14. Abingdon

14.1 Abingdon is an historic market town in Vale of White Horse district. It is 9 miles to the south of Oxford, 7 miles northwest of Didcot and has good links to the A34. The nearest mainline rail stations are at Didcot Parkway and Oxford, with links to London, Reading, Birmingham and the West of England. Local rail services are available at Radley and Culham stations.

Figure 1: Plan of Town

14.2 This attractive area of Oxfordshire has the Oxford Green Belt situated to the north and the Thames Path runs through the town. The town is dissected by the River Ock and River Thames, bordered to the west by the A34 trunk road and to the east by the railway line. The major potential environmental threat for Abingdon is from flooding of the rivers, as experienced in recent years.

14.3 Abingdon is near to the employment hub at Science Vale UK, and well placed to benefit from this important area of growth and development for enterprise and innovation. Abingdon serves a rural hinterland that includes the wards of Drayton, Marcham & Shippon, Sunningwell & Wootton, Kennington & South Hinksey, Sandford and Radley. Abingdon has the White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre - the largest public sports and leisure facility in the area; the town has 13 primary schools, the vast majority of which are in the north of the

town. There are 3 secondary schools each with 6th forms again these are located to the north of the town. Abingdon and Witney College offers post 16 education. There are 3 primary and 3 secondary (including post 16 education) private schools within Abingdon. Abingdon has a Community Hospital with minor A&E facilities along with four GP Surgeries.

Transport within Abingdon

14.4 Oxfordshire County Council, as highway authority, was responsible for developing and implementing the Abingdon Integrated Transport Strategy (AbITS). The County Council worked in partnership with both Abingdon Town Council and the Vale of White Horse District Council on the adopted AbITS Strategy. There were a number of objectives of the strategy including removing all but essential traffic from the town centre and reducing dependence on car travel by providing attractive and safe alternatives to encourage travel on foot, by bicycle or public transport, whilst recognising that many journeys require a car.

14.5 From 2006 – 2010 the AbITS town centre improvements scheme was implemented. The improvements were aimed at removing queuing traffic from High Street and Stert Street and improving the pedestrian environment. The scheme consisted of introducing a new linked signalised entrance to the town centre, holding traffic back on Bridge Street, Vineyard and Ock Street; Stratton Way was made two-way with a bus waiting facility included. Stert Street and High Street both had new footways laid, with off-carriageway loading bays introduced on Stert Street. The centre of Abingdon is greatly improved for pedestrians as a results of the town centre scheme, with high quality materials used to help enhance the pedestrian environment and to be in keeping with Abingdon's historic environment.

14.6 The series of bus stops on Stratton Way function as a bus terminal for Abingdon and provide services on Premium Routes to Oxford. The Oxford Bus Company X3/X4 service runs a frequent (turn up & go) service to/from Oxford every 10 minutes during the daytime, these also serve Oxford Rail Station. Buses also operate frequently to Didcot Parkway Station, and Didcot town centre. Additionally, there are regular services to/from Culham, Milton, Harwell, Wantage (with some services serving Grove) and Radley. There are also subsidised bus services serving the town.

14.7 The town centre scheme in conjunction with other measures has improved the pedestrian experience in Abingdon. Additionally, there are many footways separate from the road network throughout the residential areas of Abingdon which provide attractive routes between key destinations; however there are areas that require improvements.

14.8 There is a good range of public rights of way that connect Abingdon to the surrounding countryside. However the network is disjointed in many places where paths meet the road network. Selected improved management, road crossings and traffic-free links could help enable more people to access the countryside on foot, cycle or horseback.

14.9 Cycling is popular in Abingdon, with National Cycle Network Route number 5 running through part of the town. More could be done to provide better infrastructure for cyclists. At present, nearly two thirds of the Abingdon working population drive to work.

14.10 Abingdon has an Air Quality Management Area (AQMA), which was declared in 2006; it covers the area including High Street, Stert Street, Ock Street and St Helen's wharf area. The town centre scheme implemented to date has helped reduced the levels of pollution in the town centre, however they still exceed the national air quality objective level.

Problems and Challenges

Walking and the Pedestrian Environment

14.11 The town's layout including location of main employment areas and shopping facilities, coupled with the dissection by the River Ock and River Thames can be a barrier to pedestrians; this has the effect of shifting more traffic on to an already congested network. There is limited publicity of 'green routes' from residential areas, to local services, schools, employment areas and the town centre.

14.12 The topography of Abingdon can be regarded as relatively flat. Therefore, opportunities exist to significantly improve infrastructure for walking and cycling to enable access to local services, and to public transport.

