

THE FRIENDS OF ABINGDON

Abingdon's Civic Society



Caring for our past, present and future

Newsletter – Summer 2011

Message from the Editor

This edition of the newsletter is shorter than usual as much of what we would normally include is covered in the detailed AGM reports which are enclosed for the benefit of those who were unable to attend. However there has been a lot happening in recent weeks so we have tried to give you a brief update.

AGM – 14 June

After completion of the formal business we had a stimulating talk from Claire Chidley on 'What makes a great place to live, work and play.' She told us about her experiences with regeneration in various towns from Andover to Bilbao – and further afield. She encouraged us to start by identifying what sort of town we wanted to be: we should establish our own identity and benchmark ourselves against other similar places, no matter how far afield, rather than against other local towns who might have very different identities. For example, her immediate impression had been that we could make far more use of our riverside location.

In her experience art and culture could provide a successful means to spearhead regeneration: we should look for sources of creative energy and use these to start initiatives. They need not be big or costly – a "lick of paint" or a small project could lead on to bigger things. There was no need to rush: national political changes and local government financial cutbacks could be turned into benefits by providing time for reflection and planning. We should also work to develop a culture of civic leadership –

recognising genuine obstacles but not allowing ourselves to be bogged down by bureaucracy.

Claire left us with a lot of ideas which we are drawing on in taking forward our various projects. Her talk was followed by a lively discussion which continued in the Long Gallery over refreshments, provided to her usual wonderful standard by Jenny Berrell.

Projects

Town Maps

The first of the new-style town maps produced by Choose Abingdon Partnership was installed at Rye Farm Car Park in June. The remainder will follow in the coming weeks. They will be more informative than those they are replacing: instead of all being the same, each will incorporate detail about the area in which it is sited. Friends of Abingdon have contributed a lot to the development of these maps and welcome the improved image they will give of the town.

Abbey Grounds

On 26 June, John Burren led a walk around the whole of the Abbey site, including St Nicolas Church, the Abbey Grounds and Coseners House Gardens and finishing with tea in the Lower Gallery. The walk was very successful and over-subscribed so he ran it again on 31 July when it was equally well-received.

The Lost Abbey Project has now nearly completed the series of interpretation boards which are being placed at various points around the Abbey Grounds and they will be launching these and their Abbey Trail on Saturday 10 September as part of Heritage

Weekend (see events page). If, based on this year's experience, we think there is sufficient demand, we hope to run the Friends of Abingdon walks on a regular basis next summer.

House Histories

Representatives from Friends of Abingdon and the Abingdon Area Archaeological and Historical Society (AAAHS) met in May to discuss possibilities for recording information about buildings and areas which although not formally listed are of historical interest. Since one of the main purposes of this would be to assist with conservation, particularly in the light of possible future development proposals, we felt that the first step should be to try to establish a constructive working relationship with the new Councils. We have made initial contact with them and hope to start detailed discussions soon after the summer break.

Publicity

We are redesigning our membership leaflet: the new version should be available in time for Heritage Weekend. We are also developing a new website. Once these are in place we will run a more active recruitment campaign for new members, but in the meantime we hope that existing members will continue to encourage their friends to join.

There will be more detail on these and our other projects in our next issue.

Abingdon news

Shopping Centre redevelopment

The Vale of White Horse District Council has just announced a consultation exercise, asking for views on the next stage of planning for the revitalisation of the Abbey Shopping Centre and Charter Area. The consultation lasts until 23 September.

The latest proposal draws on feedback from previous consultation on plans for the town centre and illustrates how the future development might look, but does not include specific details of the final schemes. These will be set out in planning applications, the first of which is expected to be submitted later in the year and there will be another chance to comment at that stage.

Full details of the consultation and a short online feedback questionnaire will be

available from 12 August at www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/spds Paper copies of these documents will also be available from the VWHDC and Abingdon library.

There will be a staffed exhibition of the proposals in Unit 33 of the Abbey Shopping Centre from 12.00 to 19.00 on 18 - 19 August and the exhibition material will remain on display until 23 September.

All comments made during the consultation will be considered before the plans are finalised and adopted by the council. Subject to planning permission, work on the Abbey Shopping Centre could start as early as February next year and work on the Charter in 2013.

Community Shop

For about 9 months during 2010/11 the Choose Abingdon Partnership (ChAP) ran the Community Shop in one of the empty units in the Abbey Shopping Centre: it proved very popular with community groups, who could use it free of charge to demonstrate their activities' and with the public who enjoyed seeing something different in the town centre from week to week. The shop has been closed since April because of a problem over the liability for rates: this would be resolved if the lease was held by a registered charity so we are in discussion with ChAP and the Shopping Centre owners and hope that the shop will soon re-open under the FoA name. ChAP will continue to provide the administration of the shop and underwrite running costs.

