

Abingdon-on-Thames Community Led Plan meeting

Monday 16th April 2018

Town Retail, Town Centre Development and Parking

Introduction

Cllr. Alice Badcock thanked everyone for coming.

Updates from previous meetings

James Wigmore – cycling champion has arranged to meet cycling representatives at the Free Wheelers cycle festival.

Paul Townsend – to reduce plastic usage. He has met with Carbon Cutters and is due to meet with the Chamber of Commerce. There is a display about reducing plastic in the Community Shop.

Town Retail, Town Centre Development and Parking

Invited representatives: Cllr Mike Murray - Cabinet member for regeneration and development

Dr Melanie Smans - Economic Development Manager (VWHDC)

Sgt Tim Pavey – Thames Valley Police

PCSO Ali Blood – Thames Valley Police

Paul Townsend – Chamber of Commerce

Sgt Tim Pavey – Thames Valley Police

Sgt Tim Pavey invited people to join focus groups.

- It was pointed out that the police had a range of other issues (vulnerable people, burglary, anti-social behaviour, rural crime etc.) which they must concentrate on and Abingdon is a big town.
- 1000 parking tickets were issued by the police last year.
- Discussions are ongoing to decriminalise parking. This will enable local authorities to take on the enforcement role in relation to parking offences such as parking on double yellow lines.
- The police cannot stop cars parking illegally on a regular basis. They can just issue multiple tickets, it's up to the Courts to take it further.
- Please notify the police about illegal parking and if the parked car is causing a risk to public safety they will attend immediately otherwise they will attend if and when they are able.

Issues raised

- Disabled bays in Bath Street were regularly being used by vans and lorries.
- Taxis are double parking in the town centre.
 - This requires reporting the District Council as licencing authority.
- Anti-social car usage and parking were reported in Thames View and Jackman Close.
 - Refer issues regarding CCTV camera locations to Community Safety.

The Police stated that they relied on people informing them of issues. There is a new system by which to contact them due to be introduced soon which should be an improvement on the current 101 waiting times.

Cllr Mike Murray - Cabinet member for regeneration and development

- The District Council is working with the Chamber of Commerce and the BID to regenerate the town, and is delivering the independent shops project which aims to attract pop-up shops to the town and develop initiatives to support independent businesses in the town centre.
 - The District Council can facilitate opportunities and discussions between estate agents, landlords and businesses because they don't own the premises, i.e. they have no powers to make landlords lower rents or accept offers.
 - The district council is progressing the Charter area regeneration. This includes working with current tenants to identify suitable alternative premises.
- Public estates.
 - Currently there is a review in progress of all premises owned by public bodies across the County, District and Towns. The aim of the review is to ensure that resources are being used most effectively.
- Owned estates.
 - For example the Upper Reaches Hotel. The tenant has security of tenure so there is a limit as to what the District Council is able to do except encourage them to maintain the site and bring the hotel back into use.
- Wi-Fi
 - The District Council is exploring options to provide free Wi-Fi across the District.
 - The Wi-Fi unit can be attached to and powered by lampposts.
- Abingdon BID
 - The District Council
 - Administers the collection of the levy on behalf of the BID.
 - Provided staff to support the BID Management Company and advisory board.
 - The district council was asked to carry out an observational review of matters on behalf of the BID. This has been concluded, and forwarded to the BID Company. It is not a Vale "audit", and the ownership of the review it sits with the BID rather than the council. The District Council is supporting

the BID Company to consider the review, together with options for the future of the BID.

Issues raised

- The Thames Street residents regarding Upper Reaches Hotel site.
 - Requested an update on how the District Council's negotiations with the landlord of the Upper Reaches are progressing.
 - The residents are concerned about anti-social behaviour, public safety and environmental health issues on the site.

District Council's response:

The tenant has a long lease with security of tenure. This provides the tenant with significant protection under the law.

- The tenant is responsible for maintaining the property and can occupy the site or not and use the site as they wish within the law and tenancy agreement.
- The Council has no rights to go onto the site and check the buildings. The premises have been checked but only to the level allowed by law.

As the commercial landlord of the site the District Council can only act within the law, such as in relation to a planning or environmental health issue.

- The District Council is looking at the terms of the lease and what can be done to encourage the tenant to maintain the site and bring it back into use.
- The District Council is doing all it is currently able to do and reviews it regularly.

Paul Townsend – Abingdon Chamber of Commerce

The aim of the Chamber of Commerce is to promote businesses in Abingdon.

They run:

- Four "Local Excellence Markets" a year on the Market Place on the months with five Saturdays because traders have other commitments on the rest of the Saturdays. This has been running for the last nine years.
- Christmas Extravaganza
- Map of the businesses in the Town Centre. This is currently under production and will be delivered to every door in Abingdon and the local villages. The online version will include the local shopping centres such as Peachcroft.

