

# **ABINGDON-ON-THAMES NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN 2041**



## **Appendix 2** **Character Studies (Draft)**

# 1. What is a Character Study?

- 1.1. A character study of townscape is an analytical evaluation that focuses on the distinctive physical and visual qualities of a specific urban area. It encompasses an examination of architectural styles, building forms, street patterns, open spaces, and the relationships between buildings and their surroundings. The study aims to identify and document the unique attributes that contribute to the area's identity and sense of place. Key components of a character study include:
- **Architectural Styles:** Analysis of predominant architectural styles and their historical significance, materials, and construction techniques.
  - **Building Forms:** Evaluation of building typologies, heights, massing, and roofscapes that define the urban fabric.
  - **Street Patterns:** Examination of the layout and connectivity of streets, including the hierarchy of roads, pedestrian pathways, and the integration of public spaces.
  - **Open Spaces:** Assessment of green spaces, parks, and other open areas that contribute to the urban environment's quality and character.
  - **Visual Relationships:** Identification of important views, vistas, and visual corridors that enhance the aesthetic appeal of the townscape.

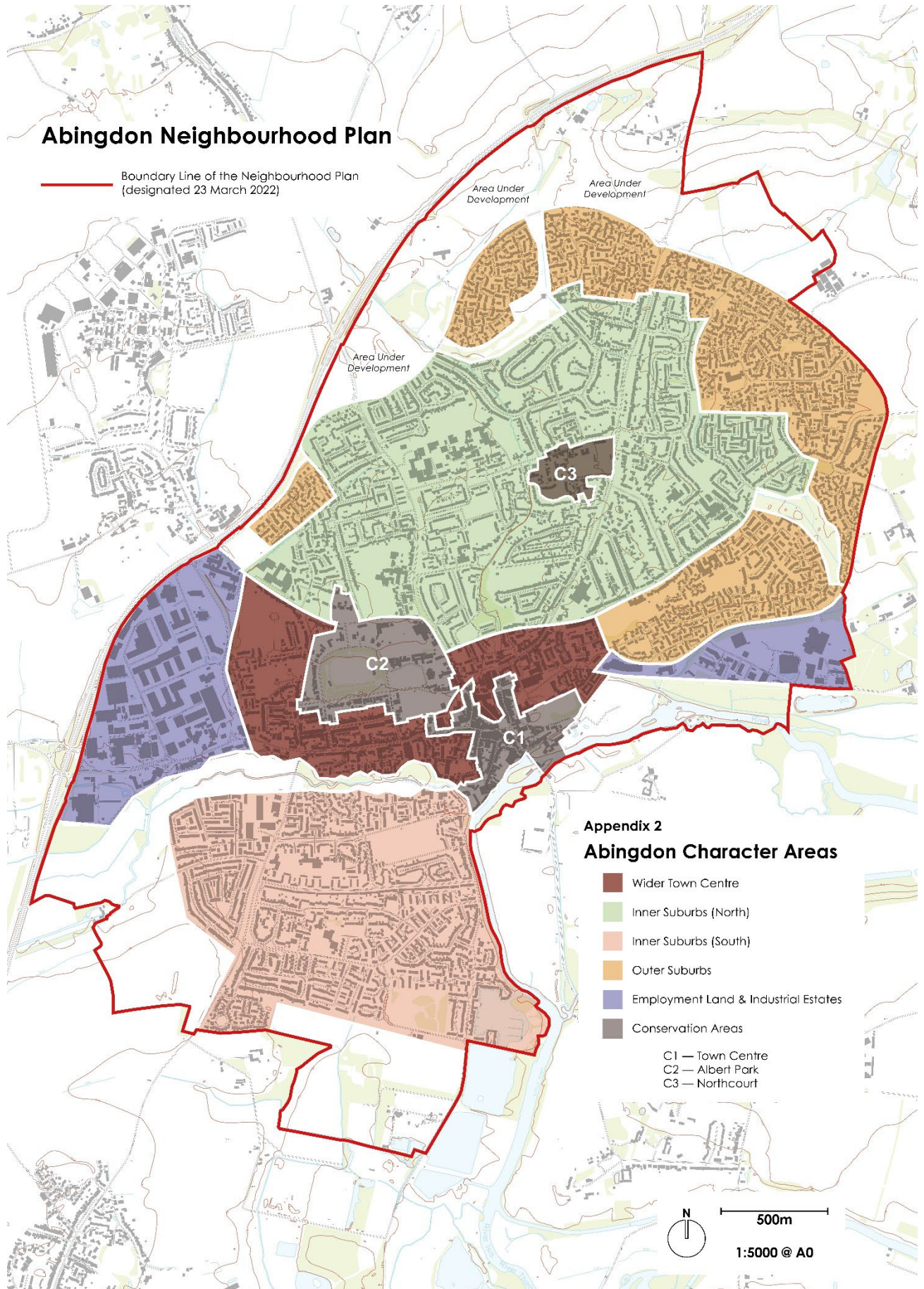
## Importance of Character in Planning Policy and Decision Making

