

Civic Pride Article - Abingdon Neighbourhood Plan by Simon Hills



The people of Abingdon can now review and comment on the interim report from the town's Neighbourhood Plan group. The purpose of the plan is to make our future town an even better place to live, work and grow than it is now. Importantly, once finalised, the Vale of the White Horse Council must take the Neighbourhood Plan into account when considering planning issues across the town. This will ensure Abingdon gets the right types of development, in the right place, taking into account land use as well as social, economic and environmental issues like housing, heritage and transport.

The creation of the plan is being led by a steering group, supported by a consultancy commissioned by the Town Council.

Much work has already been done by volunteers to help shape the plan. Last autumn small socially distanced groups of volunteers looked at their immediate neighbourhoods through five different lenses - landscape, architecture, culture, engineering, and planning.

Earlier this year participants in topic-based virtual focus groups shared views about how they would like to see our town develop, by exploring their needs, hopes and everyday experiences. And over the Easter holidays children from our local primary schools completed worksheets that enabled them to contribute to the plan.

All this information has now been assimilated into a report, presenting issues, ideas and options which will be built on during the public consultation phase over the summer.

One challenge identified is how to encourage healthier more sustainable alternatives to the car, maybe by creating pleasant routes around town through interconnecting green spaces.

We also explore how the town centre could be better connected to the river, and the role of the Upper Reaches site in making that happen. An integrated approach could enhance recreational and cultural opportunities by creating a hub, comprising housing, workshops and performance spaces in a new riverside quarter.

It is important that the Neighbourhood Plan is written by the community of Abingdon. There are a number of ways in which the people who know and love the town can contribute. The interim report is available on the Town Council's website <https://www.abingdon.gov.uk/neighbourhood-plan> with a short questionnaire to complete. Task groups are being set up that will focus on issues such as green spaces, the town centre, neighbourhood identity and culture. And we will be holding outreach events under the County Hall on Saturday 10th and 24th July.

Do read the report, fill in the online questionnaire, consider volunteering as a task group member or come and chat to us at the Saturday sessions. The more of us that join in, the better the Neighbourhood Plan will be and the closer we'll get to my own aspiration for it, which is to make an even better Abingdon for generations yet to come.