

Annual Town (Parish) Meeting – Wednesday 10th March 2021

Report from the Chair of Green Advisory and Scrutiny Committee

This committee has been developing since August 2019 and advises the Council, its committees and sub-committees on all matters relating to the climate emergency and the environmental impact of its actions with a view to promoting sustainability, adopting best practice, and strengthening the council's environmental performance. The committee's role is also to provide community leadership and raise awareness in relation to the climate emergency and sustainability, engaging with public sector partners, businesses, community groups and residents. In summary, the remit is to scrutinise, suggest and make recommendations to the council via the committee structure, on green matters from a carbon footprint, sustainability, energy efficiency, value for money and waste reduction perspective.

I took on the role of chair with Cllr Alex Greenaway as vice chair, towards the latter half of last year. We have met as a committee regularly and our focus has continued to make Abingdon Town Council carbon neutral by the end of 2030, which is in line with the wider Vale and county council climate action framework. We continue to have significant and valuable input from residents and specialist groups who have helped to inform our decision making, with ongoing matters and other plans for Abingdon.

A summary of what has been achieved so far and what constitutes our forward plan follows:

Update on Town Council Buildings

As part of being responsible for our carbon emissions and air pollution, an official energy audit has been commissioned to assess Scope 1 and 2 CO₂ emissions from our buildings, (Guildhall and County Hall). The purpose of this is to assess and evaluate the energy consumption of both buildings, starting with the Guildhall and following on with the County Hall. The company SGS won the contract and will be advising us on how to reduce our overall emissions, whilst upgrading and modernising the internal infrastructure, to complement the new boiler heating system that was recently installed within the Guildhall. The initial data collection is almost complete, with an onsite Covid 19 secure visit planned for April / May 2021

LCWIP (Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan)

The overall aim of the town is to encourage and see more residents choosing active travel (cycling or walking) or by public transport. Liveable Streets (a collaboration of Abingdon Carbon Cutters, AbiBike, Abingdon Freewheeling, Abingdon Health Walks, and the Town Council) have contributed to and shaped the LCWIP for the county council. The Town Council is looking to formally adopt this after examining the document and whether we feel the balance between cycling and walking is evident. We will be applying in due course for any available funding for active travel that to help with for example, resurfacing some of the paths and cycle ways in Abingdon.

Single Use Plastic Policy

Abingdon has been granted plastic free status and we are proud to have adopted a single use plastics policy which has been devised by Cllr Andrew Coveney, with input from Carbon Cutters, in particular Anne Smart. Areas where the Council can make an impact are the markets in the town square and the summer events in the park when permitted via the government's roadmap. Here we are ably assisted by Abingdon Cuts Plastic and AbiBinit! Market traders are already doing well in his respect. We can still confirm that all waste thrown into the bins in the town square is properly sorted and then recycled or burned to generate electricity. We are actively encouraging residents to refrain from using disposable coffee cups and to start using their own reusable mugs, given most of our takeaway establishments are now happy to facilitate this. Going forward, we anticipate a reduction in single use plastic cups for both hot and cold drinks locally and at any outdoor event when permissible. We will shortly be producing Abingdon branded sustainable bags to be distributed with the help of carbon cutters to residents via the Market Place, as a gift and incentive to refrain from purchasing plastic shopping bags.

Link with the Neighbourhood Plan

The Local Neighbourhood Plan is advancing at a progressive pace with the focus groups very much established and data already being collected towards the next phase. The Committee will offer advice and scrutiny in relation to the outcomes of the focus groups (those linking to the green agenda) going forward.

Planning Ahead

Biodiversity Plan

The desire is to make Abingdon a much more ecologically diverse place and to have more trees to soak up our carbon emissions. The largest tracts of land owned by the Council are the cemeteries, where sound ecological principles are already being practised. Also, within the cemetery beehives are being trialled and, if successful, may become a permanent feature.

We are still consulting on further tree planting and the introduction of a more diverse plant life and wilder areas, not only within the public parts of the community but within household gardens, allotments etc. A focused and guided biodiversity plan for Abingdon is now in its consultation phase to address the above. It will be led by our Outdoor Services Manager who will initiate a joint committee audit to assess what Abingdon currently has in terms of its biodiversity infrastructure, and then to propose a staged plan of action to improve this sustainably which will be informed by specialists, including Abingdon Naturalists Society and the Horticultural Society.

Other projects and initiatives

We plan to work alongside the Amenities and Recreation Committee in looking at street lighting and light pollution at night, the impact this has on biodiversity, and what can be altered

to encourage a healthier and thriving wildlife within Abingdon and nearby surroundings. We will also be looking at the impact that fireworks impose on our environment and whether other options that are equally celebratory could be considered, such as the use of drone focused light shows which were used as part of the London New Year celebrations bringing in 2021.

Lastly, we would like Abingdon to be considered as a pilot town for any suitable green initiatives / projects (insulation, solar, energy efficient heating systems etc). Alongside this, we will access any forthcoming green grants awarded by central and local government, to improve our town in relation to any of the areas already listed and discussed.

Finally, we would very much like to thank all those (councillors, staff, members, organisations, and residents) who have taken the time to contribute to our meetings and very much hope that this will continue as we venture on with our plan.

Cllr Gabby Barody
Chair of the Green Advisory & Scrutiny Committee 2020-21