

January 2022 Civic Pride article

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Discussions on social media – or in “real life” when that is allowed – give a pretty clear picture of what people enjoy – and dislike – about our town. We all have wish lists of things we would like to see changed, although of course not everyone’s lists are the same. So, as we come to the end of another strange year, here are some aspirations for 2022.

Town centre vitality: one of the most common concerns. It is not just an Abingdon problem, but some other councils and business groups do give it higher priority. Here it does not feature prominently on the agendas of either council and we don’t have an active business group. Helping local businesses to thrive will help the councils’ green agenda by reducing travel and will make the town somewhere people want to live and work, so benefiting housing developers and bigger businesses. Let us hope the new leaseholders of the precinct will bring some new ideas and work with others to restore our bustling market town.

Traffic and travel: a common, but contentious issue. Some think the problems can be resolved by more and better roads; others say we need to reduce the amount of car travel. In the short term, action is probably needed on both fronts: we need to improve the alternatives before we can expect people to make major changes to their habits, but in the meantime resolve current traffic problems. So my wish-list would be to see implemented the work being done to improve walking, cycling and public transport options, but also to see the long-promised Lodge Hill slips, to enable those who do have to drive to easily get away from residential areas.

Protecting what is beautiful about our town: people rightly bemoan the damage done to the historic town centre in the 1960s and 70s. We can’t undo that, but we can prevent more damage. Planning controls during the last 40 years or so have helped, but these are being dismantled and there are real risks emerging for our attractive streets and open spaces. Let us hope that the local councils use the powers they have to ensure that our special places are protected and in particular that eyesores like the Upper Reaches and Old Abbey House are restored to their rightful attractiveness by the end of 2022.

New developments: by this time next year we will have hundreds of new residents in Abingdon. Let us hope that the Councils will use the funding available to provide the infrastructure they need, to ensure that their new homes are built to the best possible environmental standards and to find ways to integrate them into the town, rather than treating their homes as dormitories, going elsewhere to work, shop and socialise.

The list could have been much longer, but space does not permit. Santa couldn’t deliver any of these, but our elected representatives can do a lot. Let us see where we have got to in 12 months’ time. Happy New Year.