Abingdon BID

- The Councils have no authority over BID and very few powers.
- Traders have written to the District Council voicing their concerns
- A representative of the traders has asked the District Council for help and met with the District Council Chief Executive.

- The District Council was asked to carry out an observational review of matters on behalf of the BID.
 - The interim Chairman of the Advisory Board of the Abingdon BID wrote to levy payers in May 2018, referring to the observational review as a 'full financial audit'.
- An enquiry was made as to what had happened to the BID website.
- There is an advisory board currently in place. The Town Council chose to not have a representative on this board.
- Cllr Mike Badcock has offered to meet the traders and put their issues to the BID.

Feedback from the Group discussions:

Group 1 – Mr King

Felt that parking and traffic issues lead to retail problems at the end of the chain:

- Create a Green town. Get volunteers to clean up.
- Damaged/broken lampposts and bollards are not replaced.
- Bath Street charity shop's boarding is still covering the pavement.
- Distribution of flyers, posters etc. to advertise local businesses. Include places such as the Caravans and Campervans on cricket pitch, Peachcroft Farm, boats moored on the river, car parks.
- Advertise Abingdon businesses on the local buses. "Walk about Abingdon" is already being advertised.
- BID has a pot of money which could be doing something for the town.

Group 2

Provide positive information about Abingdon

- Get some interactive street maps/signs containing business names and contact details.
- Provide USB charging points in bus stops etc.
- Abingdon becoming a "coffee town". The District Council, in consultation with the BID has considered having a 'best barista' competition.

Group 3

- Felt that it wasn't known around the town as to what was happening on the Market Place. It should be advertised in places where people go e.g. Tesco's and Waitrose.
- Create "Pop up Shops" in empty shop units in Bury Street.
- Create a Treasure Hunt, walking trails/tours around Abingdon which are publicised in car parks, website etc.
- French Market etc. in the Market Place. They used to come and decided not to return, the whole foreign market circuit has declined. These markets tended

not to come from the actual countries. The shops didn't like the foreign markets.

Group 4

- Cinema – already happening
- Performance space/Concert Hall. The Abbey Hall would be good for this.

Group 5

- Pop up ice rink and stalls. These would be a great attraction.
 - Concern over cost and weather conditions.
- Clear up out of date posters

The meeting was reminded of shop front grants which are available from the funds held by the Town Council on behalf of the (former) Abingdon Joint Environmental Trust.

Group 6

Parking

- Size of spaces in Multi-storey car park.
- Early time of shutting the Multi-storey car park.
- Rye Farm car park not being used much.
- Lack of knowledge of where car parks are.
 - Chamber of Commerce regularly advertise where the towns' car parks are.
 - Request the District Council to improve the car parks' signage.
 - Include a map of the car parks on the town website.
 - Include car parks on Town Guide.

Late night shopping. This has been suggested but very few shopkeepers are interested as it hasn't previously been successful.

Shop front murals of Abingdon from the Old Goal building works (3 of the 4 have been saved). Put these back in empty shops.

Named Actions

1. Tidy up Abingdon Town Centre - green gym litter pick. Steve King to run.
2. Look into producing and distributing flyers to advertise what's available in Abingdon and publicise businesses, events and other activities. Paul Townsend to look into this.
3. Clear up out of date posters. Lynn Carter
4. Put up Abingdon Murals into the empty shops in Bury Street; 3 of the 4 are available. Steve King and Chamber of Commerce.

Actions requested that are already being investigated

1. USB charging points in bus stops etc. OCC cabinet already investigating this.

2. Pop up Shops in empty Bury street shop units. The District Council is working with estate agents, landlords and interested businesses to identify pop up shop opportunities.

Other Actions proposed

1. Walking tour/Treasure hunt/Abingdon map signs up in car-parks. This will require liaising with the District Council. Walking tours of Abingdon have been produced in the past – publicise these.
2. Market Place activities etc. advertised in places like Tesco's and Waitrose.
3. Interactive street maps/signs from a company such as J C Decaux:
<http://www.jcdecaux.co.uk/>
4. More markets – e.g. French market. These require organising through the Town Council.
5. Have an attraction like an ice rink to attract people into the town centre.
6. Car parks
 - a. Better signage and advertising e.g. social media as to where the town car parks are.
 - b. Increase the size of the spaces to accommodate modern vehicle sizes.
 - c. Invite Councillor Eric Batts to a future meeting.
 - d. Put a map of where the car parks are on the Town Council website.
7. Late night shopping – Chamber of Commerce.

Future Meetings:

- Date of next working group Thursday 10th May at 7pm – Roysse Court meeting room.
- Community Led Plan meeting Monday 18th June at 7pm – venue to be confirmed. Theme: Community safety and flooding.