



## Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council

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# ABINGDON-ON-THAMES TOWN COUNCIL

Wednesday 15 January 2025

## Minutes

### Present:

Cllr Rawda Jehanli

Cllr Elio Astone

Cllr Cheryl Briggs

Cllr Penny Clover

Cllr Margaret Crick

Cllr Neil Fawcett

Cllr Oliver Forder

Cllr Mark Giddins

Cllr Tom Greenaway

Cllr Murali Gunarajah

Cllr Jim Halliday

Cllr Gwyneth Lewis

Cllr Pat Lonergan

Cllr Lorraine Oates

Cllr Colin Sanderson

Cllr Andrew Skinner

Cllr Victoria Walker

Deputy Mayor, Chair of the meeting

### In attendance:

Cherie Carruthers

Andy Crick

Town Clerk/Chief Executive

Democratic Services Officer (clerk to the meeting)

One member of the public

### T62/24 **Public participation**

None

### T63/24 **Apologies**

The Mayor, Cllr Gabby Barody; Cllr Leo Midwinter

T64/24 **Declarations of interest**

Cllr Clover has been appointed to the Friends of Abingdon CAB.

T65/24 **Minutes**

It was **proposed** by Cllr Halliday, **seconded** by Cllr Giddins and **RESOLVED** to adopt and sign the minutes of the meeting held on 9 October 2024 as a correct record of the meeting.

Matters arising

T55/24 – the draft Neighbourhood Plan has now been issued for public consultation, which is ongoing.

T66/24 **Mayor's engagements**

The council reviewed the Mayor's announcements. The Deputy Mayor highlighted the visits made by her with the Mayor to several old people's home on New Year's Day which they found to be very rewarding and which was recommended.

The Deputy Mayor thanked Cllr Astone for attending the Mayor's Conference in Lucca, the Italian twin town of Abingdon-on-Thames, on behalf of the Mayor. Cllr Astone made an official visit to the Puccini Museum in conjunction with the Mayor of Lucca's office and Fondazione Giacomo Puccini. He also met with representatives from the twin towns of Sint-Niklass and Shongau, and Colmar, which is officially twinned with the Vale of White Horse District Council.

The Mayor of Lucca, Mario Pardini and his administration welcomed the visit, which also marked the 2024 centenary of composer Giacomo Puccini's death. The Mayor of Lucca named Abingdon-on-Thames as an 'Ambassador of Puccini' for the promotion of Puccini's musical, artistic and historical heritage worldwide.

T67/24 **Oxfordshire County Council**

No report was provided but Cllr Fawcett provided a verbal update.

Local government reorganisation

The government has launched a consultation on local government reorganisation which will require existing county and district councils to become unitary authorities. The system of electing regional Mayors will also be extended across England and is currently being considered for the Thames Valley region. Oxfordshire County Council has advised the government that it does not want to delay elections scheduled for 2025 but it will want to proceed at pace with reorganisation. The proposed changes will affect county and district councils and there may be impacts on town and parish councils which will need to be considered. Councils which have formed unitary authorities in other areas have established successful local

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structures involving all levels of local government which Oxfordshire may be able to learn from.

Lodge Hill A34 junction

Work on the Lodge Hill junction is proceeding with plans in place, funding provided, and ground work being undertaken to establish if the project will succeed.

Flooding prevention

Oxfordshire County Council is stepping up work on flooding prevention to address the current fractured system. The county council hosted a flood summit in December 2024 which involved representatives from the county council, district councils, the Environment Agency, emergency services and other organisations to try to clarify responsibility and provide better publicity for flood response information, much of which is already in place. Councillors will meet with the Environment Agency and the local MP at Tithe Farm to discuss future action.

**T68/24 Vale of White Horse District Council**

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

Local government reorganisation

With regard to the proposed local government reorganisation mentioned above, the Vale of White Horse District Council (the Vale) has a population of around 140,000 and the government is aiming for councils with a size of around 500,000 residents. The Vale and South Oxfordshire District Council are currently in consultation with West Berkshire Council over possible combination of the three authorities.

Abbey Buildings Trust

The Abbey Buildings Project has a forecast cost of £5m, which is different to the figure quoted in the report. The support of local authorities is very important to unlock contributions from other organisations and charities. The town council and district council have both expressed support and councillors were encouraged to support the project. The Abbey Buildings Trust has applied for lottery funding and a decision is expected soon.

**T69/24 Community committee**

The draft minutes of the Community committee meeting held on 29 October 2024 were received. The Chair of the committee, Cllr Fawcett, noted that the latest minutes highlight the level of support the town council offers for a number of important organisations in Abingdon including Abingdon Carousel, One Planet Abingdon, Oxfordshire South and Vale Citizens' Advice and The Abingdon Bridge. The town council's approach of working with partners has been very successful and the town council can be proud of the impact it has had.

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The next Clubs and Societies Day is scheduled to take place on 1 March 2025 and a list of grants issued was suggested to demonstrate the support the town council provides across the town.

