

## **Civic Pride – A Positive Vision**

It is a bright sunny Sunday morning in February. Come with me for a walk along the Thames in Abingdon. What do you see? Families with children of all ages, dog walkers, older people out for a Sunday morning walk, runners – in fact a good representation of the population of Abingdon. Most of them are smiling (even the dogs) and all are enjoying themselves.

Dozens of children are in the excellent play area – the older ones queuing up to have a go on the slip wire and the younger ones happily using the slides and swings. Nearby, the outdoor pool is being refurbished – hopefully it will be ready for use in the summer.

Walk on across the Abbey Meadow to the Thames itself. It is quieter here – just a few older people enjoying the winter sunshine. There are more people around Abingdon Lock and on the bridge over the weir, but it is still peaceful. Walk back along the Thames Path: there are a couple of fishermen on the riverbank, and two or three narrowboats moored by the Abbey Meadow. Through the leafless trees you can see the back of Cosener's House and the gardens stretching down to the river, and ahead of you is the view of St Helen's Church spire and Abingdon Bridge, exactly as sketched by JMW Turner in 1805. Sadly, the next thing you see is the boarded-up hulk of the Upper Reaches Hotel, waiting for someone to save it from ruin.

Go up the steps, cross the bridge and right into Thames Street and then through the narrow alleyway (the Slype) which takes you past the Abbey Buildings – the remainder of the great medieval Abbey of Abingdon – which were threatened with demolition in 1944. However, the townspeople worked together to save them from the wrecking ball, and they are now one of Abingdon's proudest possessions. They are also the location of a new and very successful venture in Abingdon – the Unicorn Cinema. The cinema is sharing the Unicorn Theatre (once the Abbey granary) with local drama groups and Music at the Unicorn to provide Abingdon people with a lively arts centre.

All this helps to make Abingdon a great place to live. But inevitably there are things missing, so we are pleased that the Town Council has launched a Community Led Plan ABINGDON FOR ALL (<http://abingdon.gov.uk/town-council/abingdon-for-all>). Public meetings about various areas of interest have been arranged in March and April, so we hope people will get involved and contribute to the future planning of our town. Among other important issues, we desperately need the Abbey Hall to be reopened for public use as soon as possible, and careful thought to be applied to its long-term future.

Spring is coming – and that means spring cleaning. Abingdon does not have an enormous problem with litter, but there are some spots which need attention. A group of volunteers will be making a contribution to the 'Great British Spring Clean' on Saturday, 3 March, so please come and join us at 10 a.m. at Reynolds Way shops, Abingdon.

*Bryan Brown*

**Chairman. Friends of Abingdon**

**February 2018**