



Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council

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ABINGDON-ON-THAMES TOWN COUNCIL

Wednesday 31 July 2024

These are draft minutes, subject to the approval of the town council and they may therefore change.

Present:

Cllr Gabby Barody
Cllr Rawda Jehanli
Cllr Elio Astone
Cllr Penny Clover
Cllr Mark Giddins
Cllr Tom Greenaway
Cllr Jim Halliday
Cllr Gwyneth Lewis
Cllr Pat Lonergan
Cllr Leo Midwinter
Cllr Colin Sanderson
Cllr Andrew Skinner
Cllr Victoria Walker

Mayor
Deputy Mayor

In attendance:

Cherie Carruthers
Andy Crick
Mark Matthews
Jill Williamson

Town Clerk/Chief Executive
Democratic Services Officer (clerk to the meeting)
SRO Engagement Manager, Thames Water
Engagement Team, Thames Water

11 members of the public

T24/24 Act of reflection

The opening reflection was led by Dr Hamid al Shejni, Imam and Leader of Abingdon Muslims Community. The Mayor thanked Dr al Shejni.

The Mayor advised the council of the passing of Anne Smart, who worked with the town council on a range of projects and sat on the Environment and Amenities committee for many years. The Mayor offered the condolences of the town council to Ms Smart's family and friends.

T25/24 Public participation

There were two presentations.

One Planet Abingdon

Three young people – Flora, Lily and Ava - gave a presentation about the activities of One Planet Abingdon Youth (OPA). They thanked the Mayor and the town council for their support and requested continued backing and engagement.

Activities organised included crochet and craft sessions, recycling yarn to make items including blankets, bags and bathmats. Youth volunteers have helped to plan events including the One Planet Living Festival in June, at which they ran a stall selling crocheted animals. They organise, advertise and run Youth Sundays, as well as weekly sessions in the Climate Emergency Centre designed for the enjoyment and wellbeing of children and teenagers. The sessions include chess, board games, craft, upcycling, painting, crocheting and other activities run by volunteers. OPA was previously closed on Sundays due to lack of financial support but it is now able to open due to the work of volunteers and a grant from Christ's Hospital. Sunday activities has attracted greater involvement of young people.

The volunteers noted the need for spaces in Abingdon for young people to meet in, which OPA offers without a need for attendees to pay. The volunteers asked for town council support to engage with schools and to share their message around the town to inform young people that OPA is available for them. This could be done with a leaflet to all residents or inclusion of an article in the Town Crier magazine.

The volunteers also requested that the town council follow the OPA youth account on Instagram and share posts to contact more young people.

The volunteers mentioned research by Force of Nature, a youth non-profit, released in March 2021 which highlighted the impact on the mental health of young people as a result of the climate crisis. The volunteers asked the town council to consider how it might contribute towards helping young people with mental health issues arising from climate concerns and to help disseminate information about the climate emergency to schools and other groups. The volunteers requested regular meetings with the town council to address these issues.

The Mayor thanked the volunteers for attending and speaking to the meeting and said that young people would be welcome to contribute to council business.

Thames Water

Mark Matthews and Jill Williamson from Thames Water delivered a presentation on the proposed new reservoir to the south west of Abingdon. A consultation is currently underway on the scheme. The Mayor thanked Mr Matthews for his presentation and invited questions, which were addressed as follows:

- The proposed reservoir is not designed as a flood alleviation scheme. It would be partly in the flood plan so flood plain storage needs to be included in the development to compensate for the loss of this area. This would be done early in the scheme with stone and gravel ground drains to the south of the reservoir. The scheme will not be approved by government if it does not address this.
- The Thames Water representatives were asked about the ongoing need to reduce water leakage by repairing old water pipes as an alternative to investment in a new reservoir. Repairs continue across the Thames Water region but there remains a need for significant additional water resources for the region and nationally.
- Councillors asked if exhibitions could be organised outside of business hours to encourage more engagement with working residents. There have been seven events, four of which finished at 8pm and one of which was held on a Saturday. The event in Abingdon was well attended by over 300 people. Overall, these events have engaged with more than 1,200 people.
- The Thames Water representatives were asked about the reliance on a single road to access the reservoir site during construction and concerns over the lack of agreement to date from Network Rail for access via railway sidings to be constructed. The meeting was advised that Thames Water was working with Network Rail to confirm plans for new railway sidings and this was expected to be agreed by 2026. Plans for road use were also being developed.

The Mayor recommended that councillors and residents continue to engage with Thames Water and thanked the representatives for coming to the meeting.

T26/24 Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllr Cheryl Briggs, Cllr Margaret Crick, Cllr Neil Fawcett, Cllr Oliver Forder, Cllr Murali Gunarajah, Cllr Lorraine Oates

T27/24 Declarations of interest

None.

T28/24 Minutes

It was **proposed** by Cllr Halliday, **seconded** by Cllr Astone and **RESOLVED** to adopt and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2024 as a correct record of the meeting.

