



Abingdon-on-Thames Annual Town Meeting

Thursday 28th April 2022, 7pm

Draft Minutes

Present

The Mayor of Abingdon-on-Thames Cllr Cheryl Briggs

Leader of the Council Cllr Samantha Bowring

The Town Clerk Nigel Warner

There were 27 attendees including town councillors and officers.

1 General Introduction

The Mayor, Councillor Cheryl Briggs opened the meeting at 7.00pm and welcomed those present. The Mayor advised that the meeting was not a council meeting and is organised by the council each year and gives the council the opportunity to inform the public of its work and the progress being made with the Chairs of the main committees presenting reports. The meeting will be recorded for ease of taking minutes, attendees were asked if they had any objections. There were none.

Abingdon Town Council has two main roles, it provides services and represents the view and interests of the town.

The services are wide and varied and include, the Museum, the Guildhall, recreation, open spaces, allotments, markets, Christmas lights, Abingdon in Bloom, fairs, fisheries, street furniture, bus shelters and town twinning, issuing publication and organising events. It also encourages and supports the work of many groups in the community through its grants scheme, of which more later.

The council has an important role in representing the town interest in matters that are not directly under its control and making representations to the Vale of the White Horse District Council and the Oxfordshire County Council.

Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council has 19 councillors. The councillors meet in committees and working parties with a quarterly cycle culminating in a full council meeting. All councillors are dedicated to the town providing services of a high quality that are cost effective. We believe in consulting with the public and look for continual improvements in our services.

2 Abingdon Video

A video showcasing the work of the town council in the community over the last year was shown, however there was no sound. The Town Clerk apologised and the video was shown later in the meeting when sound was restored. The video can be accessed via the town council website [here](#).

3 Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting 10 March 2021

It was **PROPOSED** by Cllr Foulsham, **SECONDED** by Cllr Bowring that the [minutes](#) of the Annual Town Meeting which took place on 10 March 2021 are **AGREED** as a correct record.

There were no matters arising.

4 Reports by Town Council Committee Chairs

The Mayor introduced the Chairs of each of the Council's committees and invited them to to speak on any specific matters they wished to highlight. The full reports can be found on the website. Any questions arising from these reports will be taken at Item 8.

Finance, Governance, Asset Management Committee – Cllr Samantha Bowring.

Cllr Bowring advised that her full [report](#) was available on the website and hoped that everyone had been able to read it. There were some items that Cllr Bowring wanted to highlight this year.

- A climate emergency centre now operates from the museum basement.
- We created an accessible Local Information Centre for residents and visitors on the ground floor of the Roysse Court Offices
- We are developing plan for a new community woodland.
- We are working with Damascus and The Abingdon Bridge to support and involve young people.
- We have managed finances to minimise council tax rise.
- We continue to manage our assents to a high standard.

This has been another challenging year for the Council and our town as the pandemic has continued. However, Cllr Bowring was pleased to report that we have risen to this challenge and stated her report as Leader includes an update on the specifics of her Committee's work and an overview of the Council's work more generally

Community Committee – Cllr Rawda Jehanli

Cllr Jehanli's stated her full [report](#) can be found on the website and advised that she was very happy in how her first year has gone highlighting the following.

- Annual grant total amount awarded - £65,300.
- The Monday market continues to thrive.
- Events - Abingdon Pride: A successful event was held on 11th September 2021, Music in the Park: This was cancelled in 2021 because of Covid restrictions. In 2022 it will be combined with the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations at Rye Farm.
- Aim to increase our social media presence – The Town Crier has continued to be published during the past year and delivered by Royal Mail to every house in the town. Friends of Abingdon Civic Society have offered to help update notice boards in the town.
- Once again, the Christmas lights and Christmas tree were a credit to the town.
- The museum staff have worked hard during the year and provided online activities when the museum was closed to the lockdown. These include virtual workshops and exhibitions. It is pleasing that attendance figures have returned to "normal." Cllr Jehanli thanked the staff for their work.

Environment and Amenities Committee – Cllr Gabby Barody

Cllr Barody advised that this new committee was formed last year and became an amalgamation of the original Amenities and the Green Advisory and Scrutiny Committees following recommendations from a structural review. The following was highlighted.

