



Planning the future of Abingdon



Abingdon Neighbourhood Plan Public Meeting
7pm Thursday 3rd March 2022

About Us

Feria Urbanism is an award-winning planning and design studio based in Bournemouth

We have worked on over 20 neighbourhood plans across the country – nine of these have now passed referendum

We are also involved in strategic planning, city visioning projects, public realm projects and small site designs





“Make no small plans. They have no magic to stir men’s blood!”

Daniel Burnham
Chief Planner for Chicago, 1893



**“Neighbourhood planning?
Be bold but don’t be reckless!”**

Steve Quartermaine
Government’s Chief Planner, 2011



“Towns and cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody”

Jane Jacobs – journalist, author, activist 1961

What steps are needed to prepare a Neighbourhood Development Plan?

- 
1. Defining the neighbourhood area – agreeing the plan boundary
 2. Drafting the plan – research, engagement, drafting policy text etc.
 3. Formal min. 6-week consultation (Reg. 14) – run by the town council on a draft of the plan
 4. Consider revisions and changes – based on the results of the Reg. 14 consultation
 5. Submission to Vale of White Horse District Council – once the plan is updated
 6. Formal min. 6-week consultation (Reg. 16) – run by the local planning authority
 7. Independent examination – to check against the regulations
 8. Referendum – final plan is voted upon by local people
 9. Plan comes into legal force – if the referendum is won



Informal Consultation

A Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) is being prepared for Abingdon

Informal consultation currently being held on three sections only of the plan

- Character Areas
- Green Spaces
- The Town Centre

Deadline for comments Friday 4th March 2022



Early Work



Access & Movement

Research so far has revealed that a crowd-sourced walking map of Abingdon could really help people move about in greener and more enjoyable ways. This map could be associated with new wayfinding and signage to direct people to safer and more direct routes into town.

There was a clear consensus that pedestrians and cyclists need to be separated from motor traffic if both active travel modes are to be considered safe and become a made-of-choice. Shared use paths for cycling and walking were generally felt to not be a good solution. Sections of Audlett Drive were referenced in the research as better examples of cycling infrastructure due to width and separation while Twelve Acre Drive was mentioned as a poor example as being too narrow to properly give cyclists and walkers the space they need.

Workshop participants felt that many pavements needed to be resurfaced and better maintained. Specifically mentioned as needing surface improvement were Boxhill and Oxford Road. Overgrown vegetation making easy walking is also an issue although which organisation is responsible for cutting back varies from place to place. Sins that block pavements also came up as an issue. In some places walkers also face nuisance caused by dogs. Around the Mill Road can sometimes be impassable due to flooding.

Priority access to the town centre seems to be given to motor traffic, while pedestrians and cyclists are given less direct, disconnected routes to follow, with a lack of safe crossing points. This often results in pedestrians crossing busy roads in awkward locations. A 20mph zone across the whole town centre, including the roads around the edge, was suggested to make the whole area safer.

Walking and cycling access to primary schools needs to be of a good standard for most people but not to secondary schools. Research showed that the tennis courts on Audlett Drive are in a great location but they are not maintained as well as they could be. The former grass tennis courts located at Albert Park have gone, leaving Abingdon without any grass tennis courts. Otherwise, there is fairly good tennis provision across the town. Abingdon has several football and rugby teams. Both girls' and women's football are booming and clubs are aware for the potential need to expand facilities. The cricket club has a good membership roll but there is a lack of decent facilities. There is a lack of outdoor training areas and outdoor pitches are prone to flooding.

Design of the town centre, including access streets and roads, needs to prioritise pedestrians and cyclists much more.

Potential Policies & Projects

1. Establish a high quality walking and cycling map of Abingdon and link this to a wayfinding scheme.
2. Develop stronger active travel connections between the suburban areas and the town centre (inwards movement) and between the suburban areas and the surrounding countryside (outwards movement). All existing routes need to be better maintained signposted and mapped.
3. Design of the town centre, including access streets and roads, needs to prioritise pedestrians and cyclists much more.



Healthy Town & Outdoor Recreation

The pandemic lockdowns over the past year have alerted people to the need for outdoor exercise and the benefits of access to green space. Both the town centre and the more peripheral areas have many little alleyways and "secret" footpaths that form connected walking loops, but many people are unaware of them. Therefore, a walking map to alert people to the potential of the hidden network could become very valuable.

Some walks can already be found on websites, but this could be expanded and connected to create a walking strategy for the whole town. Specific weak points in the network include:

- The route along Ock valley is good although the Ock valley floods at times and gets muddy. Year round surfaces are needed.
- The Culham Railway Bridge needs a parallel pedestrian and cycle crossing as this would open up further good walking and cycling routes.
- Convenient and direct walking routes are essential in the Albert Park area, several paths have barriers that make access by wheelchair users difficult.

The Dunmore Road was originally built as a bypass but when Abingdon expands, it will become a main road running through the town. It could block successful integration of future development with the existing town unless it is downgraded or redesigned.

Informal outdoor activities scattered across the town such as outdoor chess, table tennis, geo caching and Pokémon Go could complement formal sports. Open and/or cold water swimming is possible in places across the town and is enjoyed by many.

