

Report from the Chair of the Town Infrastructure Committee to the 2024 Abingdon-on-Thames Parish Meeting

Public toilets in the town centre

Last year's Infrastructure report mentioned the "woeful" state of public toilet facilities in the Town Centre, due mainly to persistent vandalism, and we have been trying to do something about it. First, Cllr Clover drew our attention to a scheme in Frome, Somerset involving shops and cafes putting signs in their windows saying that non-customers were welcome to use them. Since then, she has successfully engaged 3 business (Java, Coffee Aroma and 35 Ock Street) in a similar scheme for Abingdon, which is now in operation. Second, the 'Space for Change' toilet under the arch in the Guildhall Historic Buildings is now open following extensive plumbing work and redecoration. This facility is aimed primarily at residents and visitors with disabilities and requires a 'radar' key. Meanwhile the Vale has repaired the toilet in Abbey Meadow for people with disabilities (but not the others). This also requires a 'radar' key.

Speed Indicator Devices

The Committee has been considering the siting of Speed Indicator Devices (SIDs) in the town. A working group (Astone, Giddins) has examined data on accidents, conducted on-the-ground surveys and taken advice from County Council experts. It has been found that these devices are more effective if their sites are changed from time to time, so the group proposed 14 poles with 7 SIDS rotating between them, and that where the sunlight was sufficient the devices should be solar-powered. The Town has now bought the SID units, and they are expected to be operational by the end of May.

Neighbourhood Plan

The Neighbourhood Plan's (NP) steering group is now writing up the results of its research, face-to-face engagement, and consultations, with sections on Greener Abingdon, Business and the Economy, Access and Movement, Families and Young People and Town Centre. The next step is to develop objectives and planning policies with the help of the Vale's expert team. These in turn will set expectations for all proposals for development within the town boundaries. Consultation on the resulting draft NP will be taken forward by the Town Council, culminating in a referendum. The NP team is also considering how to address the Vale's Central Abingdon Regeneration Framework (CARF), which addresses the future of Vale-owned properties in the town, namely the Charter area and car park, Abbey House, and the Upper Reaches Hotel. Cllr Skinner has been our link into this process.

Maintenance of roundabouts

Officers have been asked to find providers of maintenance services for our roundabouts, both from firms specialising in work for councils and from more general contractors. Further to this, the Town Council has recently agreed to ask the County if it can take over maintenance of the two key roundabouts on the Marcham Road for a trial period of one year. We are seeking financial support from the County Council for this while pursuing commercial sponsorship. We have also asked Officers to prepare a report on options for restoring the wooden monk on the Marcham Road roundabout. The monk is not in fact the responsibility of the Town council, but we hope to arrange restoration work during the trial maintenance period.

Bus Working Party

A working party set up in 2022 to review the ATC-supported service 41 has been revived with a broader remit, to look at bus services in the town more generally in the light of population need and demand (Clover, Forder, Gunarajah, Sanderson). These are early days, but data have been tabulated on current routes and their utilisation, and links established with the Oxford Bus Company (OBC). One point of discussion will be publication of a map showing bus routes serving Abingdon similar to one that the OBC produces for Didcot.

Finger posts in central Abingdon.

Cllr Halliday has conducted a detailed survey of the condition of finger posts in the town centre, and has made recommendations for each, including realignment so as to point in the right direction; removal of stickers and/or repainting; and removing out-of-date fingers and installing new ones as appropriate. This work is in progress.

Bicycle racks in the Market Place

The Market Place is a popular place for cyclists to gather, particularly at weekends, but there are not enough bicycle racks. So, some bicycles are being chained to benches and lampposts, which is not good for either cyclists or pedestrians. We have made provision in this year's budget to put this right.

Councillor Colin Sanderson

Chair of the Town Infrastructure Committee