- The cemetery will be discussed during question time.
- Biodiversity – the committee has been engaging with the community on this. The Green Forum links into the committee. There is a draft proposal in circulation outlying a vision statement and the necessary steps required for a formal policy to be agreed and adopted. The policy will be completed and adopted at the June committee meeting.
- Community Woodland Project – A working party has been set up to work on developing the land off the Marcham Road. Cllr Barody thanked John Killick and Lucille Savin from The Naturalists Society for their input into the original design of the woodland and its progression over the next five years.
- The service team were also thanked for their tree planting and the updating of play areas which were on a 5-year rolling plan.
- Allotments – the committee are looking into the provision of more allotments.
- The Climate Emergency Bill was agreed.
- Cllr Barody thanked everyone who has been involved in the committee and especially the community groups stepping up and putting on various events and everyone involved in the community, the Town Council staff and the service team.

The full report can be found [here](#).

Town Infrastructure committee – Cllr Andrew Skinner

- The committee responded to the County Council's invitation to apply for a 20mph limit which has been something the Council has wanted to do for a long time, partly for safety and partly for reducing emissions. The application has been accepted and we have also asked for the ring road around Abingdon to be reduced to 30mph. We are also placing 'speed reminders'.
- A policy has been agreed such that in future, street furniture and other installations that are funded by the town will be identified as such.
- The council have recently reviewed our CIL policy and this will be discussed later.

The full report can be found [here](#).

The Mayor thanked the Chairs for their reports.

5 Abingdon Neighbourhood Plan

The Mayor invited Cllr Clifton to give an update on Abingdon's Neighbourhood Plan.

- Since the presentation at the Annual Parish meeting last year we had just finished a round of online focus groups focusing on 8 different theme areas. From these, we chose three topic areas (green spaces, town centre and character areas) and split into three groups to work these topics up to present to the public.
- At the same time that the working groups were finalising their topic areas, we ran a series of meet and greet sessions under the museum arches during the summer holidays.
- A dedicated website has been built, it went live on January 24th 2020. www.abingdon-neighbourhood-plan.org This facilitated the first round of engagement which have received 146 comments about the topics.
- So, where are we going next with all of this? The Steering Group are currently working on a further three topic areas which will be added to our website for consultation before the summer – these are access and movement, families and young people and business and employment. These will form part of our formal six-week regulation 14 consultation which we hope to have kicked off by July.

Cllr Clifton stated If anyone would like to get involved with any of our work and contribute to the working groups or would just like to find out more or comment on the emerging themes and findings, head to our website where a copy of the March 3rd presentation can be found, PLACE findings and the original three theme area findings. In addition, there is a dedicated page about the Neighbourhood Plan on the [town council website](#).

The full report can be found [here](#).

The Mayor thanked Cllr Clifton for her presentation.

6 **Presentations by Community Groups**

The Council gives a number of grants each year and there were short presentations from several organisations which received larger grants.

Abingdon Carousel – Sharon Jenkinson The Chair of Trustees

Abingdon Carousel Family Centre is a charity which was set up to run services in the former County Council funded South Abingdon Children's Centre in Caldecott Chase. When OCC withdrew funding it was incorporated as a charity and is now in its fourth year of offering services to families.

Service priorities are those that benefit families with children 0-5 although other family and community services are also offered under an umbrella approach that tries to be relevant for the community as a whole.

Socially distanced sessions had re-started in September 2020 but following government guidance to lockdown in November, Carousel stopped social sessions but offered one-to-one support sessions to vulnerable families which were a lifeline to those who needed us the most.

Socially distanced sessions were finally able to start again from 19 April 2021 and 3 sessions a week were usually fully booked with families relieved to be able to get out and meet others again. One to one sessions with vulnerable families continued and also specific support to families with children with SEND.

To replace lost room-hire bookings, which in previous years had contributed around £10,000 of income, the Trustees decided to target the many small grant schemes which had been either newly set up, or their criteria widened, in response to the Covid crisis. This pulled in grants from the Doris Field Trust, Lennox Hannay Trust, Oxfordshire Community Foundation, the Cumber Trust, to name a few.

It was proposed to Trustees that a step-change in services should be planned for the post-Covid period including increased content in the general sessions and adding Family Links courses to really drive a long-term change in family lives. The Chair put together a funding bid to Garfield Weston Foundation and this was successful with a £7,500 grant being awarded just before the end of the year.

