

## 14. Abingdon-on-Thames Area Strategy

14.1 Abingdon-on-Thames is an historic market town in the Vale of White Horse district. It is 9 miles (15 km) to the south of Oxford, 7 miles (11 km) north of Didcot and has good links to the A34. The nearest national 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.

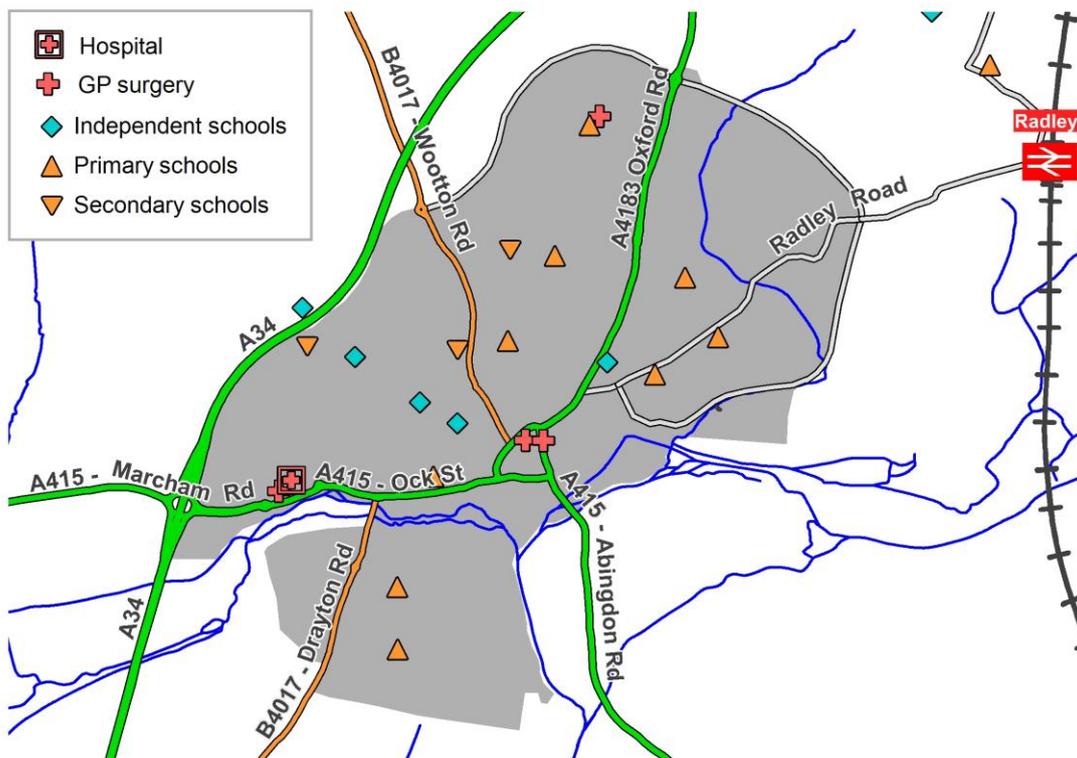


Figure 14.1 Abingdon-on-Thames

14.2 Abingdon-on-Thames lies on the banks of the rivers Ock and Thames and is bordered to the west by the A34 trunk road. The major potential environmental threat for Abingdon-on-Thames is from flooding of the rivers, as experienced in 2007.

14.3 Abingdon-on-Thames is situated to north of the employment hub of Science Vale UK, and well placed to benefit from this important area of growth and development for enterprise and innovation. Abingdon-on-Thames is the third-largest settlement in Oxfordshire and serves a rural hinterland that includes all or part of the parishes of Drayton, Marcham, Shippon, Sunningwell

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& Wootton, Kennington, South Hinksey, Sandford, Culham and Radley. It has the White Horse Leisure and Tennis Centre, the largest public sports and leisure facility in the area, and thirteen primary schools, the vast majority of which are in the north of the town. There are 3 secondary schools, each with 6<sup>th</sup> forms, located to the north of the town. Abingdon and Witney College offers post-16 education. There are also three primary and three secondary (including post-16 education) private schools within Abingdon. The town has a Community Hospital with minor A&E facilities along with four GP surgeries.