14.13 Access to education is considered good for a town the size of Abingdon. The distribution of schools (especially secondary) in Abingdon (mainly to the north) means less pupils walking to school than is desired.

14.14 Employment is concentrated to Abingdon town centre, and to the west of the town. The employment sites on the outskirts of town are segregated from residential areas; these sites are therefore a considerable walking distance from many dwellings.

14.15 Maintaining and improving links where public rights of way meet urban footways and highways could help to enable more people to feel confident in using alternatives to the private car for local journeys and recreation.

Cycling

14.16 Cycling infrastructure across some areas of Abingdon could be improved and promotion of both walking and cycling routes may increase the use of these as alternatives to private car. Although cyclists can use bridleways, restricted byways and byways (along with horse riders) these often do no connect up safely with roads. National Cycle Network Route 5 runs through Abingdon and should be promoted.

14.17 Employment is concentrated to Abingdon town centre, and to the west of the town. The employment sites on the outskirts of town are segregated from residential areas; these sites are therefore a considerable cycling distance from many dwellings and have a lack of connected, legible routes from the residential area to the employment hubs.

Public Transport (Bus and Rail)

14.18 There are concerns that in some areas of Abingdon there are pockets of deprivation, these pockets of deprivation can be caused, in part, by poor accessibility to public transport. Access to public transport needs to be reviewed across the town, to ensure the greatest opportunities are gained for access to public transport services. Subsidised buses do not provide services to all residential areas and cease before the afternoon peak.

14.19 Abingdon has no direct access to Rail services but there are stations nearby at Radley and Culham that are accessible from Abingdon town centre by public transport. Bus services also serve Oxford and Didcot Stations. As there are no plans or commitments for rail to extend to Abingdon, links between residential areas of the town and the rail stations need to be preserved and expanded where possible.

14.20 Abingdon is situated to the north of the employment area known as Science Vale UK. All three main employment sites in Science Vale UK are served by bus services from Abingdon town centre; however increasing the attractiveness of these bus services is a key opportunity.

14.21 Bus Services to Oxford run frequently from Abingdon, however improvements could be made to Didcot and local village services.

Behavioural Change

14.22 Abingdon town centre, Marcham Road, and Oxford Road are served by frequent bus services. Despite that, compared to the county levels, relatively more people in Abingdon drive. At the same time, the proportion of people travelling less than 5km to work is in line with county levels.

14.23 The Travel Behaviour Team at Oxfordshire County Council have worked closely with the schools in Abingdon for a number of years and a key problem that has been highlighted is the safety of the pupils when cycling to the schools. In order to influence a positive change in travel behaviour and encourage children of school age to travel by more sustainable modes of transport, this issue will need to be addressed. This issue leads to opportunity for behavioural change in Abingdon.

Highway Infrastructure and Traffic Management

14.24 Abingdon is served by the A415, A4183 and B4017, which converge in the town centre. The Abingdon Integrated Transport Strategy (2001-2010), sought in part, to address traffic issues in the town centre, whilst improving air quality and the pedestrian experience. However, significant delays at key junctions during peak times are not uncommon across the town and specifically in the town centre where the historic street layout and convergence of three main routes only serve to exacerbate the problem. Abingdon has two junctions with the A34. The northern most at Lodge Hill has north facing slips only, whilst the junction to the south, Marcham Interchange, is an all movement junction.

14.25 Abingdon is dissected to the south by the Thames and Ock Rivers. Both constrain access between the south of the town and the north/town centre. Road crossing points are available at Drayton Road, St Helen's Wharf and Abingdon Bridge; all of these experience congestion in the peak hours.

14.26 There is a strong local desire to construct an all movement junction on the A34 at Lodge Hill to enable movements to/from the north of the town and use of this junction would reduce town centre traffic. Traffic modelling has shown there would be limited benefits to the town centre traffic levels and increased traffic levels on other parts of the road network. This would make it difficult to attract central government funding support for the scheme.

14.27 Additionally, there is local desire for a second River Thames crossing for the town; again it is hoped that this river crossing would relieve traffic congestion in the town centre.

14.28 A second river crossing and an all movement junction on the A34 at Lodge Hill are major infrastructure projects and will require significant financial investment to deliver them. Given that there is not a substantial amount of growth planned in Abingdon to 2026 (compared to other towns within the Vale) it would be hard to gain central government funding for such major infrastructure schemes, that are likely to have limited benefits and potentially cause issues on other parts of the road network.

14.29 Due to the lack of major development and limited benefits these major infrastructure schemes are deemed to be unviable and unlikely to progress in Abingdon; these schemes would only progress if the relevant amount of housing growth were implemented to deliver them. The strategy will therefore focus and benefit more from investment in walking, cycling, public transport schemes and promotion as well as influencing behavioural change.

