

Report from the Chair of the Town Infrastructure Committee to the 2023 Abingdon on Thames Parish Meeting

20mph zone

As I reported to you last year, the Town Council endorsed the Infrastructure Committee's recommendation to join Oxfordshire County Council's 20mph in urban areas initiative. Although as I said, Abingdon was in the first round, you will not have seen any changes yet. This is partly because the democratic process rightly offers the opportunity for individuals and companies to raise objections to the change. These have largely alleged longer journey times. Our calculations were that the speed reductions add at most only a few minutes in return for safer roads. If the new limit is fully approved and a timetable established then there will be a comprehensive publicity campaign.

Neighbourhood Plan

The news about the Neighbourhood Plan(NP) is similar: work has been progressing but the public are probably still relatively in the dark. The volunteer group of residents steering it on your behalf have completed most of their research, which can be seen on the [dedicated website](#). Drafting the plan is about to start.

Some months ago you may have seen an exhibition in the Precinct about the Central Abingdon Regeneration Framework (CARF). Written by the Vale of White Horse District Council, it concerns the Vale-owned properties in Abingdon, namely the Charter area and car park, Abbey House, and the Upper Reaches Hotel. Work on the CARF has finished and the district council has asked us to incorporate it into our NP. This has yet to be formally agreed but it makes sense to bring local government's ambitions for Abingdon together in one document.

We hope that by next year's parish meeting we will be able to report that the NP has been 'made' (the technical term indicating that it has been published, the public have had an opportunity to review it, and the Independent Examiner has approved it). The final step will be a public referendum for you, the people of Abingdon, to adopt or reject it. If adopted, the NP will then be a legal part of the planning process which must be considered in all proposals for developments within the town boundaries.

Conservation area appraisal

In another initiative to safeguard our town, the Town Council is working with the Friends of Abingdon Civic Society and local residents to draft a "Conservation Area Appraisal" for the Albert Park area. This will be submitted to the District Council later this year.

Parking

Something which you are more likely to be aware of is the new parking regime, whereby with our encouragement Oxfordshire County Council has taken on responsibility for enforcement. This has been largely welcomed, as it has freed up some permanently occupied spaces.

Stratton Way mural

I should also mention the mural in the Stratton Way underpass. We had hoped, with the help of a local artist and young people from our local schools, to refresh and extend the decorated area to celebrate the Queen's platinum jubilee. Unfortunately the timetable slipped and the death of Her Majesty meant this was no longer appropriate. Plans are going ahead with a revised theme.

Other matters that the Committee has considered in the past year, some of which will be taken up in coming months, include:

- the updated signposts (including the Twinning Towns);
- the woeful state of public toilet facilities in the Town Centre;
- opportunities for improved cycling paths, not least through existing housing developments;
- support for CCTV

Councillor Andrew Skinner
Chair of the Town Infrastructure Committee