The sports field at Northcourt Lane presents an opportunity for a public place for different generations to meet. The village feel here could be intensified with the green space at the south of the cricket field becoming a "village green". The new residential estates in the north and east encourage car-based travel and are lacking the design quality of Northcourt. Meanwhile, areas in the south have reduced access to local facilities (for example, a post office has recently closed) and there are significant health inequalities across the town.

Potential Policies & Projects

1. Establish a crowd-sourced walking map of the whole town.
2. Identify key spots in the network and describe the interventions needed to improve conditions.
3. Schedule the interventions required in the neighbourhood plan projects appendix.
4. Further integration of projects around dementia-friendly design and mental health with the neighbourhood plan projects.



Leisure & Sports

There is a wide variety of sports and leisure opportunities in Abingdon, from the outdoor pool in Abbey Meadow and wild swimming opportunities in the River Thames to informal basketball courts and a BMX track.

The airfield at Dalton Barracks (due to close in 2029) is used to host British Cycling accredited races and as a training facility for cycling and triathlon events. Those involved with cycling and triathlon are keen to secure a long term future for these sporting activities. However, the airfield is located outside the boundary of the neighbourhood plan so cannot be directly influenced by plan policies.

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The Environment

It appears that this topic will broadly consist of four key sections, as follows: Design & Build of Developments; Green Spaces; Transport; and Town Centre.

New Builds – All new homes across the plan area require high quality, energy efficient construction techniques. They should be zero carbon and use heat pumps, efficient insulation, and solar panels to minimise/avoid fossil fuel use. Car parking spaces may still be necessary but spaces must be easily convertible to other uses. For example, use of courtyard parking spaces instead of driveways.

Green Spaces – Abingdon has a surprisingly high number of small green spaces. The loss of these spaces (e.g. green courtyard spaces between houses) through infill development is a big concern as such spaces support wildlife and biodiversity, and support quality of life and emotional wellbeing for local people of all ages. The neighbourhood plan should audit, map, designate and protect the most valuable of these green spaces, to protect the most precious green spaces in some places. Higher housing density should be encouraged elsewhere.

Transport – Traffic volumes and speeds need to be reduced. While electric cars will reduce air pollution at source they will still cause traffic congestion and leave a huge carbon footprint in the manufacturing process. Instead,

Tilsey Park is used by local athletics clubs and the Abingdon Hockey Club. A youth football club uses this facility as an evening venue and the 400m track is used by the triathlon club for run training. However, land either side of Tilsey Park is allocated for new homes, making the expansion of this facility unlikely in future.

In term of missing facilities, a climbing wall and/or bouldering facility was suggested as something that could benefit the town.

Potential Policies & Projects

1. Identify and safeguard expansion land adjacent to existing sports facilities to ensure future flexibility and investment as the town's population grows.
2. There seems to be a busy "sports village" in the south of Abingdon, that includes rugby, football and water sports on the Thames. Can this be supported and consolidated through further investment?
3. Can there be increased investment in sports provision in the north of the town to counterbalance the southern sports village and reduce the need to travel? Or are there other solutions, such as a "cycle super highway" from the north of the town to access sports facilities in the south?



Families & Young People

Research to date has shown Abingdon to be a great place to live: a strong sense of community with a balance of people who have lived there a long time but also a sense of welcoming newcomers. However, some more recent housing areas can feel isolated. These areas need to feel better integrated.

Provision for young children is often through volunteers, charities and triathlon groups. The Carousel group, active on the south side of the town, has filled the gap left by the closure of the local Children's Centre. Older children and teenagers are often drawn towards the "bright lights" of Oxford. Relatively good public transport links for many people make this easy to access by bus.

Abbey Meadow is appreciated by all and seen to be a green space where all generations could meet.

Workshops included a discussion about "inter-generational cross-over" spaces. For example, creating play areas that are also public spaces for all ages to meet. By extension, these spaces could support pop-up activities, like small festivals or fairs. All areas of Abingdon should have such spaces within the local neighbourhood.

Design of the town centre, including access streets and roads, needs to prioritise pedestrians and cyclists much more.



Heritage & Built Environment

Abingdon has several districts that are rich in built heritage. These are well-loved by residents and visitors alike. While the town has three Conservation Areas these do not cover all the heritage areas that people feel should be protected. An appraisal report exists for Northcourt and appraisals are being considered for both the Albert Park and Town Centre Conservation Areas. While the neighbourhood plan cannot expand the Conservation Areas it can offer protection to non-designated heritage assets (i.e. those areas or buildings that are not within a Conservation Area or are not Listed).

Analysis of the best parts of Abingdon (e.g. materials, form, scale, massing and composition) will likely reveal themes or patterns that can provide guidance for future developments. In this way, Abingdon's built past can inform its built future. Use of a locally defined pattern book should ensure that new buildings will be less anonymous as inspiration will be informed by the immediate locality. The site of the defunct Upper Reaches Hotel could benefit from this locally-derived design code. Such an approach could help avoid a bulky, over-scaled development in this prime location.