Transport Strategy

Walking

To improve facilities for all pedestrians (including disabled people) across Abingdon through developing good, clear routes from residential areas to the town centre and other services and facilities around the town. Along with making sure urban links join up with rights of way.

14.30 When resources or opportunities allow this is to be achieved by:

* Improve facilities for pedestrians by conducting an audit of current footways. The audit will identify schemes to improve legibility, way finding and permeability by creating formal walking routes to key facilities by providing new and improved signage, widening, dropped kerbs, and improved crossing points especially along routes leading to the main employment sites in town as well as to the schools.
* Improve connections to the rights of way network particularly where urban footways meet rural rights of way though new footpaths and signage to provide footpaths throughout the town and into the countryside.
* High Street Phase 2 works (increased footway outside the front of the County Hall)

Cycling

To ensure that the best cycle routes from residential areas to local services, schools, employment areas and the town centre are publicised. To provide a suitable number of good quality cycle stands at key destinations and appropriate infrastructure where required along key routes from the town centre to employment, education and National Cycle Network Route no 5.

14.31 When resources or opportunities allow this is to be achieved by:

* Improving facilities for cyclists by conducting an audit of existing cycle ways, well used routes and locations of cycle parking across Abingdon. Provision of additional cycle infrastructure such as cycle lanes/paths, advance stops, improved signage and crossing points with a particular focus to improve accessibility to key destinations and the schools.
* To develop safe and secure cycle parking within the town centre and at key local services.
* To improve connections to the rights of way network particularly where urban cycleways meet rural rights of way, so that routes for commuting and recreation are improved.

Buses

To work with local bus companies to improve and develop bus services on existing routes and new routes in order to increase accessibility to/from Abingdon to key facilities, further afield and to secure increased accessibility to education and employment.

14.32 When resources or opportunities allow this is to be achieved by:

* Work with bus companies to improve bus services and infrastructure to serve Abingdon in such areas as the Drayton Road, Wootton Road and Northcourt Road.
* Maintain the good quality frequent service to Oxford
* To promote Radley station as the rail facility for Abingdon including investigating a cycle route from north Abingdon/Peachcroft area to Radley station.

Behavioural Change

To initiate and influence travel behaviour change in particular to encourage schools, businesses and organisations to reduce car trips, where possible, to use more efficient and lower emission vehicles as they become available.
To encourage a greater number of trips by walking, cycling and public transport.
To increase awareness and promote better infrastructure for walking, cycling and public transport in and around Abingdon and further afield.

14.33 When resources or opportunities allow this is to be achieved by:

* Promotion and marketing of cycling, walking and public transport both in written print and electronically.

* Continue to work with Abingdon schools, targeting and prioritising those which contribute the greatest traffic in the area.

* Update the existing School Travel Plans and work with the school to ensure it is carried through.

* Explore current transport and travel opportunities and concerns for students travelling to school with a focus on reducing car use and increasing road safety education, training and publicity.

* Identify businesses with high trip rates by car and who are contributing to traffic in the area and work with those businesses to develop and implement a workplace travel plan. The plan should particularly focus on reducing car use by initiating and exploring car-share schemes, working at home policy, promoting walking and cycling by exploring the provision of cycle parking, changing facilities etc.

* Discourage private car use by physical constraints such as traffic calming measures and restricted parking.

* Ensure all new developments produce a travel plan.

Highways and Traffic Management

To discourage private car trips in and around Abingdon where alternative modes of travel are provided as well as improving existing and providing new infrastructure to accommodate real travel needs.

14.34 When resources or opportunities allow this is to be achieved by:

* Encourage use of Low Emission vehicles as technology advances that come forward with the aim to reduce average CO_2 emissions in passenger vehicles and HGVs across Oxfordshire to 130 g/km by 2030.
* Child road safety improvement measures, including targeted crossings, signage, traffic calming
* Investigate Oxford Road/Dunmore Road/Twelve Acre Drive junction improvements
* Investigate Wootton Road/Copenhagen Drive/Dunmore Road junction improvements
* Northcourt Road/Oxford Road junction – investigation into improvement to layout and pedestrian crossing facilities

* Peripheral road signage improvements – to encourage greater use of the peripheral road and clearer signage to local facilities.
* Investigate delivery/loading restrictions in the town centre for the peak hours.

14.35 **This Strategy replaces the Abingdon Integrated Transport Strategy (2001). Contributions collected towards AbITS will be transferred to the LTP3 Abingdon Town Strategy**.