## Transport in Abingdon-on-Thames

- 14.4 Oxfordshire County Council developed and implemented the Abingdon Integrated Transport Strategy (AbITS) in partnership with Abingdon Town Council and the Vale of White Horse District Council. 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 the removal of queueing traffic from High Street and Stert Street and improving the pedestrian environment. A new linked signalised entrance to the town centre was introduced, holding traffic back on Bridge Street, the 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 wider footways and off-carriageway loading bays introduced on Stert Street. The centre of Abingdon-on-Thames has been greatly improved for pedestrians and high quality materials have been used, in keeping with Abingdon-on-Thames' historic character.
- 14.6 The bus stops on Stratton Way function as a bus terminal for Abingdon and provide services to Oxford. There is a frequent service to/from Oxford every 10 minutes during the daytime, some continuing to Oxford Rail Station and others to the John Radcliffe Hospital. Buses operate regularly to Didcot Parkway Station and Didcot town centre, and there are services to/from Culham, Milton, Harwell, Grove and Radley. There are also subsidised bus services around the town.

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- 14.7 There are many footways separate from the road network throughout the residential areas of Abingdon-on-Thames which provide attractive routes between key destinations and a good range of public rights of way that connect Abingdon-on-Thames to the surrounding countryside. However the network is disjointed in many places where paths cross the road network. Improved management, road crossings, and traffic-free links, could help enable more people to access the town and countryside on foot or cycle.
- 14.8 Cycling is popular in Abingdon-on-Thames, 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.
- 14.9 An Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) 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 has helped reduced the levels of pollution in the town centre, although they still exceed the national air quality objective level.

## Transport Strategy

### Walking

***Policy AB1 – Oxfordshire County Council will improve facilities for all pedestrians (including disabled people) across Abingdon-on-Thames by developing good, clear routes from residential areas to the town centre, jobs, services and facilities around the town, and making sure that urban links join up with rights of way in the surrounding countryside.***

- 14.10 The location of key employment and retail areas on the outskirts of the town, the concentration of private and state secondary schools in the north of the town, and the River Ock which acts as a barrier, puts more traffic onto an already congested network. There is limited publicity of 'green routes' for walking and cycling from residential areas to local services, schools, employment areas, and the town centre.
- 14.11 The topography of Abingdon-on-Thames is relatively flat and opportunities exist to significantly improve infrastructure for

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walking and cycling to enable access to local services and public transport.

14.12 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, recreation and accessing countryside.

14.13 When resources or opportunities allow, this will be achieved by:

- \* improving facilities for pedestrians by conducting an audit of current footways. The audit will identify ways to improve walking routes by creating formal routes to key facilities, providing new and improved signage, widening footpaths, dropped kerbs, and improved crossing points, especially along routes leading to the main employment sites and schools in the town;
- \* improving connections to the rights of way network particularly where urban footways meet rural rights of way through new footways and signage to provide footways throughout the town and into the countryside.

## Cycling

***Policy AB2 – Oxfordshire County Council will ensure that the best cycle routes from residential areas to local services, schools, employment areas and the town centre are publicised.***

***Policy AB3 – Oxfordshire County Council will provide high quality cycle stands at key destinations, and infrastructure where required along key routes from the town centre to employment, education, and National Cycle Network Route no 5.***

14.14 The employment sites on the outskirts of town are within cycling distance from many of Abingdon's residential areas, but lack connected, legible routes from the residential area to the employment hubs.

14.15 When resources or opportunities allow, this will be achieved by:

- \* improving facilities for cyclists by conducting an audit of existing cycleways, well used routes and locations of cycle parking across Abingdon-on-Thames. This could include provision of additional cycle infrastructure such as cycle lanes/paths, advance stop lines, improved signage and

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crossing points;

- \* providing safe and secure cycle parking in the town centre and at key destinations; and
- \* improving connections to the rights of way network particularly where urban cycleways meet rural rights of way, so that routes for recreation and access to local destinations outside the town (e.g. Radley, Culham, Milton Park, Marcham and Didcot) are improved.