In such a difficult year, to have continued to support families, especially the most vulnerable, and to have emerged with £57,000 of income and a break-even position, we feel that we should count that as a good effort on the part of staff and Trustees and a good outcome in the circumstances. As ever we thank the local individuals who support us month in and month out with a regular donation.

The full report can be found [here](#).

The Mayor thanked Sharon saying that it had been very interesting.

Be Free Young Carers – Mandy McCartney

Mandy advised that she was the newly appointed Fund Raising and Events Coordinator for the charity. There have been lots of changes in the last 5/6 months including moving offices. She thanked Abingdon Town Council for their support.

Be Free Young Carers is the only charity that supports young carers of which there are approximately 12,000 young carers in Oxfordshire, recent reports suggest that there are 2 young carers in every classroom in Oxford. Coming out of lockdown the services as support for young carers has never been in more demand. We support these young people with respite activities, one to one support and befriending services. One to one support in schools has increased due to increased mental health concerns and our Counsellor is working with young carers in a secondary school in Abingdon.

The face-to-face respite activities have been increased which has included trips to trampoline parks, Space Store in Didcot, Spy Mission in Milton Keynes, we've put on pottery and dance workshops and sports days. The summer schedule has just been finalised which includes trips to Thorpe Park, Chessington World of Adventures and Cotswold Water Park. This gives the young carers the chance to meet new friends and have a break from their caring roles. We provide transport with convenient pick-up points.

The Outreach and Volunteers coordinator are busy building a pool of volunteers and befrienders making sure they have correct training, they provide one-to-one emotional support to the more vulnerable carers.

There is also a bespoke group for young carers 13-year-old and over and who meet monthly.

A previous laptop campaign, which Abingdon Town Council helped to support, means we can now commit to supplying laptops to those carers over 7 that need them.

Be Free Young Carers has also been working with the Oxford Playhouse, year 8 pupils from an Abingdon secondary school were invited to watch a performance called Getting There which was literally on a bus which drove around Abingdon Town whilst performing.

We are all so passionate about what we do and want to thank all the funders including Abingdon Town Council, we have recently received some funding for expansion into Oxford City.

Mandy invited everyone to follow the charity on social media and their LinkedIn page where updates can be found.

The Mayor thanked Mandy and her team for all their work and said it was shocking how many young carers there were which people don't realise.

The Abingdon Bridge (TAB) - Gary Hibbins

Gary firstly thanked all the town councillors and members of the public and stated it was clear that focus was concentrated on those things that matter. There is a very richness and vibrancy when it comes to the third sector in Abingdon and we are very lucky to have a proactive Council who is backing us at grass roots level. The charity has been going 28 years and without the support of the Town Council it is very difficult to draw down any national funding. We have been very successful obtaining finance in the last year with top up grants from both Children in Need and the National Lottery.

This has really ensured that we can grow to be able to meet the local need. The need has risen and uncertainty has increased. Various things have affected wellbeing. Mental health masquerades itself and this can come out as anger, crime, unemployment, and the Abingdon Bridge has tried to put in place diverse group interventions that can really support Abingdon's young people. It's been our biggest year ever, we have never supported so many young people. Currently we are working with over 150 young people from Abingdon on a one-to-one basis per week which gives a sense of the growing need.

Anxiety is a huge thing with uncertainty about exam results for example but also we are seeing more growing demand in more complex situations such as self-harm and suicidal thoughts. This is something we give support on a daily basis. If it wasn't for the Abingdon Bridge those who need support would be waiting a long time for help so it is vital that we are here.

We are constantly striving to improve, we are investing more and trying to be more proactive and preventative in our approach. Over the last year we have been very successful in delivering workshops, group work and working with all Abingdon schools. We are delivering evidence-based work.

We offer a counselling service to young people and a wellbeing team in addition to running workshops.

The Mayor thanked Gary for his presentation and all the good work that the Abingdon Bridge does.

