

Civic Pride Column for May 4th Abingdon Herald
By Hester Hand, Friends of Abingdon Civic Society

Abingdon Town Council's "Annual Parish meeting" last week provided an opportunity to reflect on many things the town can be proud of and to ask questions about matters of concern.

When the current Council took office in 2019, they identified their key priorities as responding to the climate emergency, developing a resilient and sustainable town for residents, and working with community partners to support the vulnerable and increase inclusivity. They use these annual meetings to report on progress against these priorities.

This year's meeting focused mainly on the last of these and highlighted the support the Council gives to charities working with families and young people. These include Be Free Young Carers, the Carousel Family Centre and The Abingdon Bridge (counselling and wellbeing support for young people). We also heard about the Abingdon Integrated Youth Support Project (AIYSP), a partnership between the Town Council and the various youth-related charities which supports young people in taking an active interest in their town and looks to find ways to improve provision for them.

The accounts of all of this work were very uplifting and the town should be really proud of all of those who are making it happen. However progress in other areas is less evident. Residents remain very concerned about issues such as traffic congestion, the impact of the new housing developments on the town, the eyesore of the Upper Reaches Hotel site and the lack of activity on the Abingdon Bridge repairs.

Most of these are not the direct responsibility of the Town Council, but with three different councils it is difficult for ordinary people to work out who is responsible for what and even more difficult to know how we can influence matters. However the Town Council is the only body which is solely focused on Abingdon and it would be good to think that they could bring pressure to bear on the other councils on matters of concern to their residents. They do routinely receive reports from the other councils but in my experience these are usually bland and rarely subject to significant questioning or challenge. That is left to community groups or persistent individuals.

There are opportunities coming up for the Town Council to influence some of these matters. They will get nearly £500,000 from developers' contributions to the new housing and will hopefully allocate this to projects in line with their objective of developing a resilient and sustainable town for residents. They will shortly be attending a meeting with senior officers from the District Council about the Upper Reaches and will hopefully use that to press for a solution. They will also be able to contribute to the District Council's strategic review of Abingdon Town Centre, which alongside the Neighbourhood Plan work which they have commissioned will hopefully produce a deliverable vision for our beautiful town.

Let us hope that the reports to next year's Parish meeting will celebrate progress in these areas too.