

## **FRIENDS OF ABINGDON CIVIC SOCIETY**

### **NOTES OF MEMBERS' MEETING PRESENTATION BY EMILY SMITH, LEADER OF VWHDC - 1 MARCH 2022**

#### **Oxford-Cambridge Arc**

This seems to have disappeared from the government's agenda. Local Authorities along the route have been told that if they still want it they will have to organise it themselves. While the Oxfordshire LAs had welcomed the abandonment of the Expressway, there were other elements of the Arc project which would have helped with the delivery of their housing and sustainability objectives and the way forward was not clear.

#### **Oxfordshire 2050 Plan**

This is being drawn up by representatives of the 4 District Councils, the City Council and the County Council, with the aim of providing a framework for use in addressing county-wide issues within individual Councils' Local Plans. Following a public consultation last year, reports and recommendations are about to be sent to the local councils.

One key area is housing targets: there are three ways of calculating these and the Vale is likely to press for the lowest figure because of concerns over the ability to provide infrastructure to support greater numbers.

#### **Joint Local Plan – and other local planning documents**

The Vale and South Oxfordshire DC are starting work on a Joint Local Plan 2041 to supersede the existing separate ones which were due to run until 2031 and 2035 respectively. There will be an initial public consultation on options later this year and the process should be complete in 2024.

In the meantime, the Councils have recently been consulting on a Joint Design Guide – to update standards on design quality of development proposals – and a Supplementary Planning Document for 1200 houses at Dalton barracks (this is separate from the Garden Town proposal which will come later).

Emily was asked whether she thought the two Councils would merge. She said there were no plans at present: proposals for a unitary council come forward periodically and she thought that would be more likely than a merged DC.

#### **Reservoir Proposal**

The Vale are keeping a close eye on the emerging plans: they have already challenged them on the basis of their carbon implications and there may be other issues to be raised in due course.

#### **Lodge Hill slip-roads**

Substantial changes had been made to the proposals in order to address concerns raised at the preliminary consultation last year. A planning application is expected in the spring: as a Highways matter, the planning authority will be the County Council rather than the Vale.

### **A34 improvements**

Following the abandonment of the Expressway proposal, Highways England were now considering improvements to the A34. Preliminary indications were that these could involve significant changes, possibly including some re-routing.

### **Bus services**

Changes/service reductions due to be introduced from 1 April have been postponed. Some s.106 money from new developments was being made available to support bus services.

### **North Abingdon developments**

David Wilson Homes were now building on the western “parcels” of the site and Bellway Homes had announced plans for 371 homes on the easternmost parcel (between the Oxford Road and Peachcroft Farm). No plans had yet been submitted for the central parcel where the local centre, school etc were to be. However the planning approval laid down precise criteria for how many houses could be occupied before these were in place so there was an incentive for the developer (CEG) to bring plans forward soon.

There had been many complaints from local residents about the disruption caused by the current work and people were unsure about how to raise them. It was a common practice for developers to set up a Community Liaison group for this purpose; this had not been done and the Council were considering creating a development forum themselves.

### **Central Abingdon properties**

*Old Abbey House:* the planning application was due for consideration the following week. Officers were recommending approval.

*Upper Reaches:* the situation remained deadlocked (see separate notes on website) but Emily and the Cabinet member for Finance and Property were meeting Contemporary Hotels next week and would be pressing them to take action to resolve the situation. In answer to a question, she said that the Vale did receive some income from the lease, but it was not significant in the context of their budget.

*The Charter:* the upper floors of the car park were unsafe and repairs would be very costly, so a decision would be taken as part of a wider review (see below). She did not know what the current situation was in relation to the toilets but would find out.

Officers had recently completed an audit of all the Vale’s properties and were about to present proposals in relation to each town. For Abingdon however it had been decided to undertake a broader Regeneration Review covering the Upper Reaches, the whole Charter complex and “new” Abbey House. This would run alongside the Neighbourhood Plan. An announcement would be made in a few days – there would be provisions for community involvement. (Note: announcement now made and can be found at <https://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/uncategorised/a-regeneration-review-for-central-abingdon-is-underway/>)

End