



NEWSLETTER 2024



Dear Members and Colleagues,

Well, it has been a strange couple of years – hardly a meeting in person and much Zoom! However, we are keeping it altogether. Amazingly you have been wonderful Members.

We have been very active nevertheless, as you will see, and our Membership remains steady.

We are fantastically lucky to have a great amount of expertise in our Executive Committee, so we have been keeping a close eye plus involvement with Planning submissions etc.

Financially we are quite healthy. On the minus side, we bank with HSBC who have decided to charge us £5.00 per month plus a charge for cheques. We would thus be very grateful if you ever need to pay us, to pay us on-line.

Please do look at our updated website (www.banburycivicsociety.org), which has been redesigned and re-populated with documents, minutes etc.

Adrienne Rees Brown – adrienne.brown@btopenworld.com

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT - AGM 2024

This year's Annual General Meeting was held on Monday 24 June 2024 at St Mary's Church Centre, Horsefair, Banbury OX16 0AA

1. Welcome

RKS thanked everyone for attending this year's AGM and for our members' support throughout the year.

2. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Margaret Little, Michael Snelling, Jean Snelling, Mariette Fiennes and David Finlay.

3. Report by Treasurer

ARB circulated copies of the Society's accounts for the period ending 30 April 2024.

She noted that membership subscriptions had dropped as two members had passed away, three had left the area and three members had joined the Society: Lisa Phipps, Rosie Cresswell and Will King.

The accounts showed the affiliation fee to Civic Voice; £45 paid towards the Town Mayor's Charities, in lieu of attending their annual dinner; Public liability insurance to cover our stand at the Banbury Canal Festival; and the Zoom fee for hosting online Committee meetings.

Closing balance as of 30 April was £3010.54 in the current account and £592.51 in the deposit account. AR-B proposed transferring £2,000 to the deposit account.

The Committee thanked ARB for presenting the accounts and congratulated her for her work as Treasurer over the past year.

4. Election of Officers

As no nominations had been received, RKS proposed that the Executive roles remain as they are, with himself and Peter Monk as Co-Chairs and Adrienne Rees-Brown as Honorary Treasurer and Honorary Secretary.

RKS encouraged the membership to become involved in the running of the Society.

Dr Will King expressed an interest in joining the Committee. His appointment was proposed by RKS and seconded by ARB. RKS thanked WK and said that he would arrange for him to be invited to future Committee meetings.

5. Chairman's Report

RKS presented a summary of key developments over the past year.

He reported that the Society's Patron, Nathaniel Fiennes, 21st Baron Saye and Sele, an ardent supporter of Banbury's heritage, had sadly passed away in January. His son, Martin, has kindly taken his role as our Patron. Brian

Goodey, Professor Emeritus of Urban Landscape Design at Oxford Brookes University, also sadly passed in May. RKS recalled Brian's past contributions to the Society's work, particularly with regard to the successful designation of the Grimsbury Conservation Area.

Events of the past year

RKS gave a quick resumé of key town events over the last year:

- Storm Henk, causing widespread damage across the UK in January. Banbury's flood defences were unfortunately unable to cope, resulting in flooding of The Mill and Banbury United's ground.
- In November the decision was made to move Cherwell District Council's offices from Bodicote House to Castle Quay, using the former Gap and the first floor above Lock 29 as its new offices.
- The Jacobs Douwe Egberts announced its intention to stop production in Banbury with the loss of 280 jobs.
- The Odeon cinema on Horse Fair closed, following the success of The Light, but, on a brighter note, the Whately Hall Hotel next door has reopened.
- The RAAC crisis has been manifested locally with the re-roofing of Town Centre House.
- The former Gala Bingo site has been levelled for new retirement flats, retaining the Grade II-Listed 'Trelawn'.
- Plans have emerged for the long-awaited alternative vehicular access to the railway station, via Tramway.
- More ugly 'big sheds' have been consented for the Banbury 15 site (land north of Junction 11, between the Motorway and A361 Daventry Road), following the failed application by EuroGarages for a motorway service station. The service station application was refused on traffic grounds.
- Heritage highlights have included:
 - The re-roofing of the locally-listed St Mary's School, retaining the distinctive metal ventilators.
 - the sympathetic conversion of the locally-listed former Magistrates Court on Warwick Road to luxury flats.
 - The sympathetic conversion of the Grade II and locally-listed former Elephant and Castle pub in Grimsbury, following the rejection of earlier plans that would have seen the loss of the distinctive early-20th-century part.