South and Vale Citizens' Advice (CAB) – Debbie Watts

Debbie introduced herself and her role within the CAB and thanked Abingdon Town Council for their support. The demand on services has grown over the last 12/24 months and without funding they wouldn't be able to meet that demand. The CAB offers advice on a range of issues, such as help to claim benefits, debts and relationship advice etc, often dealing with multiple issues. In the last financial year in the Abingdon office the CAB dealt with 3,403 clients, 13,000 issues. Abingdon office has some paid staff which are supported by volunteers which we can't function without.

Over the last 2 years during COVID CAB has successfully managed to provide services where needed.

The Abingdon team have achieved gains of over £150,000 for Abingdon people, with nearly £18,000 worth of debt written off. CAB have also been involved in the housing support fund. We have some work to do with our volunteer network and are working hard on recruiting this year. We are looking to increase sessions over the next few months.

Debbie thanked Abingdon Town Council and all the volunteers for their support.

The Mayor asked if the CAB has contact with Thames Water and can help those struggling to pay. Debbie confirmed that the CAB does have contact details for Thames Water.

Christ's Hospital – Gillian Kent

Gillian Kent, Clerk to the Governors of Christ's Hospital read a report out from the Governors.

The charity has received an annual grant from Abingdon Town Council for a number of years towards the maintenance and upkeep of Albert Park. For 2021 the grant was £4,100. The Governors are grateful for the donation received which recognises the cost of providing this public amenity. During the accounting year 1st January to 31st December 2021 the sum of £98,135 was spent on costs relating to Albert Park and the surrounding roads.

Already in 2022, there have been several instances of bad behaviour in Albert Park, in particular, the defacing of an Atlas Cedar, it is anticipated that there will be the usual bout of fires and tree damage as happens each year and sadly memorial benches often seem to be the target of vandalism.

The Park is a very much loved and used by the townsfolk of Abingdon and it is a wonderful resource for public well-being. We will continue to maintain it to the best of our ability. However, we would still be willing to discuss Abingdon Town Council taking over control of Albert Park and the surrounding roads, pavements, and verges, if they wished to do so.

In addition to the annual grant we have received from Abingdon Town Council we also benefit from 5 Town Councillors on our Board of Trustees. We are grateful to them for giving their free time and for their additional expertise

The Mayor thanks Gillian for her presentation.

7 Abingdon Integrated Youth – Support Project (AIYSP)

Holly Freeland and Roxy Elford

Holly stated that this year Damasas, Abingdon Town Council and Abingdon Bridge have been delivering a collaborative project aimed at getting together the voices of young people along with other projects.

Roxy from the Damasas Youth Project advised that this project had been running for 67 years which supports young people with employment, wellbeing and engages with young people in the evenings. Damasas has been working with Abingdon Bridge thanks to Abingdon Town Council for being proactive, the help makes a huge impact.

The collaboration has been set up to work together to support young people across the whole of Abingdon, initially starting by going out on the streets in the evenings in North, South of Abingdon and the Town, several times a week. This was to carry out needs analysis and find out where young people need support and alongside that identify the impact of COVID. Building relationships over the last year has been key.

Alongside that we have also been doing focus group work, helping young people in education, helping them apply for work, making sure they get what they are entitled to such as Universal Credit. Abingdon Bridge have been doing the wellbeing support and the counselling services. This project has certainly increased the amount of young people having access to services.

We also have 3 open access drop-in sessions, one in the Town, one in the North and one in the South which is meeting the needs of a diverse range of young people.

We have also been running Abingdon Youth Voice who are a group of young people in Abingdon who are the voice of young people to get their voices heard.

The group has bonded really well.

A survey has been carried across all the schools to find out what young people are passionate about and had over 150 replies, the understanding of this will lead the next years' work.

The Mayor thanked them for the presentation and all the work that had been achieved in the last year.

8 **To discuss Town affairs**

Questions from residents to Town Councillors.

Question 1 – Sue Stevens, Drayton Road
(In 3 parts, the Mayor read out the questions)

1) Why was the parish meeting date changed from the one advertised in the Town Crier?

Answer.

The change of date was because of the ongoing pandemic. It was our intention to hold this meeting in person in the Guildhall, however unfortunately, early in March 2022, the COVID infection rate was very high but based on national expectations it was thought that the numbers would drop significantly in time for us to meet in person. It became apparent earlier this month that the case rates continuing to be very high with a number of councillors and staff contracting the virus in the last month. We are pleased to note that cases are coming down quite quickly and we are hoping the next year we will be able to go back to normal, meeting in person.