- 1.2. Character studies of townscapes are essential tools for informing planning policy and decision making. These assessments provide a detailed understanding of an area's unique qualities and help to ensure that new developments are sympathetic to their context and enhance the overall character of the urban environment. Key reasons for their use include:
- **Preservation of Heritage:** Character studies highlight historically and architecturally noteworthy features, aiding in the preservation of heritage assets and preventing inappropriate alterations or demolitions.
  - **Guidance for Development:** The insights gained from character studies guide the design and scale of new developments, ensuring they complement the existing urban fabric and contribute positively to the area's identity.

- **Community Engagement:** Character studies serve as a valuable resource for engaging with the community, providing a collective understanding of an area's distinctive features and fostering a sense of pride and ownership among residents.
- **Informed Decision Making:** By providing a comprehensive analysis of the townscape, character studies support planners and decision-makers in making informed choices that balance development needs with the preservation of the area's character.
- **Policy Formulation:** The findings from character studies inform the development of planning policies and guidelines that promote sustainable and context-sensitive urban growth.

## About this Appendix

- 1.3. The Abingdon Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group undertook a series of character assessments of Abingdon as part of the plan preparation phase. These assessments used a proforma, that encouraged a recording of the following features:
  - Primary land uses
  - Predominant era of construction
  - Urban layout and form
  - Density
  - Predominant building types
  - Coherence of built form
  - Community or focal centre, services and facilities
  - Resident population
  - Predominant boundary treatments
  - Landscape details
  - Architectural style
  - Main construction materials
- 1.4. The results of these assessments have been used to inform this consolidated set of character studies for Abingdon. It is hoped that these can play a crucial role in shaping planning policy and decision making by ensuring that the unique attributes of Abingdon are recognised, preserved, and enhanced through thoughtful and contextually appropriate development, as supported by the neighbourhood plan.



## 2. Wider Abingdon Town Centre

- 2.1. The area around the core of Abingdon Town Centre is characterised by a distinctive blend of architectural styles and urban design elements that reflect the town’s historical significance and enduring charm. Architecturally, this area is often defined by its medieval or early modern origins, with buildings that showcase a range of periods, including Tudor, Georgian, and Victorian influences. The principal areas in Abingdon that exhibit these characteristics are Ock Street, as it wraps around the southern part of the Albert Park Conservation Area and the area around Vineyard and the northern section of Stratton Way, to the east of the Town Centre Conservation Area.
- 2.2. Key architectural features include timber-framed structures, red brick facades, and stone-built edifices, which contribute to a varied and visually rich streetscape. Many buildings possess ornate detailing, such as sash windows, gabled roofs, and decorative cornices, highlighting the artisanship of their respective eras.
- 2.3. Urban design in the traditional town centre prioritises walkability and human scale, creating an intimate and accessible environment. Narrow, winding streets and alleys, often paved with cobblestones, encourage pedestrian movement and exploration. Public squares and open spaces provide communal gathering points and enhance the social fabric of the town.

### Summary

- 2.4. The layout a mix of independent shops, cafes, fostering a vibrant and diverse economic landscape. The presence of green spaces and parks within or adjacent to the town centre contributes to its aesthetic appeal and environmental quality, offering residents and visitors a respite from the urban environment.