Outreach

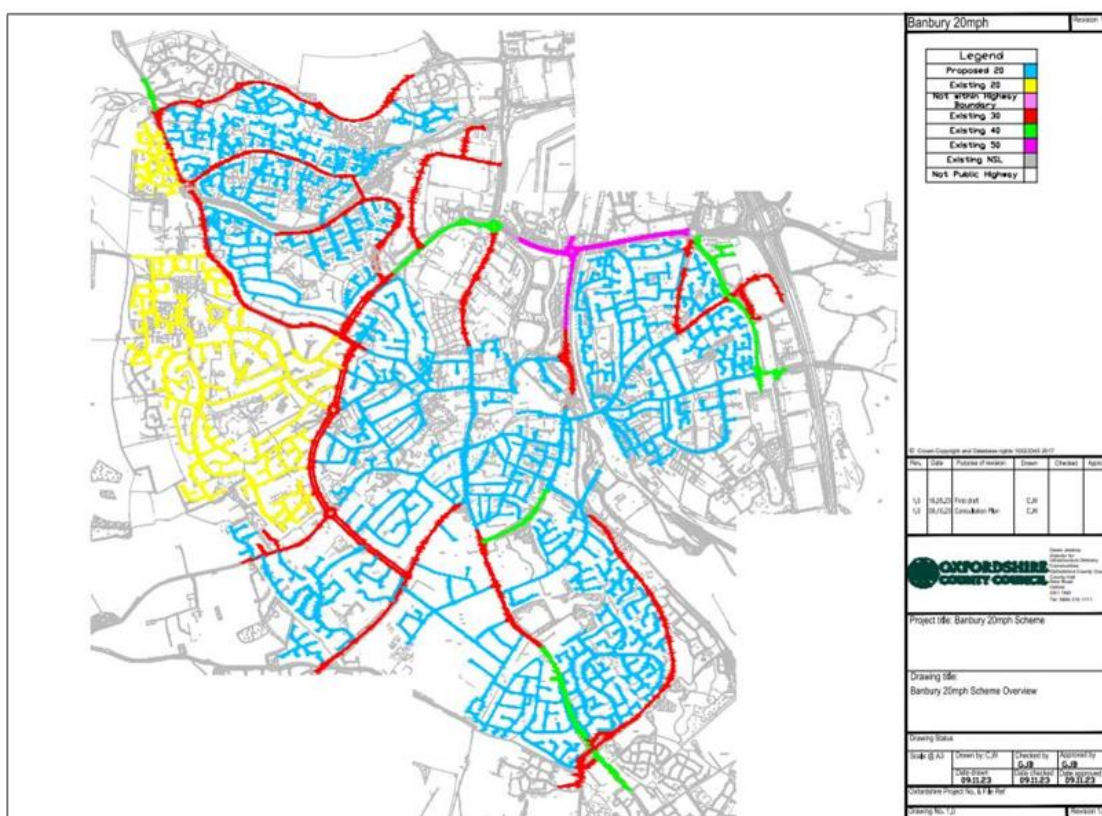
The Civic Society's stall at last year's two-day Banbury Canal Festival (in October) was well attended and attracted much interest, despite being located in the undercroft below Lidl. Our presence there is a positive shop window for the Society; volunteers to attend the stall and help out at this year's Canal Festival are welcome.

Consultations

Members of the Executive Committee have been involved in a number of public consultations in the last year:

- Cherwell Council has consulted the Society on the *Draft Cherwell Local Plan 2040*. In contrast to the current Local Plan that predominantly involved expansion on the edges of Banbury, the new Draft plan concentrates new development on existing brownfield sites within the town, viz. the public car-parks at Calthorpe Street (former Sainsburys / TK Maxx), the Cherwell Centre (Matalan / The Range) and at Bolton Road, leaving the carparks at Castle Quay. The Bus Station site is also identified for redevelopment. These plans will result in the loss of 586 public parking places and a gain of some 750 flats. There was discussion about the effects of the loss of so much parking on the vitality of the town, particularly for those living in surrounding villages.

- Recent months have seen members of the Committee involved in CDC's consultation events for *Banbury Vision 2050*, which seeks to regenerate the town centre. Our comments included the regeneration of the market, the need to address external repairs to a number of neglected frontages, the South-to-East link road (Bankside to Jct.11) and the need for a new performance space for the town.
- The Committee agreed that the amended proposals for the *20mph zoning* in the town (now with 30mph, 40mph and 50mph on certain arterial routes outside of the town centre) were reasonable on balance.
- The spring also saw the Committee making comments on CDC's *Cherwell Landscape Character Assessment* consultation and the *Public Realm Strategy Framework for Banbury*.
- Following the rejection of an earlier scheme on heritage grounds, the Committee was also consulted by the owner of the Grade II-Listed *Borough House* (former Grammar School) who wishes to convert the building from offices to flats due to the high cost of bringing the existing offices up to the now-required mandatory EPC rating for offices. The proposal has been much improved. As part of the consultation, the Committee suggested the reinstatement of the lost wrought iron finials on the façade, to match the adjacent Banbury Library.



