

Christ's Hospital of Abingdon (CHoA)– Review – March 2024 For Abingdon Parish Meeting 2024

Christ's Hospital of Abingdon is the oldest of Oxfordshire's Charities (Registered No. 205112) and dates back to 1553.

CHoA provide assistance to the people of Abingdon through four primary means:

- i) The provision of Almshouses
- ii) Support to those referred to the Charity
- iii) Educational support
- iv) Support to local organisations

CHoA has thirty-two Almshouses. Thirty-one Almshouses are for the occupation of residents of Abingdon-on-Thames (and Oxfordshire in the case of Tomkins). One Almshouse is used as CHoA's Head Office. Residents of the Almshouses are provided with self-contained accommodation, and they pay a weekly maintenance contribution towards the maintenance and upkeep of the property. The Charity also provide residents with heating, electric and water at no cost.

Grants are provided to primary, secondary and pre-schools in Abingdon-on-Thames supporting things such as pupil assessments and items such as laptops and play equipment. Grants are also provided to organisations that benefit the people of Abingdon. CHoA also provide household items to low income families in need, who are referred to the Charity by suitable professionals such as Health Visitors, Social Workers, Doctors or organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau. Unfortunately, CHoA is unable to deal directly with applicants.

The Charity also owns and maintains Albert Park, a private Grade II listed Victorian Park situated near the centre of Abingdon-on-Thames for public use. The Charity also own the immediate surrounding roads, pavements, and verges on Park Road and Park Crescent. Albert Park contains a workstation which is the base for the Park-Keeper and Park Contractors, employed by CHoA. Next to the workstation are also garages for machinery and equipment used for park maintenance.

The Abingdon Bowling Club is situated within the Park and is responsible for all of the costs relating to the building leased from CHoA, as well as the maintenance of the bowling green.

During the accounting year 1st January 2023 to 31st December 2023 approximately £96,000 was spent on costs relating to Albert Park and the surrounding roads. This amount includes a portion of the Park Keeper's salary.

Donations towards expenses received for 2023 total £4,100 and this was received with thanks from Abingdon Town Council. CHoA is extremely grateful for this donation.

As in previous years, there have sadly been odd instances of vandalism in Albert Park. Bad weather over the previous winter has also caused damage to the park grass and trees. Most recently, a tree near to the entrance of Faringdon Road was damaged by high winds. The Park Keeper performs any in-house repairs to damaged railings, fencing, benches, and bins. Damage to trees and any replacement trees are dealt with by a contractor who is familiar with the procedures for a Grade II listed park.

CHoA receive complaints about excess litter and dog fouling every year. However, we feel that with the park-keeper visiting each weekday and signs already in place regarding both of these things, there is little more we can do other than enforcing dogs are kept on a lead. All of the Albert Park expenses must be very carefully justified, and we are of the opinion that more guidance or prohibitive signs would not make a difference to those who disregard responsible behaviour.

Repairs and restoration to Conduit House, situated on the edge of grounds of Albert Park completed in October 2022 at a cost to CHoA in excess of £50,000.00 which is not included in the general park costs. Conduit House was re-sealed indefinitely. There have been incidents of graffiti on Conduit House on more than one occasion.

Despite these problems, we feel that the Park is much loved. It is well used by the townsfolk of Abingdon-on-Thames, and it is a wonderful resource for the public’s 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, should they wished to do so.

Mrs Andrea Acott
Clerk to the Governors