities scattered across the town such as outdoor chess, table tennis, geo caching and Pokémon Go could complement formal sports. Open and/or cold water swimming is possible in places across the town and is enjoyed by many.

The sports field at Northcourt Lane presents an opportunity for a public place for different generations to meet. The village feel here could be intensified with the green space at the south of the cricket field becoming a “village green”.

The new residential estates in the north and east encourage car-based travel and are lacking the design quality of Northcourt. Meanwhile, areas in the south have reduced access to local facilities (for example, a post office has recently closed) and there are significant health inequalities across the town.

## Potential Policies & Projects

1. Establish a crowd-sourced walking map of the whole town.
2. Identify weak spots in the network and describe the interventions needed to improve conditions.
3. Schedule the interventions required in the neighbourhood plan projects appendix.
4. Further integration of projects around dementia-friendly design and mental health with the neighbourhood plan projects.



# The Environment

It appears that this topic will broadly consist of four key sections, as follows: Design & Build of Developments; Green Spaces; Transport; and Town Centre.

**New Builds** — All new homes across the plan area require high quality, energy efficient construction techniques. They should be zero carbon and use heat pumps, efficient insulation, and solar panels to minimise/avoid fossil fuel use. Car parking spaces may still be necessary but spaces must be easily convertible to other uses. For example, use of courtyard parking spaces instead of driveways.

**Green Spaces** — Abingdon has a surprisingly high number of small green spaces. The loss of these spaces (e.g. green courtyard spaces between houses) through infill development is a big concern as such spaces support wildlife and biodiversity, and support quality of life and emotional wellbeing for local people of all ages. The neighbourhood plan should audit, map, designate and protect the most valuable of these green spaces. To protect the more generous green spaces in some places, higher housing density should be encouraged elsewhere.

**Transport** — Traffic volumes and speeds need to be reduced. While electric cars will reduce air pollution at source they will still cause traffic congestion and leave a huge carbon footprint in the manufacturing process. Instead,

transportation needs to move away from “high mobility” towards “local access” by active travel (i.e. walking and cycling). Car clubs can help support longer journeys.

**Town Centre** — Too much traffic in the town centre is detrimental to a busy and attractive town centre in which people want to spend time. Better, and more frequent public transport, to the town centre is needed for those who cannot drive or do not wish to do so. Blocking off town centre through-routes to private cars (while maintaining bus and emergency vehicle access) will likely make a high proportion of town centre traffic disappear. Nobody can accurately predict how transport will develop in the future, so opportunities for flexible solutions need to be inherent in the plan.

## Potential Policies & Projects

1. Create sustainable design codes for all new build properties.
2. Identify areas for potential biodiversity improvements and/or tree-planting schemes.
3. Map and audit all green spaces across the town to enable their protection and enhancement.
4. A radical town centre traffic management strategy to be part of the neighbourhood plan.



# Heritage & Built Environment

Abingdon has several districts that are rich in built heritage. These are well-loved by residents and visitors alike. While the town has three Conservation Areas these do not cover all the heritage areas that people feel should be protected. An appraisal report exists for Northcourt and appraisals are being considered for both the Albert Park and Town Centre Conservation Areas. While the neighbourhood plan cannot expand the Conservation Areas it can offer protection to non-designated heritage assets (i.e. those areas or buildings that are not within a Conservation Area or are not Listed).

Analysis of the best parts of Abingdon (e.g. materials, form, scale, massing and composition) will likely reveal themes or patterns that can provide guidance for future developments. In this way, Abingdon's built past can inform its built future. Use of a locally defined pattern book should ensure that new buildings will be less anonymous as inspiration will be informed by the immediate locality. The site of the defunct Upper Reaches Hotel could benefit from this locally-derived design code. Such an approach could help avoid a bulky, over-scaled development in this prime location.

Furthermore, local architects, businesses and design companies should have priority in the design and construction of new developments. An increasing number of "exceedingly small flats" are being developed from existing properties in the town centre, properties

only suitable for young people, without children. A richer mix of generations living in the centre would generate a much healthier town centre atmosphere and will better support local business. To assist community cohesion, both in the town centre and in peripheral areas, there needs to be many different types and sizes of outdoor meeting spaces within all developments. Such outdoor civic spaces offer flexibility to accommodate a diverse, complex, and ever changing community.

Opinions on "shared garden spaces" were divided: Some were concerned about problems caused by friction between neighbours while others thought that such an arrangement could strengthen the community spirit.

## Potential Policies & Projects

1. Create a schedule of non-designated heritage assets to be protected by the neighbourhood plan.
2. Analysis of the best parts of Abingdon to inform a local architectural pattern book to shape and influence new development.
3. Town centre housing strategy to inform a better balance between smaller flats and more generous town houses and apartments.
4. Civic spaces strategy, to embed outdoor meeting places within reach of all residents.



# Business, Economy & Town Centre

Workshop participants agreed that Abingdon is a beautiful town on the river but more needs to be made of this fabulous waterside setting that can easily be overlooked by visitors. Abingdon should be known as one of several beautiful “towns on the Thames”. It is, after all, the next one upstream from other successful towns like Henley and Marlow.

To reinforce this riverside identity, a direct, convenient and convivial connection is needed between the town centre and the north bank of the river. The route needs to be more obvious and a solution is needed to overcome the barriers to easy movement presented by busy traffic flows.

In the town centre there are some underutilised and/or vacant large retail units. The current decline in “real world” retailing mean these are unlikely to be filled again. Could these units be used as a new innovation, science, technology or creative hub? Perhaps scattered out across the town centre taking up empty units as and when needed? Or be used as flexible shared work spaces to bring new activity into the centre? Rather than demolish these units, can they be quickly repurposed?

Meanwhile, small-scale, independent shops with a local provenance can generate new visits to the town centre in a time where people can buy the basics and more online. A greater focus on leisure, culture and food/drink destinations rather than retail will better

align the town with future trends.

There are also very few residential uses around The Charter. This results in very little activity during the evenings and at night making the area feel unsafe due to a lack of natural surveillance. A greater mix of uses in this area, including new homes, can help address this.

A successful travel strategy will reduce the numbers arriving in the town centre by car, reducing the need for land in the town centre to be dedicated to car parking. Creating a “pedestrianised zone” within the ring road would push car parking into land outside this area but where would this go?

The pandemic has forced upon us new ways of working e.g. work-from-home. What the long term effects of this will be is unknown. Therefore, flexibility in planning policy will be important to allow for evolution of working patterns.

## Potential Policies & Projects

1. Branding and identity strategy to revolve around the “beautiful town on the river” concept.
2. Audit of ex-retail buildings with a view to repurposing for innovation or cultural accommodation.
3. Encouragement for small-scale independent and innovative retail within the historic street pattern.
4. Town centre residential strategy to ensure a balanced mix of small and larger properties.