



The Friends of Abingdon  
Civic Society

**Response of The Friends of Abingdon to the Abingdon Town Centre Consultation**

We note that the planning proposals will be implemented in two discrete stages: the modifications to Bury Street fairly soon, the Charter not for another 12 months or so.

With respect to the Abbey Shopping centre, we agree with the emphasis on creating an appropriate setting to enhance our historic streets which could reverse a lot of the mistakes made in the 1960s, in particular the emphasis on creating vibrant but human-scale public spaces and attractive focal points at the entrances to the shopping area and on “active frontages”. It is important that these positive steers are adhered to in assessing the proposals that come forward.

Two areas that we feel require careful thought when plans for the Charter are assessed are a requirement for active frontages on the Bath Street side of what is now Poundland as well as the Broad Street frontage, and the creation of a pleasant space at the Bath Street/Stratton Way junction (the Bath St Triangle).

We are pleased that the plans incorporate the office building at the corner of Stert Street and Stratton Way, but do not feel this site is appropriate for a Health Centre for the following reasons

- a) the access by foot would be either across the busy junction or the entrance to the car park (as we understand the figure). This could create conflict between pedestrians and traffic.
- b) sick people could be exposed to a health risk because of air pollution from this junction and possibly the entrances to the car park.
- c) most patients will visit a chemist after the doctor and this site seems a long way from these. Visits to chemists encourage footfall in the town centre as patients wait for prescriptions. This and the need for level access should be kept in mind as the location for the health centre is planned.

Many people from the surrounding villages visit both the Health Centre and the Library and we feel that they should not be hidden away from the main pedestrian routes. It is disturbing that two edge of town centre health clinics were chosen for comparison from the TRICS database (Abingdon Options par1.9)

We accept the necessity of a large anchor store, but would prefer something other than another food supermarket. There are many food outlets in or near the town centre. A larger store would be fine if it were a Department Store, e.g. a satellite to John Lewis in Oxford's Westgate development. Otherwise we feel that any supermarket should be as small as possible. We note that “an interrogation of the food superstores sites in the TRICS database has shown that no town centre food stores of a comparable size are available”, and that comparison with cities like Leicester, Nottingham and Norwich had to be made.

We suspect that people who come to shop at a large supermarket in the town centre are likely to fill a large trolley and then go home without visiting other shops, as happens with the current out-of-town Tesco store. We are also concerned that as use of the Internet increases with home delivery becoming commonplace, people could shop at local stores for perishable items and large supermarkets could become little more than distribution centres.

The document discusses pedestrian access and routes at great length but vehicular traffic gets half a column on P.24. The key paragraph says:

“Due to existing traffic management challenges access and servicing of the Charter Area is difficult. Any applicant should seek to engage with Oxfordshire County Council at the earliest opportunity and must demonstrate in detail that the access and service arrangements are not detrimental to the quality of Abingdon Town Centre.”

This is very true and the presence of a large store will make these considerations all the more important. We think that VWHDC could have given much clearer guidance about entrance and exit arrangements for the Charter complex before going out to consultation.

In particular, we feel that likely usage of a supermarket-based car park could be very different from the current usage of the Charter car park. We suspect that many working people have permits to park all day in the Charter, but would the same be true of the new one which presumably would be geared to encourage relatively short stay parking? This could mean far more movements in and out of the car park than in the present arrangement, i.e more traffic.

Finally we are glad to hear that the work on the precinct should start soon. We know that the canopies are popular and appreciate that cover will be too expensive at the moment, but hope that provision will be made so that individual shop canopies can be added at a later date if at all possible.



J P Bryden

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