## Public Transport

***Policy AB4 – Oxfordshire County Council will work with local bus companies to improve and develop bus services on new and existing routes in order to increase accessibility between Abingdon-on-Thames and key destinations, and to secure increased accessibility to further and higher education, and employment.***

- 14.16 There are some areas of deprivation in Abingdon-on-Thames, made worse by poor accessibility to public transport. Subsidised buses within the town do not provide services to all residential areas and cease before the afternoon peak. Access to public transport needs to be reviewed across the town, to ensure the greatest opportunities are gained for access to public transport services.
- 14.17 Abingdon-on-Thames has no direct access to rail services but there are bus services to stations at Radley, Culham, 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.
- 14.18 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 challenge.
- 14.19 There are excellent bus services to Oxford, but services to Didcot and local villages could be improved. When resources or opportunities allow, this is to be achieved by:
- \* working with bus companies to improve bus services and infrastructure within Abingdon-on-Thames in such areas as the Drayton Road, Wootton Road and Northcourt Road;

- \* maintaining the good quality frequent service to Oxford; and
- \* promoting Radley Station as the rail facility for Abingdon, including investigation of cycle routes from Abingdon-on-Thames to the station.

### Improving Travel Choice

***Policy AB5 – Oxfordshire County Council will work with organisations and businesses to reduce the occurrence of congestion and its impact and will support the provision of information, and platforms that reduce the need to travel or reduce inefficient car use.***

- 14.20 Abingdon is served by frequent bus services, however despite that relatively more people in Abingdon drive to work compared to the county average. At the same time, the proportion of people travelling less than 5km to work is in line with county levels.
- 14.21 Oxfordshire County Council has worked closely with schools in Abingdon for a number of years and has found that a key barrier to cycling to school in Abingdon is parental concern about road safety. Allaying this concern is necessary if levels of cycling to school in the town are to increase.
- 14.22 When resources or opportunities allow, this will be achieved by:
- \* working with those schools and businesses which are contributing to congestion on the road network;
  - \* improving the level of information available on sustainable modes of transport; and
  - \* investigating other behaviour change activities as appropriate.

### Highways and Traffic Management

***Policy AB6 – Oxfordshire County Council will discourage private car trips in and around Abingdon-on-Thames where alternatives are available, as well as improving existing and providing new infrastructure to accommodate travel needs.***

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- 14.23 Despite the improvements brought about by the Abingdon Integrated Transport Strategy, delays at key junctions during peak times are not uncommon across the town, particularly in the town centre where the historic street layout and the A4183, A415 and B4017 converge. Abingdon has two junctions with the nearby A34. The northern-most of these, at Lodge Hill, has north facing slips only, whilst the junction to the south, Marcham Interchange, is an all movement junction.
- 14.24 The Thames and Ock rivers 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 are narrow and experience congestion in the peak hours.
- 14.25 There is a strong local desire to construct an all movement junction on the A34 at Lodge Hill to serve the north of the town and reduce traffic in the town centre and along the congested Marcham Road/Ock Street. Traffic modelling has shown that there would be limited benefits to town centre traffic levels and increased traffic levels on other parts of the road network and the Highways Agency have expressed concern about the scheme encouraging more local traffic onto the busy A415. This would make it difficult to attract central government funding for the scheme. There are also local ambitions for a second River Thames crossing for the town that would remove east-west through-traffic from the town centre.
- 14.26 Both schemes (Lodge Hill and a new river crossing) are major infrastructure projects that would require significant financial investment. Given that the schemes are of local benefit, rather than strategic importance, they are unlikely to gain funding from central government. Furthermore, the level of development planned for the town would not generate sufficient developer funding to cover the very substantial costs.
- 14.27 When resources or opportunities allow this will be achieved by measures including:
- \* encouraging use of low emission vehicles as technology advances come forward, with the aim to reduce average CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in passenger vehicles and HGVs across Oxfordshire to 130 g/km by 2030;
  - \* improving child road safety by measures including targeted crossings, signage and traffic calming;
  - \* junction improvements where appropriate;

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- \* better signing, to encourage greater use of the perimeter road and clearer signage to local facilities;
  - \* investigating delivery/loading restrictions in the town centre for the peak hours; and
  - \* discouraging private car use by physical constraints such as traffic calming.

14.28 **This Area Strategy replaces the Abingdon Integrated Transport Strategy -2001 (AbITS). The new Area Strategy incorporates the measures of the AbITS. Planning obligation contributions, secured in order to mitigate the impacts of development, towards AbITS will be able to be used on the LTP3 Abingdon Area Strategy and be in accordance with the planning obligations.**