Furthermore, local architects, businesses and design companies should have priority in the design and construction of new developments. An increasing number of "exceedingly small flats" are being developed from existing properties in the town centre, properties

Potential Policies & Projects

Specific points of improvement could be included in the neighbourhood plan:

1. Cycle routes to enable children and families to cycle to safely to school and into town.
2. All new developments to include community infrastructure (e.g. local shop, cafe or meeting place) to provide a sense of focus.
3. New homes need walking access to community, green spaces and local shops – the criteria of the "15 Minute Neighbourhood".
4. Through the neighbourhood plan, local people should be able to map potential sites for future new homes and establish a set of design criteria to be applied.
5. Future design codes should be based upon well-loved and successful local characteristics.
6. Consider how "schools streets" could be applied to Abingdon, an initiative that prevents car access to the last approx. 200-300m around the school gates at drop-off and pick-up time to encourage walking and cycling.



Culture

It was noted in the workshop events that Abingdon can feel "overshadowed" by Oxford in terms of access to culture. That said, there was enthusiasm around the ideas of creating a "Cultural Centre" or "Cultural Network" for Abingdon that was specific to the town.

This network could use the river to connect venues and people to walk between venues, experience public art and open-air culture and supported by food and drink land uses. There are a cluster of venues and spaces in the southern part of the town centre, including the Unicorn Theatre. This project could include a sculpture and/or history trail, perhaps with the involvement of local visual arts students.

The site of the defunct Upper Reaches Hotel on the riverbank, urgently needs to be redeveloped for civic, public or cultural uses and become a key part of this network of venues and spaces. Likewise, the council building could temporarily or permanently be used for cultural activity. The museum may put on an open air exhibition to reflect community resilience. This exhibition could start a more established pattern of open air culture to be supported by the neighbourhood plan.

It was agreed that the riverside should be used more often for events, especially the north bank, adjacent to the town with its south-facing aspect overlooking the open land south of the town. The land on the south side of the river has a history of events, such as horse trials.

As with many towns, Abingdon now perhaps has too much town centre retail space. Re-purposing excess retail floorspace to a cultural and/or innovation hub could bring live events and culture right into the heart of town.

There was some confusion and debate in the workshops over the number of bookable venues across the town and the quality and/or suitability of these for a range of events. It was agreed an audit of cultural spaces is required to better understand the situation. The audit results can then inform the need or otherwise for new venues.

Potential Policies & Projects

1. Establish a "Cultural Corridor" between the town centre and the north bank of the Thames, threading together outside and indoor spaces. This is where Abingdon culture can be showcased to local people and visitors alike.
2. Develop a broader "Heritage & Arts Quarter" to give linked identity to the historic and open privately in central Abingdon.
3. Regenerate and open-up assets held sites on the riverbank for civic and/or cultural use. The site of the defunct Upper Reaches Hotel should be a priority target.
4. Undertake an audit of cultural and social venues to better understand existing assets across the town.



Business, Economy & Town Centre

Workshop participants agreed that Abingdon is a beautiful town on the river but more needs to be made of this fabulous waterside setting that can easily be overlooked by visitors. Abingdon should be known as one of several beautiful "towns on the Thames". It is, after all, the next one upstream from other successful towns like Henley and Marlow.

To reinforce this riverside identity a direct, convenient and convivial connection is needed between the town centre and the north bank of the river. The route needs to be more obvious and a solution is needed to overcome the barriers to easy movement presented by busy traffic flows.

In the town centre there are some underutilised and/or vacant large retail units. The current decline in "real world" retailing mean these are unlikely to be filled again. Could these units be used as a new innovation, science, technology or creative hub? Perhaps scattered out across the town centre taking up empty units and when needed? Or be used as flexible shared work spaces to bring new activity into the centre? Rather than demolish these units, can they be quickly repurposed?

Meanwhile, small-scale, independent shops with a local provenance can generate new visits to the town centre in a time where people can buy the basics and more online. A greater focus on leisure, culture and food/drink destinations rather than retail will better

align the town with future trends.

There are also very few residential uses around the Charter. This results in very little activity during the evenings and at night making the area feel unsafe due to a lack of natural surveillance. A greater mix of uses in this area, including new homes, can help address this.

A successful travel strategy will reduce the numbers arriving in the town centre by car, reducing the need for land in the town centre to be dedicated to car parking. Creating "pedestrianised zones" within the ring road would push car parking into land outside this area but where would this be?

The pandemic has forced upon us new ways of working e.g. work-from-home. What the long term effects of this will be is unknown. Therefore, flexibility in planning policy will be important to allow for evolution of working patterns.

Potential Policies & Projects

1. Branding and identity strategy to revolve around the "beautiful town on the river" concept.
2. Audit of ex-retail buildings with a view to re-purposing for innovation or cultural accommodation.
3. Encouragement for small-scale independent and innovative retail within the historic street pattern.
4. Town centre residential strategy to ensure a balanced mix of small and larger properties.