**T70/24 Town Infrastructure committee**

The draft minutes of the Town Infrastructure committee meeting held on 5 December 2024 were received.

The Chair of the committee, Cllr Sanderson, met with the Cemeteries and Outdoor Services Manager, Tim Badcock, to discuss maintenance and cleaning of bus shelters. It was recommended that more visible paint could be used on bus stops in particular to help buses to see passengers waiting at night. The council noted the need to build in disability needs to all town council projects.

**T71/24 Finance, Governance and Asset Management committee**

The draft minutes of the Finance, Governance and Asset Management committee (FGAM) meeting held on 16 December 2024 were received. The Chair of FGAM, Cllr Halliday, advised that the current year had been difficult financially due to a range of pressures including increased insurance costs.

Changes to the budget for 2025-26 include the following:

- Fees and charges will be increased in 2025-26 by between 3% and 5% to bring these in line with other authorities.
- The town council will increase its youth provision budget from £25,000 to £35,000.
- The budget for large grant recipients will be increased by £6,000 overall.
- The town council has made provision to contribute to the Abbey Buildings Trust if their plans are successful. The town council will commit £30,000 from its budget and £20,000 from the Community Infrastructure Levy budget in 2025-26, with an aim to continue to support the project financially over four years. The total identified commitment over the next four years would therefore be up to £200,000, although support will be decided by the town council at each budget in future years. This support should enable the Abbey Buildings Trust to lever in significant external funding.
- The town council will invest £77,000 in maintenance of its own properties, in particular the Guildhall and cemetery buildings.
- The budget for bus shelters has increased by £10,000, recognising how bus use is increasing and that there are 88 bus stops in Abingdon, many with shelters which require ongoing maintenance by the town council.

The town council will increase its precept by 4.94% if the proposed budget is approved, a figure slightly below the inflation rate for the past year.

The work on the Abbey Hall is costing the town council a lot of money due to problems which have been revealed. The cost of the essential work is being met by

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the funds provided by the Vale of White Horse District Council when the building was transferred to the town council in 2011. The building is in need of significant maintenance and its future will be discussed at a planned strategy day in February, at which councillors and officers will consider future capital projects and set priorities for the town council. The town council must also be aware of the proposed change to unitary councils which may result in some powers moving to the town and parish level where appropriate.

It was **proposed** by Cllr Halliday, **seconded** by Cllr Giddins and **RESOLVED** to approve and adopt the fees and charges for 2025-26, to approve and adopt the budget for 2025-26, and to set the precept for the 2025-26 fiscal year.

**T72/24 Planning committee**

The minutes and draft minutes of the Planning committee meetings held on 14 October 2024, 4 November 2024, 25 November 2024 and 17 December 2024 were received. The Chair of the committee, Cllr Giddins, advised that a new planning policy framework is being developed by government with a greater emphasis on consent, with any objections to planning applications under the proposed new framework requiring clear, strong reasons.

**T73/24 Committee membership**

The town council noted that Cllr Oliver Forder has been nominated as a representative of the Vale of White Horse District Council to the Abingdon Traffic Advisory committee and that there is consequently a vacancy for a town council representative. It was **proposed** by Cllr Halliday, **seconded** by Cllr Gunarajah and **RESOLVED** that Cllr Mark Giddins be appointed as a town council representative on the advisory committee.

**T74/24 Report from the Honorary Archivist**

The town council received an update from the Honorary Archivist, Jackie Smith, which was welcomed. It was noted that the Abingdon Herald column written by Mrs Smith would be removed and the town council was asked if this could be added to the Town Crier magazine. The articles could also be added to the town council website and the town council could request from the Herald that previous articles are provided to be added to the website.

It was **proposed** by Cllr Halliday, **seconded** by Cllr Forder and **RESOLVED** that that articles prepared by the Honorary Archivist are publicised on the town council website and in the Town Crier magazine.

**T75/24 Future agenda items**

- Governance document review & policies
- Members' allowances

T76/24 **Dates of future meetings**

12 March 2025  
12 May 2025 – Monday  
18 June 2025

T77/24 **Exclusion of the public, including the Press**

The Vice-Chair, Cllr Rawda Jehanli, **proposed**, Cllr Giddins **seconded** and it was **RESOLVED** that in accordance with section 1 (2) of the Public Bodies (admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, the public, including the press, be excluded from the meeting because of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted as summarised below.

T78/24 **Property update**

The Chair of the working party provided an update on the current situation with regard to the Abbey Hall. A confidential appendix is provided to councillors and is summarised below.

The building is currently not fit for purpose and a number of issues need to be addressed urgently. The town council is considering the future of the building and the working party will meet as soon as possible. Cllr Halliday noted the work staff have undertaken, including dealing with extensive contacts from the leaseholder, and thanked officers.

At the end of the meeting the Deputy Mayor welcomed Cllr Briggs back after a period of illness.

The meeting closed at 8.06pm

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_