

ABINGDON TOWN COUNCIL

Environment and Amenities Advisory Committee 17 March 2022

Item 7 - Neighbourhood Plan update

1. Abingdon's area designation was formally signed off by Vale on 2 March, approving the map that we submitted on 10 November. This is good news as it means that we are able to apply for funding to support some of the NP project work.
2. The online public consultation (22 January – 4 March) has now officially closed, although the website will remain open until we submit the plan to Vale, allowing for further topics and themes to be explored. During this period of consultation, we received 146 comments from 72 people – 11 comments about the character areas topic, 74 comments about the green spaces topic and 61 comments about the town centre topic. Comments and feedback were broadly very positive about the direction of travel and, importantly, gaps in our data have been identified with some really good suggestions made.
3. A public engagement event was held at the Guildhall on 3rd March. In total, just under 50 people attended from across the town. Richard Eastham from FERIA updated attendees on findings from the online public engagement and explained next steps. 13 residents asked questions/raised queries with us – of these, 6 focused on the process of the Neighbourhood Plan and the remainder queried aspects of the three themes tried out during our online public consultation.
4. Given the need to shift our public engagement online due to the Omicron COVID wave, allowing residents 5 weeks to review our themes, there may be a slight shift in the NP timeline for the Actions Register. It is possible this has created a delay of one month but I can confirm this after our next Steering Group meeting.
5. The next Steering Group meeting on 16 March will review the full findings and analysis and decide on the next topic/theme areas to work up and take back to the public. I will be able to confirm these verbally at the Town Infrastructure Meeting.
6. At our January meeting, I raised concerns about the impact of Louise Brown's departure from the Council. Since Louise has left, the NP project has not received consistent support from Council staff. I would like to be very clear that I do not feel that this is anyone's fault – I fear that staff have a lot of work and the inevitable peaks and troughs of a project will need a flexible approach. Support, therefore, from council officers continues to be a risk to the success of the NP project moving forwards.
7. In January I also highlighted potential risks in relation to Vale's recently established town centre plan project and alignment with our NP. Although we have invited members of the Vale team to our public engagement event and Steering Group, I do not feel that efficient working relations have been established to facilitate smooth alignment between both our projects. I have discussed this informally with Cllr Pighills who sits on the working group for the town centre plan for Vale and we will work together to try to identify blockages and possible solutions.