Early Work

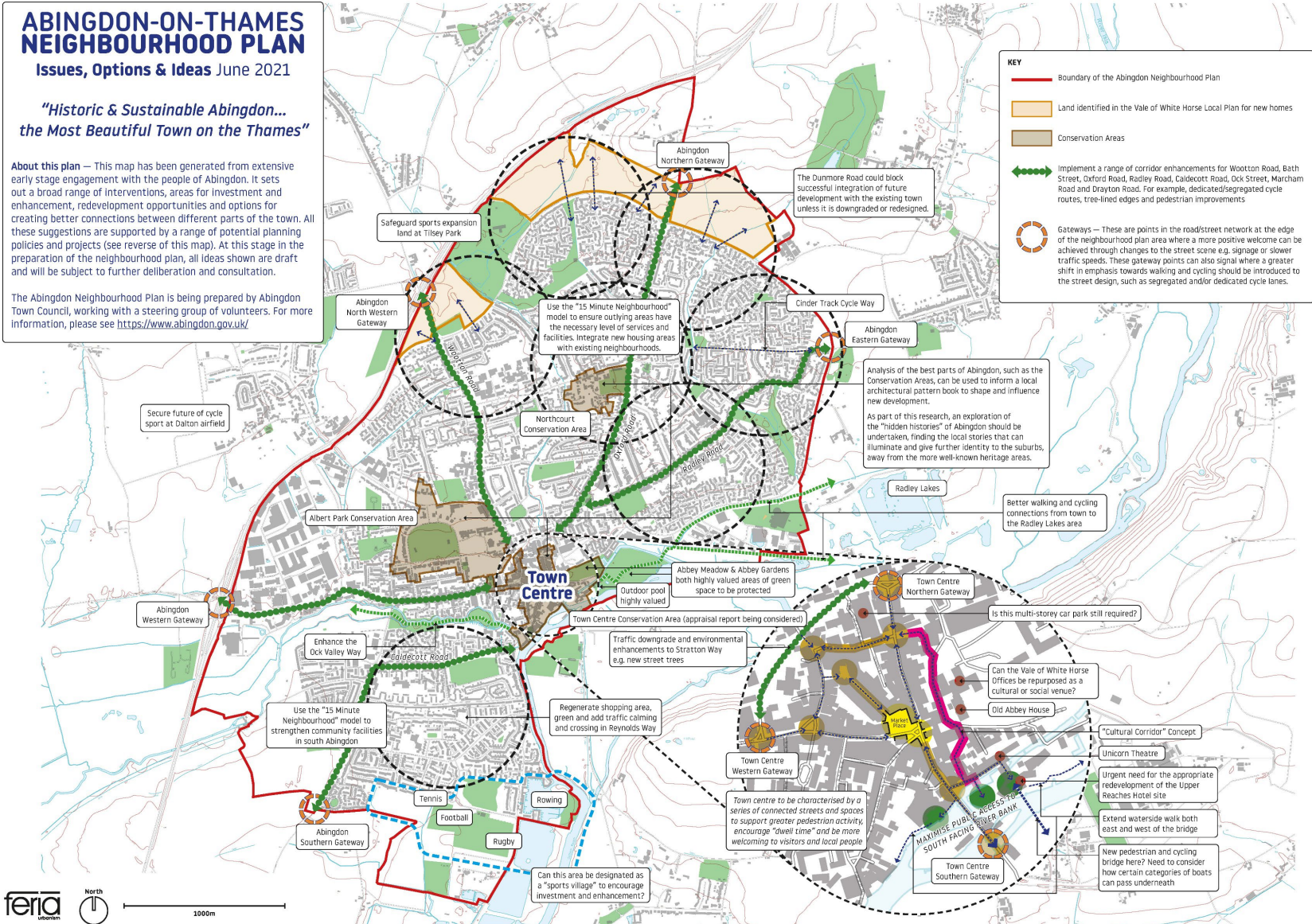
ABINGDON-ON-THAMES NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Issues, Options & Ideas June 2021

“Historic & Sustainable Abingdon... the Most Beautiful Town on the Thames”

About this plan — This map has been generated from extensive early stage engagement with the people of Abingdon. It sets out a broad range of interventions, areas for investment and enhancement, redevelopment opportunities and options for creating better connections between different parts of the town. All these suggestions are supported by a range of potential planning policies and projects (see reverse of this map). At this stage in the preparation of the neighbourhood plan, all ideas shown are draft and will be subject to further deliberation and consultation.

The Abingdon Neighbourhood Plan is being prepared by Abingdon Town Council, working with a steering group of volunteers. For more information, please see <https://www.abingdon.gov.uk/>.





The results so far...

Consultation Responses

- 146 comments from 72 people

Character Areas

11 comments



Green Spaces

74 comments



Town Centre

61 comments





Character Areas

- Abingdon comprises a series of connected neighbourhoods with distinct identities
- The neighbourhood plan will enhance these characters and reserve local distinctiveness
- We asked people to send us a postcard telling us what they love about where they live





Character Areas

Received responses from seven
of the 17 character areas

Appleford

Albert Park

Caldecott

Dunmore

Northcourt

South and
Marina

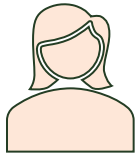
Tithe Farm



Selected Quotes

What makes your area special?