2) What developments have been made regarding the development of a new cemetery.

Answer.

Cllr Gabby Barody responded by reading out a reply from Cllr Jim Halliday. "Thank you for your question. The Town Council maintains two Cemeteries - the Spring Road Cemetery (previously known as the old cemetery) which contains two Victorian chapels - one of which can be hired to hold small funerals, and the Spring Garden Cemetery (previously known as the new cemetery). Further details of the two Cemeteries are given on the Town Council [website](#) .

Previous councils recognised that space in the Spring Garden Cemetery was being used up and took several actions - firstly, to no longer permit pre-purchase of graves, secondly, to introduce a different tariff of fees for non-residents, and thirdly, to start saving money in a dedicated earmarked reserve (as it has been recognised by successive councils that creating a new cemetery will be a significant expense). During the past year small group of councillors, the Council's "New Cemetery Working Party", has started to prepare a business case for a new cemetery which will include an estimate of when it might be needed, possible locations, what features it might contain, and how much it might cost. The Working Party recognised that this was a very complex

subject as it needed to take into account not only current and future burial rates, planning rules, land availability, groundwater conditions etc, but also National regulations (which are currently under review). It has therefore placed a contract on the CDS Group, who specialise in designing and building cemeteries, to carry out a detailed review of the options open to the Council, and to identify a shortlist of possible sites. CDS are currently carrying out an assessment of the usable space still available in the Spring Garden Cemetery, after which they will screen potential sites and provide the Council with a range of costed options. It is anticipated that CDS will complete their work in the next two months, Their report will provide the necessary facts to enable the Council to make firm plans about future cemetery provision in the town."

3) Why have the garages in Gainsborough Green/Reynolds Way been demolished are they being replaced?

Answer.

The Mayor advised that this is not Town Council property. Cllr Bowring stated that Caldecott have made contact with the developer and arrangements will be made to meet with them in the future.

Question 2 – Alistair Fear, West St. Helens Street

Have councillors given consideration to how buns can be thrown (projected) to the back of the Market Place so that there is a good distribution of buns? Also, will people be encouraged to be socially distant at the bun throwing?

Answer.

The Mayor answered that bun throwing is not as easy as it looks, it's always been a challenge to project the buns to the back of the Market place. Over the years there have been various ways councillors have done this. Plans are being made now so we can make sure that we have a good distribution of buns. To note, the ceremony is on Sunday 5th June and will start promptly at 5:0pm so my best advice is to arrive early and get a good position on the Market Place.

With regards to social distancing – The Town Clerk answered this saying as you are aware the Government has dropped all COVID regulations, there is some guidance in place but whatever we do will reflect any Government legislation in place at the time, if any. The bun throwing is not an activity that would lend itself to social distancing and we as a Council are aware that numbers at this event have increased over the years which is why we take a softer approach to advertising it, it advertises itself. People from up and down the country look out for it. We do employ a reputable security company to assist at the event and we do control numbers on the Market Place, but you simply can't ensure social distancing. We will though ask people to stay away if they are showing any signs of COVID, but we would not be able to enforce this.

Question 3 – Bobbie Nichols, Mattocks Way

The developments to the north of Dunmore Road and Twelve Acre Drive are proceeding apace, but as yet no reserved matters plan has been submitted for the local center (primary school, surgery, shops etc.) and retirement homes proposed in the outline application P17/V0050/O. These facilities will soon be necessary as

the new residents move in. Does the Town Council know what the current position is? If not, can they investigate?

Answer.

The Mayor invited a member of the planning panel to respond.

A member of the panel advised that they are only an advisory panel and as such only discuss those things that are brought before it. However the panel has been aware that there is no new schools or doctors and it is going to get very busy, there is a shortage of doctors and facilities already. The panel have been trying to find out and we will make some more enquiries.

The resident felt that it would be helpful if the Town Council pushed this with the District. An application has not been presented which would seem to be where the problem arises.

The panel member advised that they had been doing their best to keep pushing.

Cllr Foulsham stated that he had spoken to the planning officer responsible at the District Council 2 days ago and was still waiting for a planning application but we are imminently going to get a date for the community engagement which I expect to be within the next couple of weeks which we hope will give us some firm answers.