T29/24 Mayor's engagements

The council reviewed the Mayor's announcements. The Mayor noted that she had also visited a residential care home in Shippon to open a memorial garden for previous residents.

T30/24 Oxfordshire County Council

No report was provided.

T31/24 Vale of White Horse District Council

The town council received and considered a report submitted by Abingdon district councillors.

T32/24 Community committee

The draft minutes of the Community committee meeting held on 9 July 2024 were received.

T33/24 Town Infrastructure committee

The draft minutes of the Town Infrastructure committee meeting held on 11 July 2024 were received.

T34/24 Environment and Amenities committee

The draft minutes of the Environment and Amenities committee meeting held on 16 July 2024 were received.

T35/24 Finance, Governance and Asset Management committee

The draft minutes of the Finance, Governance and Asset Management committee meeting held on 22 July 2024 were received.

Officers were asked to provide some information for residents on the recent refurbishment of the Roysse Arch on Bridge Street. A notice by the arch and publicity were suggested.

T36/24 Planning committee

The minutes and draft minutes of the Planning committee meetings held on 20 May 2024, 10 June 2024 and 1 July 2024 were received.

It was **proposed** by Cllr Halliday, **seconded** by Cllr Lonergan and **RESOLVED** that the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chair of Planning, would draft a consultation response to the Thames Water consultation, after the next meeting of the Planning committee on 12 August to which all members of the council are invited to attend and/or submit views.

Cllr Giddins **proposed**, Cllr Lonergan **seconded** and it was **RESOLVED** to amend the resolution to ask the Town Clerk and Chair of Planning to prepare a response on the Oxfordshire County Council flood risk assessment.

T37/24 Neighbourhood Plan

In accordance with standing order 9, the Mayor suspended standing orders to invite Simon Hills, the Chair of the Neighbourhood Plan steering group to address the meeting.

Mr Hills noted that the Neighbourhood Plan is an important town council initiative which enables residents to set a vision for the town for the next 15 years, identifying what might be retained and what might change. When the Neighbourhood Plan is finalised and if agreed at a referendum, the Vale of White Horse District Council must take the Neighbourhood Plan into account as it considers planning applications.

The steering group was established in early 2021 and has met almost exclusively virtually, supported by Feria Urbanism, the consultancy appointed by the Town Council to support development of the Neighbourhood Plan. Wide engagement has tested thematic ideas through focus groups, outreach sessions, online consultations, a public meeting and engagement with primary and secondary schools and youth groups. The chair of the steering group made a presentation to the virtual town meeting in spring 2021. Multiple articles have been provided to media, including the Town Crier, the Abingdon Herald and a TV interview.

The 'Regulation 14' consultation has now been finalised by the steering group and the near-final version circulated to the town council. This is referred to as regulation 14, or 'reg. 14' as it is governed by regulation 14 of the 2011 Localism Act.

Two appendices remain to be added:

- Appendix 1 Character Assessments
- Appendix 2 Green Spaces justifications, according to specific criteria - beauty, historic significance, recreational value, tranquillity, richness of wildlife

These will be finalised by Feria and the steering group by the end of August.

The indicative timetable was provided to the town council for information. The 'reg. 14' pre-submission public consultation will be led by the town council and following this the draft plan will be referred to the district council and independent examiner.

The Independent Examiner will seek evidence that robust governance processes were followed during the 'Reg. 14' consultation and that the town council had made every effort to publicise it widely through different media and has made consultation material accessible to different types of potential responses in physical and online versions.

Mr Hills advised that there was still an opportunity for final revision of the draft plan and encouraged town councillors to provide comments over the next couple of weeks.

Mr Hills thanked the town council for its ongoing support. The Mayor thanked Mr Hills and requested a list of nominated green spaces to review.

The Mayor reconvened the meeting.

It was **proposed** by Cllr Skinner, **seconded** by Cllr Halliday and **RESOLVED**:

- a. that the town council thank the steering group and volunteers for their work on the draft Neighbourhood Plan;
- b. that the town council now adopts the draft plan, subject to a working party of Simon Hills, Cllr Skinner, Cllr Halliday, the Chair of Planning and the Town Clerk finalising the draft to be presented for consultation.

A consultation and publicity plan would be drafted by the working group and timed to coincide with the publication of the next edition of the Town Crier. The aim would be to complete the tasks for the working group by mid-September.

T38/24 **Committee membership**

It was **proposed** by Cllr Halliday, **seconded** by Cllr Giddins and **RESOLVED** that Cllr Neil Fawcett resign as a member of the Town Infrastructure committee, to be replaced by Cllr Tom Greenaway.

T39/24 **Motion under standing order 8**

The motion was not proposed at the meeting.

T40/24 **Future agenda items**

- Governance document review & policies
- Members' allowances

T41/24 **Dates of future meetings**

9 October 2024
15 January 2025
12 March 2025
12 May 2025 – Monday
18 June 2025

The meeting closed at 8.38pm

Signed: _____

Date: _____