Northcourt



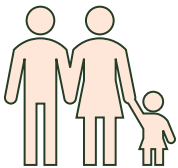
"This area is special because it is a quiet, green oasis in the middle of busy Abingdon. It has a special rural feel - when you turn into Northcourt Lane you immediately feel like you are in a lane in the countryside."

Caldecott

"The Ock is a wildlife haven. We hear owls at night and red kites by day. We hear the barking of foxes and small deer. If you are lucky you will see the kingfisher or the woodpecker."



Albert Park



"Things are drastically changing. The quirky individual old Victorian houses which used to surround me are being insensitively renovated to the point of being unrecognisable and inappropriate new builds are creeping in."

Tithe Farm

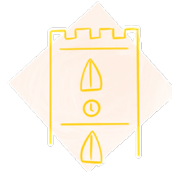
"There is a lock which takes you to the other side of the river with yet more fields you can walk through, and the views are lovely."





Green Spaces

- The steering group identified a series of green spaces that are considered deserving of protection
- This is because the spaces
 - play a recreational value
 - have a heritage value
 - provide a home for wildlife
 - are tranquil
 - are beautiful
- We asked for comments on these green spaces and any additional green spaces that should be protected





Selected Comments

All green spaces

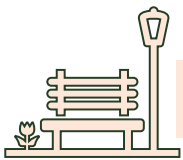


"There is huge potential for additional tree planting & wildflower areas if grass were left unmown."

1 – Land west of Wootton Road

8, 13 and 14 – Farm Road

"Isn't this green space earmarked for an Aldi store?"



"These green spaces should be bracketed together."

27– Barton Fields and Abbey Meadows

32 – Land at Barrow Field

'These spaces must not put together – they are quite different.'



"Immediately to the south contains a scheduled monument and roman remains – this should probably be designated for HISTORY."

