

## Civic Pride Column – 6 July 2022

By Hester Hand

“Pride in Place” is a popular phrase at the moment – the government’s recent Levelling-Up White Paper made much of it, with lots of fine words about community involvement and the need for “local social capital and infrastructure to be built and sustained to encourage confident and active communities”.

What does this mean for Abingdon? We have lots to be proud of and the recent Jubilee Weekend showed much of what is great about our town. Many people enjoyed the free activities and entertainment – much of it organised by volunteers - at Rye Farm, picnicking in the sun and listening to music from local bands; many others opted for the higher-octane event at the airfield – it was great that we could choose. Then there was the ATOM Festival, celebrating our place at the heart of British science and, of course, Bunthrowing – undoubtedly unique to Abingdon.

Next weekend we have a great example of community co-operation to create what should be a wonderful event: the Plot to Plate Festival has been put together by sustainability groups, Carbon Cutters and One Planet Abingdon, together with the Abbey Buildings Trust, so that people can discover the joys of growing and cooking their own food, while enjoying these beautiful buildings in the heart of our town. And the day ends with a ceilidh!

But it isn’t all fun and celebrations. Like many other towns, Abingdon’s shopping streets present a sad picture at present.

These things go in cycles: towns re-invent themselves as lifestyles change, but it takes drive and creativity from councils to make that happen. The White Paper refers to the need for “agreements between councils, public bodies and the communities they serve, seeking to harness the energy, know-how and assets of local communities”. The Central Abingdon Regeneration Framework (CARF) consultation, which is under way till 15 July at <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/central-abingdon-regeneration-framework/>, and the ongoing work on the Neighbourhood Plan are steps in this direction: they could provide genuine opportunities for us all to contribute to the vision for our town, so if we have views we should put them forward.

But a vision is not enough: resources have to be found to make it happen – not necessarily all at once, but over time. That is where the creativity comes in: Councils need to find ways to access new sources of funds and new ways of doing things. There are numerous grant schemes available and many examples of towns where councils, businesses, funding bodies and the community have worked together to achieve great results. Let us hope our councils can follow those examples.

And finally, with school holidays coming up, why not remind yourself about some of what we have to be proud of by trying our new collection of walking trails? There are ten to choose from – covering a range of interests - and they can be found at <https://abingdoncivicsociety.org.uk/activities/abingdon-walks/>