Question 4 – Anonymous

The Mayor advised that a question had been sent in anonymously regarding parking enforcement. As this was anonymous and the person was not in attendance it could not be answered in the meeting. However, the Mayor stated that she would see about replying to their email.

**Question 5 – Hester Hands
(2 questions)**

1) Can we be told how much the TC has received and expects to receive in CIL/S.106 money for the new estates – and more detail on how it may be spent?

Answer.

Cllr Skinner replied, since 2017 we have been awarded £270,819 and we expect, over the next 2 years, to receive an addition £204,982. There is a policy, the Communities and Infrastructure Policy which the Council reviewed recently, it outlines the kind of things we support. The priority points favor those projects that can be kept safe and in good order. Cycling was mentioned in the Town Infrastructure report, but we have not yet been asked for any grant money for this. It also states in the policy that we will produce detailed figures each year and the Finance Officer is in the process of finalizing the figures for this year. There will then be a full report on what monies we have received and what has been spent.

2) Question for the leader of the Council.

There are a number of issues which cause great concern to Abingdon residents but which fall outside the remit of the Town Council and we are usually told that questions about these cannot be dealt with at these – or ordinary Council – meetings. The obvious examples at present are the Upper Reaches and the Abingdon Bridge repairs. My question is why the Town Council does – which is the only body focused solely on this town – not take a more pro-active or

assertive stance in holding the appropriate authorities to account. After several years of requests at these meetings the Council did eventually ask the Vale to explain the Upper Reaches situation but allowed themselves to be fobbed off by an almost insultingly evasive response: it has been left to community groups to pursue the matter and set up discussions with both the Vale and the lessee. There is a similar situation over the bridge repairs. Surely our elected representatives should be doing at least as much?

Answer.

Cllr Bowring thanked Hester for the question. With regards to the Upper reaches the Vale are working with the landowner to try and incentivise that right type of development, something that is beneficial to the town and the residents. The Town Council supports the Vale in finding the right solution for the site even if it takes a little longer. Local authorities are limited as to how much they can influence local businesses. What has been highlighted by the question is that perhaps the Council is not communicating enough we maybe need to be better in making sure that residents are fully informed and updated. Thank you for your feedback.

Hester stated that the question was not aimed at what was happening with the site but why the Town Council is not being more proactive in pressing the Vale to sort the issue out.

Cllr Skinner added that he felt it was absolutely right that the community groups make the fuss and approach the Vale as the Town Council does not have responsibility for it. There is no limit as to what these groups can ask the Vale.

Question 6 – Stefan Paetow, West St Helens Street

I would like to go back to the anonymous question mentioned. The Town Council had the responsibility for providing visitors parking permits until last year when it was passed to the County Council. I got in touch with them to ask what the situation was with these permits as the ones I have expired at the end of 2021 and I was advised that I was not eligible for them. Could I please ask the Town Council to kindly remind the County Council which streets are eligible for those permits as they don't seem to be aware.

Answer.

The Town Clerk thanked Stefan for the question. The Town Council was acting under a contract to deliver the scheme for the County Council previously. The Town Clerk requested an email with all details and he would make enquires.

Question 7 – Terry Boswell

With regards to the Upper Reaches, I was hoping that the Town Council could actually do something to improve the presentation, whether it means putting up hording of some sort that is more inviting when people come up the river into the town.

Answer.

Cllr Bowring stated that this was something that we would need to look into to see what was possible as this is a private site.

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Cllr Fawcett advised that the Town Council has discussed and passed motions recently on the Upper Reaches and about other issues in the town and they have been raised with the Vale. There are particular issues with the lease on that site, it was a lease that was signed a long time ago, it does not contain the provisions that most modern leases would provide which would give the landowner more say in what can happen on the site and that has made it harder. Although the developer has had some discussion with local groups and the Vale and a series of meetings with the leaseholder about potential redevelopment of the site, to date he has not come forward with any proposals, the Town Council has been pushing for that. With respect to the bridge, it has been incredibly frustrating as we were previously given a timetable but not updated on delays.

The Mayor thanked Cllr Fawcett.

The Mayor then ended the meeting thanking everyone for coming and for their contribution.

The meeting ended at 9.10pm.

DRAFT