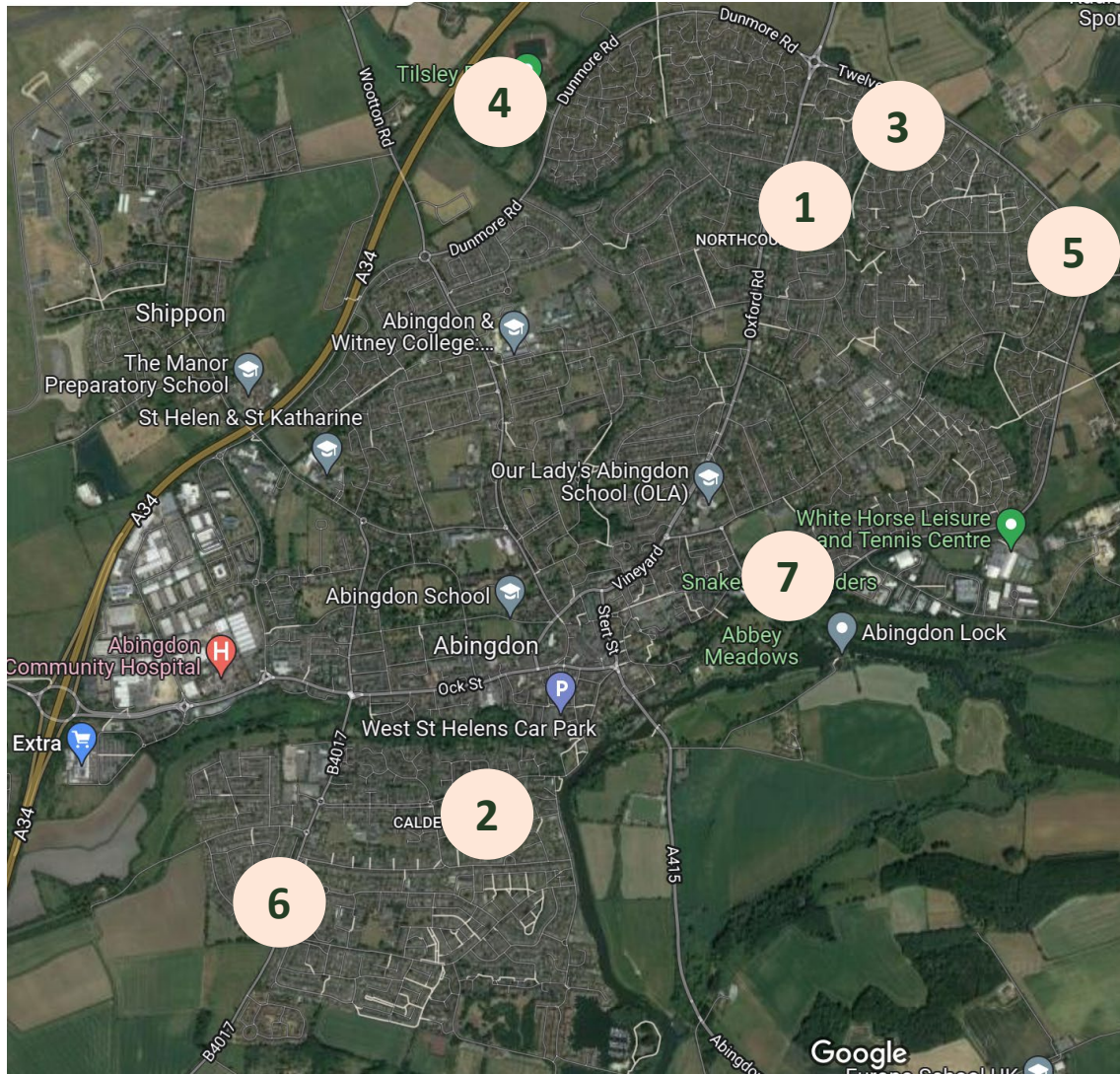
33 – Land south of Masefield Crescent

"This is also an old cricket pitch to the west of the football ground. The whole of this area should be included in the designation."





New Suggestions



- 1 Green space at the north of Welford Gardens
- 2 Caldecott Recreation Ground
- 3 Boreford Road Park
- 4 Tilsley Park
- 5 Radley Road Triangle
- 6 Verge along Drayton Road
- 7 Sherwood Avenue Play Area



Town Centre

A series of trends and influences are changing town centres around the country.

Therefore, the steering group have generated a series of ideas and scenarios for the future of Abingdon town centre including:

- Streets and spaces opportunities
- Areas for pedestrian improvements
- Redevelopment opportunities
- Cultural corridor concept
- Improvement of routes to the river





Streets & Spaces Opportunities

Key Findings

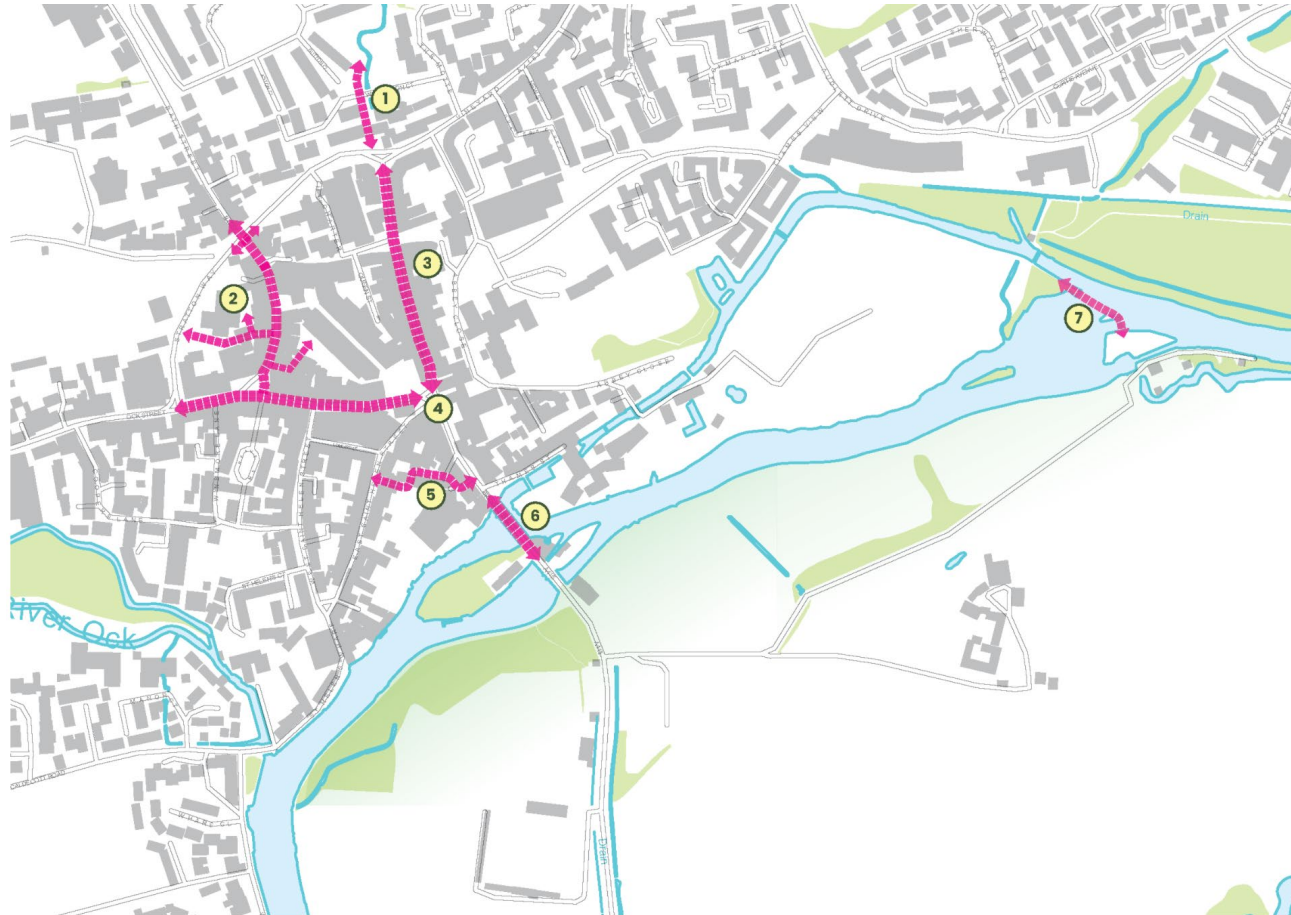


- Should be public access to the Old Gaol riverfront – was a condition of planning consent.
- Visual impact of town centre damaged by grotty 60s buildings
- Some car parking required – walking into town not always possible
- New road bridge is required to encourage walking and cycling
- The claim about shopping isn't right – a thriving town centre
- Should be a publicity board for town events.



