

## Public Art Strategy Plan for Abingdon Town Council

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## 1. Introduction

This strategy document outlines our vision, aims, and objectives for public art in Abingdon-on-Thames. It is consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and local plans.

It provides guidance for developing, commissioning, and managing public art projects that respect and celebrate our long heritage and make our town a better place to live.

## 2. What is Public Art?

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) defines public art as ‘a creative and cultural practice designed to enhance public spaces, support placemaking, and contribute to local identity and wellbeing. Public art projects are encouraged in developments as part of high-quality, well-designed spaces.’ Public Art can take many forms including:

- *Sculpture and Installations*: may be permanent, traditionally commemorating people or events, or temporary, created for festivals or special occasions.
- *Murals and Illuminations*: bring colour and life to gloomy or neglected spaces, such as underpasses, which may be at risk of vandalism.
- *Digital Art*: engage and inform through Interactive displays in town centres.
- *Youth Projects*: involve young people through eg collaborations with schools and colleges.
- *Community Arts*: Engage the wider public in the appreciation and creation of art through workshops and open studios.

## 3. What are the purposes of Public Art?

- *A better place to live*: Good public art can make a town a better place. It can divert, stimulate, inform and perhaps even inspire. It can help instil pride in and affection for the town among residents, and help the local economy by drawing in visitors.
- *A more animated and engaged community*: Public art can go beyond providing for passive contemplation of fine objects. It can offer a catalyst for interaction, participation and community development.
- *Support local artists*: A flourishing local art scene is an important part of a lively town and a good place to live. Targeted commissioning can provide opportunities for local artists, including emerging talents and art students.
- *Promote inclusivity*: Public art can respond to the diversity of our population, and open channels to good relations and mutual understanding,

## 4. Role of the Public Art Working Group

*Aim:*

To propose and manage public art projects for the Abingdon Town Council.

### *Terms of reference:*

Working with an officer appointed by the Town Clerk and reporting to the Environment, Amenities and Infrastructure Committee, to:

- maintain a list of public art funds available from the district council and any conditions associated with each fund;
- identify funding opportunities and locations for public art, and work collaboratively with the County and District Councils and other public landowners;
- secure S106 funding and implement projects as appropriate.
- Present at meetings of the Environment, Amenities and Infrastructure Committee and recommend potential projects; for those projects endorsed by the Committee, work with its officer to create a detailed outline project plan with approximate costs, collaborations, duration and suggested start time;
- monitor public art projects on Town Council land;
- ensure alignment with the Public Art Strategy and town planning;
- review final works in the light of artist briefs; and engage with the community and artists.

## 5. Public Art Group Membership

The working party consists of up to two members of the Community committee and up to two members of the Town Infrastructure committee, plus a maximum of one other person appointed by full council. The current membership is as follows:

CLlr Halliday, Community committee

CLlr Sanderson, Environment, Amenities and Infrastructure committee (chair of Public Art Group)

CLlr Crick, additional member nominated by the full council.

CLlr Midwinter, Environment, Amenities and Infrastructure committee.

## 6. Possible Public Art Themes for Abingdon

1. *History and Heritage:* Abingdon is one of the oldest towns in Britain and this offers many thematic possibilities, from architectural and industrial history to royal connections.
2. *Science and technology:* Abingdon has close relationships with national centres at Harwell and Culham, and much local employment has a scientific basis.
3. *Nature and Sustainability:* General environmental concerns can be signalled and disseminated through eco-themed art projects. More locally we can draw attention to and enhance our own green spaces like Caldecott Nature Trails.

4. *Inclusivity*: Art to encourage residents to use active travel into the Town Centre.

*Youth and Future*: Themes 2, 3 and 4 may be tailored to engaging the town's younger generations, fostering community pride. Education is something else that Abingdon is well known for, and could itself become a theme.

More specific themes may cut across these main ones. One example is Swan Upping which brings together our history and our riverside culture.

## 7. Current and Potential Future Projects

### 1. *Ongoing Projects*:

- South Abingdon Community Arts Project (MakeSpace): Funded by UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), this project promotes art as a community-building tool.
- Caldecott Nature Trails: Public art tied to environmental education and nature trails. Encourages healthy lifestyle for a sustainable Abingdon.
- Bury Street Exhibitions: A temporary exhibition space supporting local artists.
- Abingdon and Witney College Art Student Placements: Integrating student projects into the town's public spaces.

### 2. *Repair and maintenance of existing works*

- The Needle: new plaque
- Stratton Way: Restore current mural

### 3. *Future projects*

- Roundabouts: Revitalising roundabouts with sculptural installations
- Stratton Way: Adding artistic elements to this important thoroughfare
- Underpass : Transforming the underpass into an inviting space through murals, lighting, or interactive art
- Signage and Links to Tourism: Signage that both directs visitors and tells the town's story.
- Honour St. Edmund in the Town.

## 8. Artists' Brief and Commissioning Process

All public art commissions will be accompanied by an artist's brief. This document will aim to foster creativity, rather than restrict it, by providing clear objectives without prescribing specific artistic approaches.