## 3. Abingdon Inner Suburbs

- 3.1 The inner suburbs of Abingdon are characterised by a blend of architectural styles and urban design principles that reflect the evolution of residential development over time. These areas of Abingdon showcase a mixture of Victorian, Edwardian, and inter-war housing, interspersed with modern infill developments.
- 3.2 In Abingdon, there are two principal areas that exhibit the qualities and characteristics of the inner suburbs. The first is an expanse of development north of the town centre, and in particular the residential areas either side of the Wootten Road and Oxford Road. This northern area is punctuated by the Northcourt Conservation Area. The second main area is the Caldecott area, south of the town centre and the Ock Valley.
- 3.3 Victorian terraced houses, notable for their red brick facades, sash windows, and ornamental detailing, dominate the streetscape. These are often interspersed with Edwardian properties, which feature larger plots, bay windows, and decorative timber work, contributing to a varied and visually appealing urban fabric. The inter-war semi-detached houses introduce a suburban aesthetic with their hipped roofs, pebbledash exteriors, and expansive front gardens, providing a transition from denser urban cores to more spacious suburban areas.
- 3.4 Urban design in these suburbs emphasises the creation of a cohesive and pedestrian-friendly environment. Streets are typically tree-lined, with pavement widths that accommodate both pedestrian movement and on-street car parking. The layout often includes small, local green spaces and community facilities that enhance the liveability of the neighbourhood.
- 3.5 In recent years, infill developments have introduced contemporary architectural elements, integrating modern materials and sustainable design practices. These newer constructions often adhere to principles of high-density development, aiming to maximise land use efficiency while respecting the existing urban form.

### Summary

- 3.6 The inner suburbs of Abingdon offer a rich architectural tapestry and a well-considered urban design framework that balances historical preservation with contemporary living requirements. This synthesis of old and new creates a distinctive character that is both functional and aesthetically pleasing.



## 4. Abingdon Outer Suburbs

- 4.1 The outer suburbs of Abingdon, as developed from the around the mid-1980s into the mid-2000s, exhibit distinct characteristics in terms of architecture and urban design that reflect the socio-economic trends and planning policies of the period. The principal areas in Abingdon that exhibit these characteristics include Peachcroft, Dunmore Road, and Audlett Drive.
- 4.2 Architecturally, these suburbs are composed of detached and semi-detached houses, along with some low-rise apartment buildings. The residential properties from this era often feature a mix of traditional and modern styles, incorporating elements such as brick and render facades, pitched roofs with concrete tiles, and large, double-glazed windows. The design ethos favoured practicality and cost-efficiency, leading to the prevalence of standardised layouts and materials. These homes frequently include integral garages, front gardens, and driveways, indicative of the increased car ownership during this period.
- 4.3 Urban design in the outer suburbs emphasises suburban living, with an extensive network of cul-de-sacs and crescents designed to create low-traffic, family-friendly environments. The layout prioritises privacy and security, with homes often set back from the street and surrounded by private gardens. This period also saw the implementation of estate-based planning, resulting in distinct neighbourhoods with uniform architectural styles and cohesive visual identities. These approaches to urban design built-in car dependency and the layouts are often not conducive to walking and cycling.
- 4.4 Public amenities and green spaces are integral components of these suburban areas, with developments typically incorporating local parks, playgrounds, and small shopping centres to serve the community. Road networks are designed to facilitate access to these amenities, although the reliance on private vehicles is evident, with limited public transportation options.

### Summary

- 4.5 The outer suburbs of Abingdon reflect a period of suburban expansion driven by a desire for comfortable, affordable family housing. The architectural and urban design principles of this era aimed to balance aesthetic appeal, functionality, and economic considerations, resulting in residential environments that continue to accommodate contemporary suburban lifestyles.

## 5. Abingdon Town Centre Conservation Area

- 5.1 Abingdon Town Centre Conservation Area, designated in December 1968, is characterised by its dense, complex, and varied mix of commercial, community, and residential uses. The area features a higher density of development with an irregular street structure, housing a range of architectural styles and building types. The River Thames forms the southern boundary of the area, adding to its scenic and historical significance.
- 5.2 The special interest of the Abingdon Town Centre Conservation Area lies in its rich architectural heritage and historical importance. The area includes notable buildings such as the Old Gaol, the Guildhall, and various listed structures that reflect the town's medieval and post-medieval development. The conservation area's designation aims to preserve and enhance its unique character and appearance, ensuring that any future development or alterations are carefully managed to maintain its historical and aesthetic value.

### Summary

- 5.3 The Abingdon Town Centre Conservation Area is recognised as an area worthy of protection due to its distinctive blend of historical architecture, vibrant urban environment, and cultural significance.