Pedestrian Improvements

Key Findings



1. An access exists here already but needs safety improvements
2. Disagreement over whether requires pedestrian priority or 3-way light-controlled junction
3. Stert Street needs pedestrian priority & slowed traffic speeds
4. No comments
5. A link exists here however only 9-5 Mon-Sat & not accessible
6. Active travel trial on bridge caused bad traffic in town centre
7. No more light pollution along The Thames – should not be urbanised



Redevelopment Opportunities

Key Findings



A – Ock Street Businesses

Cars may still need access to this site

B – Telephone Exchange

Has already been converted to flats

C – Bury Street

Needs more radical change

D – The Charter Complex

Disagreement on what use the site needs and whether it should be redeveloped



Redevelopment Opportunities

Key Findings



E – The Old Maltings

No comments

F – Old Abbey House

Should make more use of the outdoor pool

G – Upper Reaches

Site needs redevelopment

Additional

★ “The Net”, Stratton Way – would make nice public space

★ “Coxeters”, Stratton Way/Ock St could be sympathetically redeveloped



Cultural Corridor Concept

Key Findings

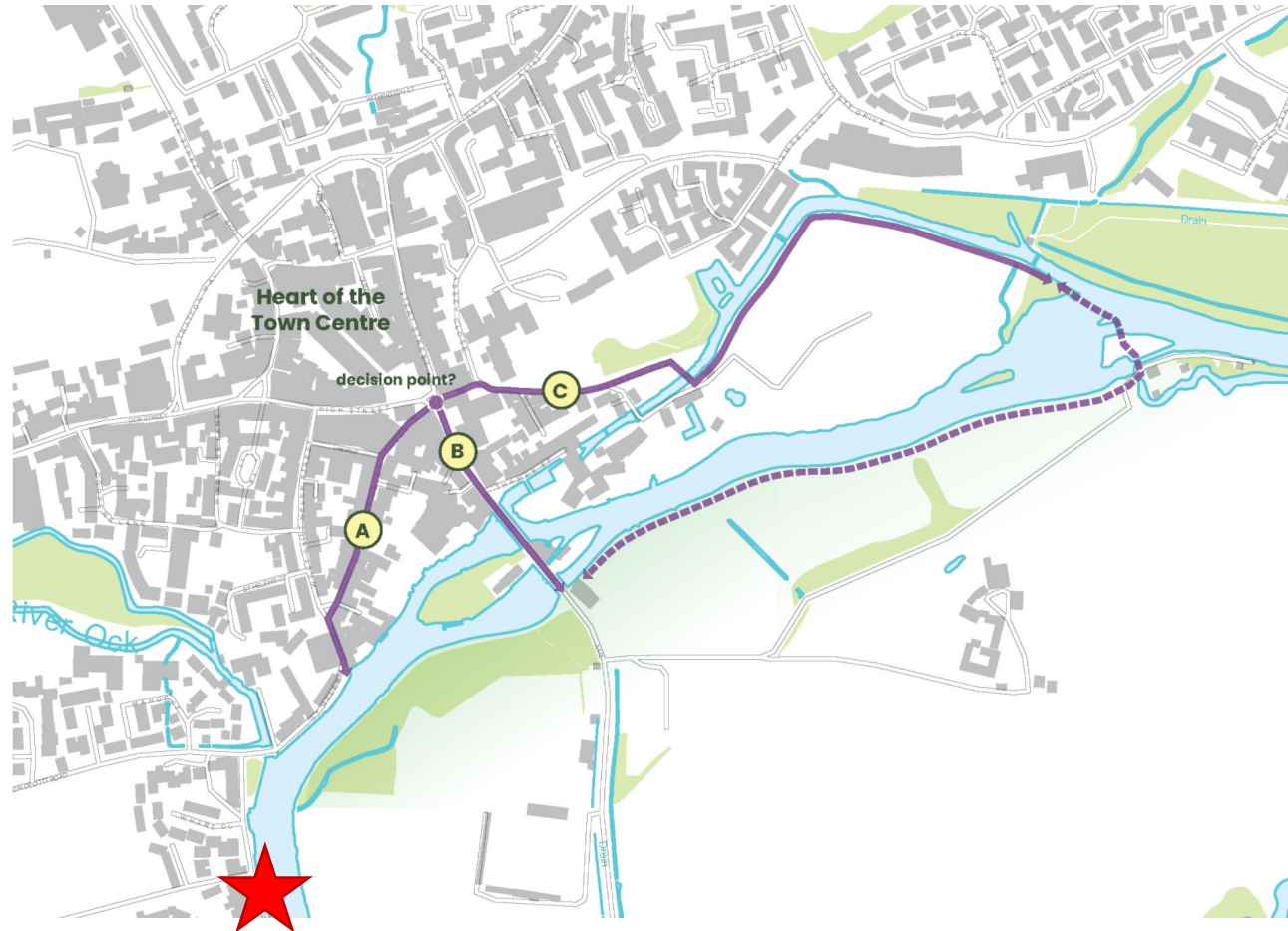


- Queries how Checker Walk can be enhanced due to the Scheduled Monument and Listed Buildings nearby
- New pedestrian bridge needs to be high enough for the Salters boats to pass beneath