Proposed 20mph zoning for Banbury: Yellow = existing 20mph, Blue = Proposed 20mph zones. ((Red = Existing 30mph retained; Green = Existing 40mph retained; Purple = Existing 50mph retained))

Planning Actions

Over the last 12 months the Committee has commented the following routine planning applications:

- **3 West Bar**, formerly a grand Victorian Gothic doctor's house and surgery, built 1867 (locally listed) – plans to greatly enlarge the building and convert to flats have been approved and are now underway, despite the Society's long-standing and sustained opposition to the new-build element.



- Plans for a large development of 'big sheds' at **Huscote Farm** (between the A361 and the A422 Middleton Road, north-east of Jct 11) were refused by CDC's Planning Committee in March, following representations from the Society, the Keep Nethercote Rural campaign and multiple Northamptonshire Parish Councils. The proposals would have had an unacceptable landscape impact and would be destroying an exceptional ridge and furrow landscape and a habitat that includes a number of red-listed species. The applicant has stated that they plan to Appeal the refusal of consent.



- **Nethercote**: Tentative proposals have also emerged for yet more 'big sheds' on further ridge-and-furrow to the east of the M40, surrounding Nethercote hamlet. The 'justification' is to deliver a new road link from the A422 (Middleton Road) to Overthorpe Road, to relieve traffic pressure on Jct.11. Whilst such proposals are yet to come forward as a planning application, any such application will be resisted by the Society, the Keep Nethercote Rural campaign and the consortium of Northants Parish Councils.



- The Society linked with the *Keep Hanwell Village Rural campaign* and multiple Parish Councils in objecting to a proposed development of 170 new homes that would result in coalescence between Hanwell village and the Hanwell Fields development, both at local planning (refused) and at the subsequent Appeal by the prospective developer. Whilst the existing Local Plan specifically seeks to prevent coalescence between Banbury and Hanwell, the Appeal was refused because Cherwell was unable to demonstrate a 5-year housing land supply. The Keep Hanwell Village Rural campaign plan to seek a Judicial Review.



- The Society has also opposed an application to build 230 apartments on the *Marlborough Road/Calthorpe Street site* (former Sainsburys / TK Maxx and NCP carpark). The scheme comprises a number of 4- and 5-storey apartment blocks with private undercroft parking for 60 cars. It is felt that the proposed blocks are too tall for this sensitive site at the heart of the Banbury Conservation Area, whilst the absence of *any* public parking provision is viewed as potentially harmful to the surviving businesses in the upper High Street. Interestingly for the Council's wider proposals for 750 new town-centre flats (see *Consultations* above), Thames Water have objected to the proposal, saying that the town-centre drainage and water supply are insufficient for even the proposed 230 apartments of this development, let alone the 750 new flats proposed in the Draft Local Plan. CDC have deferred determination of the application 'till October.



RKS talked through examples of the sorts of lesser planning issues the Society has reported or commented on over the past year – including 34 Crouch St (new front garden wall), 82 Middleton Rd (removal of front garden wall and railings), 51 South Bar (proposed reconstruction of wall), 62-63 High Street (proposed plastic windows), 2 Boxhedge Terrace and 67-83 Castle Street (loss of chimney stacks) and 49 Oxford Road (replacement of dressed stone porch).

Campaigns

- The Society has joined with Jane Kilsby and others to rename the Banbury Country Park as the Dame Sylvia Crowe Country Park, to recognise the national and international influence Banbury-born Dame Sylvia had over modern landscape design. Sadly, Dame Sylvia's birthplace on Oxford Road was demolished in the 1960s.
- The Society has also pledged its support for a local initiative to place a blue plaque on 39 High Street to commemorate Banbury's lost Winter Gardens.

The Society is in discussions with the Town Council regarding a number of other commemorative plaques around the town.

The Chairman offered his thanks to the Executive Committee; to Peter Monk, his Co-Chair; to Adrienne Rees Brown for her work as Honorary Treasurer and Honorary Secretary; to Rosie Cresswell for her hard work on the website, to Robert Richwood, Tom Forde, John Batts and Helen Middleton for their hard work on the Executive Committee; and to our loyal members and supporters of the Society.

