

## **Civic Pride Article for Abingdon Herald – December 2018**

### **By Hester Hand – Friends of Abingdon**

As we come to the end of the first year of this series of articles, it is time to take stock of how Abingdon's civic pride has fared in 2018. First some successes.

In June the Open Air Pool re-opened and, together with the improved play area opened the previous year, gave us outdoor leisure facilities of which Abingdon can really be proud. The main complaint was that the pool was not open for long enough, so let's hope that that will be remedied next summer, but in the meantime hearty congratulations to the Vale of White Horse District Council.

Congratulations also to Abingdon Town Council for the events they organised for Remembrance Weekend which really brought the townspeople together for both celebrations: Saturday's bun-throwing in the rain, and the more solemn ceremonies on Remembrance Sunday.

Last New Year saw the opening of a pop-up cinema in the Unicorn Theatre: several thousand people have been able to see top-quality new-release films in Abingdon for the first time in over 30 years, and that success has led to the imminent opening of the Abbey Cinema which will operate in both the Abbey Hall and the Unicorn.

Regular annual events such as the ATOM Festival, Cycling Festival, Fun and Music in the Park, Food Festival, Traditional Craft Fair, Christmas Extravaganza and last weekend's Beer Festival all attracted big crowds and between them cater for a wide range of ages and interests. Most of these events are run by volunteers, as are the many groups who provide a massive range of activities – sporting, musical, environmental, arts etc. - for the people of the town. Our teams of volunteers are truly something to be proud of.

Steps have been taken during the year to make Abingdon a better place for the more vulnerable members of our community: we now have two "Dementia Friendly Cafés" in Abingdon (the Barns Café and 35 Ock Street), two "Space for Change" toilets are being constructed, and there is a "Safe Places Scheme" for people who feel lost, confused or frightened.

So, a lot of success, but there is still plenty more to do. In the first Civic Pride article in January Bryan Brown wrote about the three boarded-up historic buildings in the Town Centre. Thankfully, after a lot of community pressure, the Abbey Hall and the historic Guildhall are now on the verge of re-opening, the latter with its beautiful staircase still intact. However, the Upper Reaches Hotel and Old Abbey House remain empty and neglected. We will try to persuade the District Council to find a solution this year.

Bryan also wrote about the three Conservation Areas – places which make the town special and which we are proud of. The Friends of Abingdon are keen to do as other Civic Societies do and work with the District Council to help them to ensure that they remain that way.

Here's to 2019!