### *Outline for an Artist's Brief:*

1. *Project Description:* A general description of the public art project.
2. *Aims and Objectives:* Key goals for the commission, such as celebrating history or engaging youth.
3. *Artist's Role:* The scope of the artist's involvement, including their role in community consultation or workshops.
4. *Appointment Procedure:* The process by which the artist will be selected, including open calls and interviews.
5. *Working Group Team:* A description of the team members involved in managing the project and their responsibilities.
6. *Scope and Themes:* Relevant themes for the project, such as local history or nature.
7. *Community Consultation:* Plans for involving the community, such as public workshops or surveys.
8. *Review Plans:* A framework for reviewing progress and finalizing the artwork.

### *Commissioning Process:*

1. *Project Initiation:* Identify potential sites and themes for new public art.
2. *Call for Artists:* Issue a call for submissions, with a clear artist's brief.
3. *Selection Process:* Form a selection panel comprising members of the Public Art Working Group, community representatives, and professional artists.
4. *Artist Appointment:* Commission the selected artist and initiate the project, including consultation with stakeholders.
5. *Installation and Unveiling:* Ensure the installation is integrated into the public realm, with a community launch or unveiling event.
6. *Evaluation and Legacy:* Post-installation review to assess the project's success and impact on the community.

## 9. Relevant documents

[Public Art Contributions July 2024](#)

[Public Art Trail](#)

[Make space project Abingdon](#)

## 1. Public Artworks in Abingdon

Abingdon already hosts several notable works of public art:

- Mother and Baby: A tribute to community and family values. By Franta Belsky
- The Needle: A historic landmark reflecting the town's heritage. By Michael Fairfax
- Queen Victoria: A traditional statue commemorating the town's royal connections.
- Museum Artefacts: historical and artistic exhibits contributing to the town's story.
- The Abingdon A, Neave Mews by Philip Bews and Dianne Gorvin
- Railings at the Maltings, by Jon Mills
- Sculptures at Penlon Place by Dinna Bell
- Octagon at the Old Gaol, by Tim Ward
- Mosaics and glass work at the White Horse Tennis and Leisure Centre
- Metal riverscape, Abbey outdoor Pool, Suzanne O'Driscoll
- Abingdon Sword Bridge, Thames View, by Richard Farrington
- Kingfisher, Marina Park, by Matthew Darge
- The Monk, Marcham Road roundabout – commissioned by an Abingdon business as a contribution to a Britain-in-Bloom campaign
- Stratton Way underpass murals, originally painted by a team led by Margaret Jones in 2007
- Mural on the side of Stert Street/Market Place passageway
- Bury Street/Pablo Lounge

## 2: Current Projects and Timelines

Project	Description	Start Date	Completion date
Stratton Way Refurbishment and Underpass	Refurb of the current Stratton way Mural and new artworks for the underpass, engaging with Abingdon and Witney college.	06/06/2025	

Needle Abbey Close	Repair of plaque		
Walking trails from new developments	<p>A suite of smaller-scale interventions such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Artist-designed seating</li> <li>• Interpretation panels</li> <li>• Decorative bollards</li> <li>• Rubbing posts / tactile markers</li> </ul>		
Boxhill Recreation Ground Improvements	Artistic enhancements including murals, engagement work with young people to update existing and create new mural.		
Honouring St. Edmund	<p>St. Edmund Bronze Statue in Market Place</p> <p>Timeline or boards like the information boards in the town centre. This board could focus on the Saints who have ministered and lived in our town.</p>		
Commission 2–3 significant landmark sculptures	Located at key gateway points or along major desire lines.		
Install four new welcome signs	At the town’s perimeter, updated to reflect the expanded boundary due to new developments.		

Produce a leaflet and art trail	Connecting all artworks into a single coherent Abingdon Art Trail, encouraging exploration.		

### 3: Current Funding for Public Art in Abingdon

Application Ref	S106 Ref	Site	Towards	Balance
P06/V1890	07V17	Abingdon Service Station Drayton Road Abingdon Oxon OX14 5HT	No spend by date in agreement  Work of Art Contribution  INDEX: 1 January 2007 RPI	£5,400.00
P11/V2239	11V28	The Precinct Bury Street Abingdon Oxfordshire	Work of Art on the site - the Precinct, Bury St  Index linked. No spend by date mentioned	£9,050.71
P14/V1196/FUL	15V41	Land East of Drayton Road Abingdon	Work of Art Contribution - towards the cost of selection provision and associated costs of the work of art to be erected and installed on the Site and agreed with the Council  Index Linked to pay date No spend by date	£41,520.00
P14/V1196/FUL	15V41	Land East of Drayton Road Abingdon	Work of Art - towards the cost of maintaining the Work of Art  Index Linked to pay date No spend by date	£2,906.40
P17/V1336/O	18V08	Land north west of Abingdon-on-Thames Land bound by Wootton Road, Dunmore Road and the A34 Abingdon- onThames	Art: £300 per dwelling 50th occupation Index linked to date payment due 10 year spend. To be installed on or in the vicinity (not defined) of the site by the District Council	£77,620.81
P17/V0050/O	17V61	Land North of Dumnore Road and Twelve Acre Drive	Public Art contribution - provision on site or within the vicinity of the development. £285,000 Paid in 2 instalments	£206,806.84
			Totals	£343,304.76