## 6. Albert Park Conservation Area

- 6.1 The Albert Park Conservation Area, designated in February 1975, is characterised by its spacious and green suburban environment. The area was developed as a new suburb from the 1860s onwards and is bounded by Bath Street, Faringdon Road, and Spring Road. The architectural styles within the conservation area include Victorian and Edwardian designs, with a variety of housing types that catered to different sections of society.
- 6.2 The special interest of the Albert Park Conservation Area lies in its well-preserved green spaces, historic buildings, and cohesive suburban layout. The area features large residential houses, community facilities such as churches and schools, and open playing fields. The conservation area's designation aims to protect its green and spacious character from infilling and other unsuitable changes, ensuring that any future development or alterations are carefully managed to retain its unique character and heritage value.

### Summary

- 6.3 The Albert Park Conservation Area is recognised as an area worthy of protection due to its historical development, architectural diversity, and well-maintained green spaces, which collectively contribute to its cultural and environmental significance.

## 7. Northcourt Conservation Area

- 7.1 Northcourt Conservation Area, designated in February 1978, is characterised by its rural village ambiance within a suburban context. The area encompasses a core of listed buildings, significant green spaces, and important trees and views. The architectural styles within the conservation area include traditional rural and vernacular designs, with buildings constructed from local materials such as red brick and timber.
- 7.2 The special interest of the Northcourt Conservation Area lies in its distinct character and appearance, which are derived from its historical development, spatial layout, and landscape setting. The area's historic development is evident in its layout and building forms, which have remained relatively unchanged over time. The conservation area also features key views and vistas that contribute to its unique visual appeal.
- 7.3 The designation of the Northcourt Conservation Area aims to protect and preserve its special architectural and historical interest. This includes safeguarding the integrity of its listed buildings, maintaining the quality of its open spaces, and ensuring the conservation of its significant trees and views. The area's designation as a conservation area ensures that any future development or alterations are carefully managed to retain its character and heritage value.

### Summary

- 7.4 The Northcourt Conservation Area is recognised as an area worthy of protection due to its unique blend of historical architecture, rural village character, and well-preserved landscape, which collectively contribute to its cultural and environmental significance.

## 8. Abingdon’s Employment Land & Industrial Estates

- 8.1 The character of employment land and industrial estates located on the periphery of Abingdon is defined by their functional architecture and pragmatic urban design. These areas comprise large, utilitarian structures such as warehouses, factories, and distribution centres, which are designed to meet the operational needs of industrial and commercial activities. The buildings are typically constructed from durable and cost-effective materials, including steel, concrete, and corrugated metal, emphasising functionality and efficiency over aesthetic considerations.
- 8.2 The architectural design often features expansive floor plans, low-rise profiles, and minimal ornamentation, with large vehicular entrances, roller shutters, and loading bays being common elements.
- 8.3 Urban design within these areas prioritises accessibility and operational efficiency. The layout frequently adopts a grid or linear pattern, facilitating the movement of goods and vehicles. Wide roads and ample turning spaces are characteristic, accommodating heavy goods vehicles and ensuring smooth logistical operations. These industrial estates are strategically located near major transport routes, such as the A34 dual carriageway, to optimise connectivity and distribution.
- 8.4 Landscaping within these estates is typically limited, though some incorporate green buffer zones and tree planting to mitigate environmental impacts and enhance visual appeal. Security measures, including perimeter fencing and controlled access points, are standard features, reflecting the need to protect industrial assets and infrastructure.

### Summary

- 8.5 The character of employment land and industrial estates on the edge of Abingdon is marked by their utilitarian architecture, pragmatic urban design, and strategic integration into the broader urban and regional infrastructure. These areas play a vital role in supporting industrial and commercial activities, contributing to the local economy while balancing operational efficiency and environmental considerations.

## 9. Next Steps

### Invitation to Comment on the Character Studies in the Appendix

- 9.1 Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council is pleased to announce the publication of the Pre-Submission (Reg 14) Abingdon Neighbourhood Plan, of which this appendix is a part, for review and comment.
- 9.2 The draft character studies in this appendix have been prepared to capture the unique architectural and urban design qualities that define the various neighbourhoods across Abingdon. The town council believe that the input and local knowledge from the community are invaluable in ensuring the accuracy and comprehensiveness of these character studies.
- 9.3 The town council invites residents, business owners, and stakeholders to contribute their insights and feedback on this appendix. Your local knowledge can help enhance the precision and relevance of these character studies, which are essential for informed planning, design and development decisions. Comments may include observations on architectural styles, street patterns, historical landmarks, green spaces, and any other elements that contribute to the character of the townscape.
- 9.4 You may also wish to see a subdivision each of the larger areas into smaller, more distinctive areas, subject to their being a material difference in the characteristics and qualities between areas. Your comments on this is also welcomed.