Routes to the River


Key Findings



Route A

- Cyclists' 'contraflow' to East St Helen Street dangerous

Route B

- Priority should be given to Thames pedestrian crossing
- Proposed footbridge near Wilsham Road 
- More information needed on traffic free route between Abingdon & Oxford

Route C

- Welcome Abbey Meadows cycle improvements
- Footbridge near Barton Meadows is difficult for the less able
- Safe passage into Abingdon from Culham would encourage cycling



PLACE Assessment

Local people across Abingdon have been assessing their own neighbourhoods

Used the following five categories

- Planning
- Landscape
- Architecture
- Culture
- Engineering

This is known as the PLACE Assessment



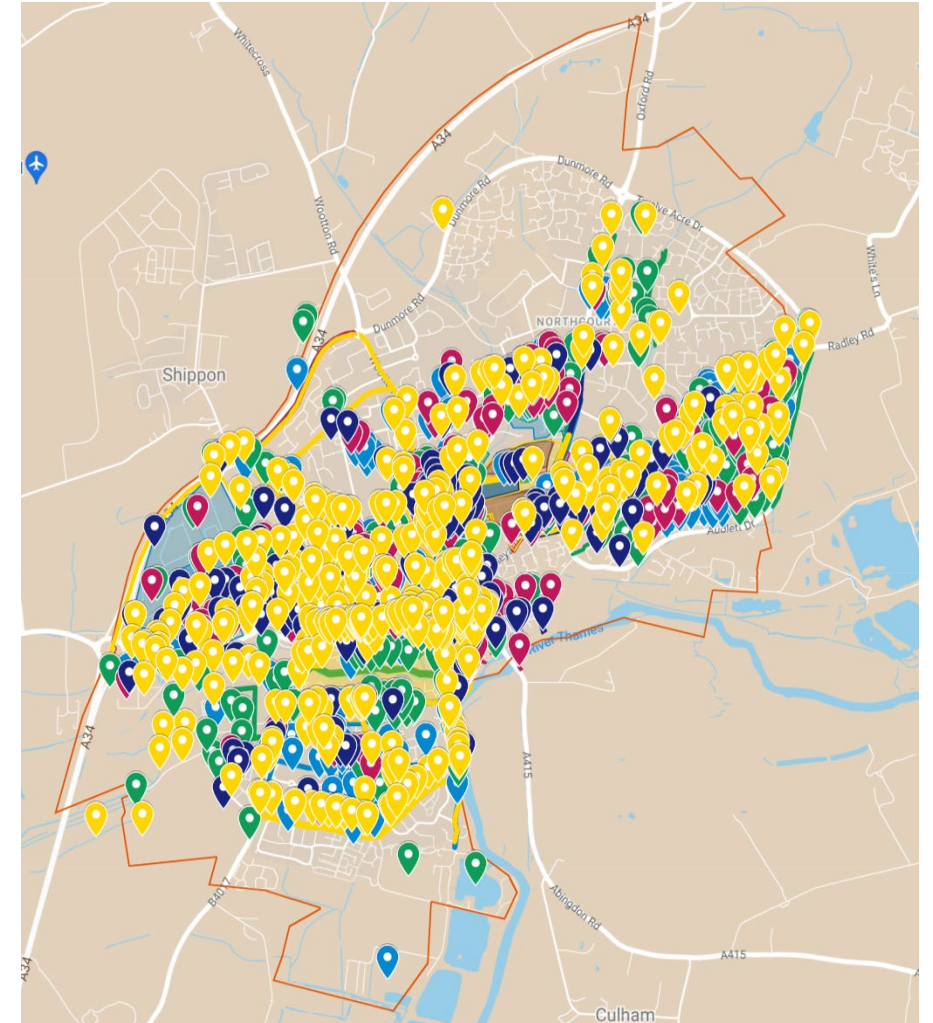


PLACE Assessment

The colour coded map displays the results so far. You can zoom in and click on the details to read what people are saying

This **PLACE** map is a work in progress

If you live in a part of town where there is currently no coverage, we want to hear from you – please get in touch to help fill in the gaps





Next Steps

1. Review comments on the first three topics
2. Use the findings to draft policy/project content on current topics
3. **Identify additional topics** – likely to include access/movement issues, design guidance (based on character area research) and site based policies
4. Prepare new content
5. Update the website and invite further comments