Planning Matters

Planning Applications

We have recently been in contact with the Vale of White Horse District Council concerning three planning applications for developments in Abingdon. One in Northcourt Lane has since been withdrawn. The other two in Wootton Road have gone to appeal following their refusal by the Vale. We have written to the appeal inspector along the following lines:

"The Friends of Abingdon are very concerned in general at the way family homes and distinctive buildings in Abingdon are being demolished to make way for high density developments of little architectural value - in particular flat roofed 3 storey blocks as built in Northcourt Road and as proposed for 42

Wootton Road. We fully support the comments which have been made by the neighbours and the Town Council with respect to the latter proposal.

"We urge the inspector not to consider each of these applications in isolation, but to give more thought to their impact on the environment of the area. We note in particular the reference to the "spacious and sylvan" setting of 42 Wootton Road mentioned in the appeal statement by JPPC. The gardens of North Abingdon provide a valuable amenity to residents in an area which has a high density of traffic flow and is surrounded by a ring road and major trunk road. The most recent developments in the town centre have been high density, but these are mitigated to some extent by the access to parks and the riverside. We would not want such dense development to become a norm throughout the town."

New Planning Rules

July 25 saw the publication of a draft *National Planning Policy Framework* which streamlines national policy from over 1,000 pages to just 52 pages - as part of a consultation to get the planning system "right for current and future generations".

Civic Voice are running workshops in Birmingham on 19 September and London on 21 September and are keen to hear comments about the policy framework before 30 September. Please contact Alan or Pat Bryden if you are interested in these meetings or wish to comment on the framework.

There is more information at: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/corporate/1951729>

We are also arranging a meeting with the leader of the Vale of White Horse District Council to discuss various issues including VWHDC's attitude towards the proposed new planning regime.

Stop Press: the proposed opening of a Tesco Express in the former Ox pub has attracted much public comment in the period when we have been putting this newsletter together. At this stage Tesco do not need to seek planning permission since their proposal does not constitute a change of use so we have not had an opportunity to register formal comments. We have however registered our concerns via the Abingdon

Herald and several FoA members attended a protest on 7 August. We will be watching out for any planning applications that may be submitted for alterations to the property itself as well as exploring the wider issues around the loss of traditional pubs and will report further in the next newsletter.



Events in Abingdon

Friends of Abingdon Events

September 8th - 19.30 Unicorn Theatre
'Abingdon Abbey Revisited' - a talk by David Clark about some recent research on the surviving buildings.
Followed by refreshments in the Long Gallery.

November 17th - 19.30 Unicorn Theatre
'Alice in Waterland - Lewis Carroll and the River Thames'
A talk by Mark Davies followed by refreshments in the Long Gallery

For both talks the buildings and bar will be open from 19.00. To help us with catering please contact Pauline Burren on 01235 525556 to let her know you are coming.

Other events in the Abbey Buildings

Charity Lunch August 20th 2011
A Fundraising event for Steppin' Stones (also known as 'The Porch'), Oxford.
An opportunity to enjoy a good lunch in the Long Gallery and see for yourselves what a great setting this is for private parties.
Tickets £15.50. available from 'Mostly Books' Stert Street, where you will also be able to view the menu.
Organised by the Oxford Club of Soroptimist International - Abingdon representative
01235 525556
www.soroptimistinternational.org
www.soroptimist-gbi.org

Abbey Strings Open Rehearsal:
 Sunday 11 September 14.00 – 16.00 Unicorn Theatre
 Heritage Weekend event - don't expect a totally polished performance as they are rehearsing for a concert in October, but do drop in and stay as long as you wish.

Unicorn Theatre events

(Please contact the organisers, not Friends of Abingdon, for information and bookings)

"Come on Jeeves" by PG Wodehouse
 Wednesday 21 – Saturday 24 September
 Presented by Breakaleg Productions
<http://www.breakalegproductions.co.uk/>
 01235 821 351

"The Turn of the Screw" by Henry James
 Wed. 28 September – Sat. 1 October
 Presented by Abingdon Drama Club
<http://www.abingdon-drama-club.com/>

Tickets for both productions available from the Bookstore, Abbey Shopping Centre

Other events in Abingdon

Heritage Open Days 10 – 11 September

Events (all free) include:

- Launch of the Lost Abbey project:
 - Abingdon Heritage Victorian Walk; Old Pubs of Abingdon Walk; 1556 Boundary Walk
 - Model Railway Layouts including Abingdon Branch
 - MG Car Rally
- and many of our historic buildings will be open for viewing

For more details see leaflets available nearer the time or www.abingdonheritage.co.uk

Abingdon Autumn Craft and Design Show

Thursday 20 – Sunday 23 and Thursday 27 – Sunday 30 October

Your chance to buy those special Christmas presents – or treat yourself. For more information see

<http://www.acfcraftfairs.com/abingdon-autumn/>

For more Abingdon events see the Abingdon Diary <http://www.abingdondiary.co.uk/>

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The Friends of Abingdon
 Civic Society

Newsletter published by: Friends of Abingdon, Abingdon's Civic Society,
 18 Thames Street, Abingdon, OX14 3HZ. <http://www.friendsofabingdon.org.uk/>
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