



# THE FRIENDS OF ABINGDON CIVIC SOCIETY

## REPORT OF THE TRUSTEES FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER 2020

The Trustees present their Report and Accounts for the period from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020

- 1) The Society is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation registered with the United Kingdom Charity Commission under registration number 1183397. Its governing document is a Constitution dated 8<sup>th</sup> May 2019
- 2) The Society's registered address is 18 Thames Street, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 3HZ
- 3) The Society was registered as a charity on May 14<sup>th</sup> 2019
- 4) The objects of the Society are:  
For the benefit of the people of Abingdon-on-Thames
  - To promote high standards of planning and architecture
  - To educate the public in the geography, history, natural history, culture and architecture of the area
  - To secure the preservation, protection, development and improvement of features or areas of historic or public interest

Examples of the ways we seek to achieve these objects are:

- Organising events and publishing articles to foster civic pride and promote the civic life, heritage and environment of the town
- Monitoring and commenting on planning applications and lobbying the relevant authorities to encourage high standards of historic conservation, planning and development worthy of the town's civic tradition and character
- Contributing in whatever way we can to help make Abingdon a great place to live, work and visit

- 5) The Trustees who served during the period were:

Hester Hand (Chair)	Appointed May 8 <sup>th</sup> 2019, re-appointed 7 October 2020
Caroline Bullock	Appointed May 8 <sup>th</sup> 2019, re-appointed 7 October 2020
Keith Butler (Secretary)	Appointed May 21 <sup>st</sup> 2019, re-appointed 7 October 2020
Bobbie Nichols	Appointed May 8 <sup>th</sup> 2019, re-appointed 7 October 2020
Olga Senior (Treasurer)	Appointed June 11 <sup>th</sup> 2019, re-appointed 7 October 2020

## 6) Summary of the year's activities

- i. **Governance** – The Committee met bi-monthly during the year, with all but the first two meetings of the year being held via videoconferencing owing to the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to these, the Trustees met on two occasions again via videoconferencing.
- ii. **Finance** - The bank balance at the end of the period was £9,983: full details are in the accounts.
- iii. **Membership and members' meetings** – the Society has c.265 members, with just over half being life members. The Committee has continued to try to engage and inform the membership of the Society's activities, although owing to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic only one members' meeting could take place. This included a talk by Councillor Alison Rooke on traffic and transport issues and was well attended. Communication with members was also maintained through a regular e-newsletter.
- iv. **Survey of Members** – during the year the Society conducted a detailed survey of what members wanted it to focus on and what it ought to be doing. A total of 55 responses to the survey were received, and the principal findings were as follows:
  - 1) The overwhelming majority of members feel that the format and frequency of members' meetings was about right.
  - 2) There is a desire in the membership to learn more about the history of Abingdon. Some issues (e.g. Old Abbey House and The Upper Reaches) were indeed referred to by several members.
  - 3) The amount of communication with members was felt to be appropriate. The Society was felt to be an important source of information as to what is happening in the town
  - 4) Transport issues and the availability of cycle routes were a clear concern

The committee was reassured by these findings and is focussing on continuing to deliver in these areas given the restrictions imposed by the pandemic

### v. **Public Benefit**

- **Planning** – the Committee is fortunate to have several members with extensive experience of planning issues and the Society has monitored planning applications in the area and made submissions and comments where appropriate, with the aim of preventing developments which we believe would be detrimental to the town's character or vibrancy or to the wellbeing of residents in general.
- **Conservation** – Society members have made a major contribution to the Conservation Area Appraisal for the Albert Park area.
- **Neighbourhood Plan** – the Society is represented on the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group and several members have been involved in consultation focus groups; we will thus be able to play a part in the Plan's development.

- vi. **Old Abbey House** – the Society led a campaign to preserve the site for the community and stop it being sold to developers. A petition was organised and extensive publicity obtained to persuade the Council to consider alternatives to a sale, or to sell to a community group or groups. However, a decision was made in December 2020 to sell to a developer for conversion to an hotel.
- vii. **Heritage Festival** – as part of the national Heritage Open Days, the Society participated in organising the Town’s Heritage Weekend. Events were limited due to the pandemic but included an information stall in the Market Square, a wide range of self-guided walks and a programme of short videos about the town, including some specially made for the event.
- viii. **Relations with Town and District Councils** - the Committee agreed that the Society should continue to be a “critical friend” of the Councils; the District Council has committed to partnership working and community engagement, and the Committee is seeking ways to build a closer relationship based on this. Observing and participating in Town and District Council meetings actually became easier during the pandemic because of the use of online meetings.
- ix. **Community Freespace** – the pandemic restrictions meant that usage of the Freespace was severely curtailed during the year. However, it was used as a centre for Abimeds, who were a group of volunteers who arranged for deliveries of medicines to those unable or unwilling to attend pharmacies. Owing to the lack of willingness by the landlord to extend the licence for use of the unit, occupation ceased in September 2020.
- x. **National Organisations** - The Society is a member of Civic Voice, the national organisation for Civic Societies, which gives access to the experience of other similar groups and to information about national developments in the areas of planning and development. It is also a member of the Historic Towns and Villages Forum. Both bodies arranged a number of low-cost webinars and other streamed events during the year which proved very useful and informative.

**Hester Hand**

**On behalf of the Trustees of Friends of Abingdon Civic Society**

**June 2021**