

Civic Pride column – April 2021

by Hester Hand, Friends of Abingdon Civic Society

One of the things that many of us have missed over the last year is the opportunity to take part in activities outside our home and meet up with like-minded people. Abingdon is fortunate in having an enormous range of groups, covering every imaginable interest: hopefully these will start up again soon and those of us who are well settled here can take up where we left off.

But what about the many people who have moved into the area in the last year or so, or people whose circumstances have changed and want to take up something new? How do they find out what is available and get involved?

Local Facebook groups frequently have posts from people who have recently moved to Abingdon and are looking for ways to meet people and activities to join in. Because most people on those groups are friendly and welcoming they usually get helpful responses, but Facebook isn't for everyone.

Families with children usually create their own networks pretty quickly, but restrictions on socialising outside school reduce opportunities for that. If people work in or near Abingdon, colleagues can be a good source of information, but with many of us still working from home, opportunities for that sort of conversation are limited.

There is a lot of discussion about the impact of the pandemic on our physical and mental health, and the ability to take part in activities can help enormously with both. Teenagers in particular have suffered from the isolation of lockdowns and will be looking for new extra-curricular activities. Abingdon has the usual range of youth groups, but many of the other groups welcome members of all ages.

We have groups offering every form of exercise from athletics to Zumba – and for all ages and abilities; also non-sporting outdoor activities maintaining our beautiful nature reserves, litter-picking etc.

For mental stimulation – and company - we have numerous interest- based groups offering regular talks and activities, plus book groups, film society etc. And for those wanting to participate there are music, drama and craft groups of every kind.

And finally, we have groups with a social purpose, be it helping others, campaigning for improvements in our environment or fundraising for charities.

So, the challenge for the coming months is to make sure that people know where to find the activities that interest them. Normally at this time of year, the Town Council organises a "Clubs and Societies Day" where the various groups can advertise themselves. There is also usually a further opportunity at the "Fun in the Park" event. In the absence of those, maybe the Council could think about holding a special event – outdoors if necessary – later in the year?

The Town Council website also has an extensive list of the groups in the Community section of their website and the Round & About magazine regularly advertises community-run events so is worth a look. As life opens up again lets hope we can all find ways to get involved.