Guest speaker

RKS welcomed Andrew Bowe, Banbury 2050 Programme Manager at Cherwell District Council, to present "Banbury 2050 – steps towards revitalisation".

Having met Rob and Peter at various consultations and attended one of Steve Kilsby's history tours, AB said he was keen to work more closely with the Society.

Andy explained that the Banbury 2050 initiative is working on a vision for Banbury town centre to ensure it meets the needs of residents, businesses and visitors up to 2050. His role is to identify what needs to be done to support the town centre to revitalise, by being a more accessible, welcoming, safer and attractive place for all to live and work.

Working with Hemingway Associates, a survey went out over the winter and has had thousands of responses, showing the immense potential of Oxfordshire's second largest settlement. They engaged with residents, businesses and young people to find out what they liked and what Banbury needed to make it a better place.

AB stressed how the proud heritage and history of Banbury is helping to help shape the town's future.

Banbury 2050 is developing a town centre regeneration programme, an emerging vision for Banbury in collaboration and partnership with communities and stakeholders. The focus is looking at the future of the post-pandemic high street. The survey results showed us that problems are empty shop units, antisocial behaviour, a lack of levelling-up and uncoordinated policy. Banbury hasn't benefitted to date from funding to promote town centres or levelling up initiatives.

But the positive aspirations for the town were clear – people want cheaper or free parking, a greater variety of shops, less crime, more pedestrianisation, more community spaces, and safe and cleaner streets.

The team has developed seven themes that emerged from the survey and will inform their plans:

Vibrant, Safe, Clean, Green, Fun, Independent and Destination.

Out of this has come the Strategy:

- **Priority to revitalise the town centre**
- **Resist further out of town retailing**
- **Bring more residential into the town centre (increases footfall and vitality etc)**
- **Improve gateways into the town e.g. Canalside**
- **Better cross-town connections**
- **Improve air quality/reduce congestion**
- **Better active travel routes**
- **Strategic green spaces, including a linear park following the canal and river corridor (from Spiceball in the north to Longford Park/Saltway in the south).**

Q&A

Andy Bowe concluded his presentation and opened the debate, which covered issues such as:

- **Free parking as other similar-sized towns offer, to encourage footfall in the town;**
- **Automatic number plate recognition in car parks that allowed the first two hours free of charge, with payment thereafter;**
- **Whether Cherwell consults with towns that have got it right and found solutions;**
- **Whether the town's vision take into account highways issues such as traffic congestion and pollution – AB said the new CEO of OCC has set up a new department looking at transport with health & wellbeing, in a more holistic way;**
- **Possibility of a link road from J11 to Bankside to relieve congestion in the town;**
- **Pedestrianised areas in Banbury feeling unsafe with cars not being stopped from driving up High Street or Parson Street;**

- CDC's move to Castle Quay by the end of the year will be beneficial to the town centre and to the staff at the Council;
- A modern, well-equipped Library in the town centre would bring people into the town;
- A drop in applications to develop flats above shops, despite it proving to bring life back into town centres; needing to overcome issues such as poor access to the flats, insurance, bins, staircases;
- Empty shop units in Castle Quay could be filled in short-term by companies want to test the waters in town as pop-up shops.

AB noted that Banbury is often compared to Witney (where parking is free of charge) and that town planners do often talk with others who have found solutions. He said the new council (a Lib Dem and Green coalition) may be more bold about car usage in and around the town.

The Vision 2050 team want to get plans in place before the summer break with some immediate actions that can be achieved straight away. It will show that the Council is responding to what people are telling them.

Peter Monk proposed thanks to Andy Bowe for addressing the meeting and for his work on the Banbury 2050 vision.

Any other business

PM wished to acknowledge the contribution that Alex Fisher had made to the Society over the years, in particularly for his work on refreshing and updating the Society's website (banburycivicsociety.org). PM expressed regret that Alex had moved back to London, but the Society is extremely grateful that Rosie Cresswell has so ably stepped in. Thanks were acknowledged from the Committee to Alex Fisher.

The Committee also thanked Rob K-S and Peter Monk for their work as Co-Chairs.

Summary of actions:

- Anyone happy to help out at the CivSoc stall on Saturday 5 and/or Sunday 6 October, please contact RKS on 07818 091862.

Revitalisation of Banbury Centre

The Society is represented at both the Town Council's Traffic Advisory Committee (BTAC) and the Town Centre Partnership (TCP). The TCP has not met since the end of the pandemic and there does not seem to be much appetite on the part of the other 'stakeholders' to resume. However, the Banbury Civic Society stands ready to resume making a contribution to the debate of 'where to now for Banbury?'

At the same time we have established relations with the Business Improvement and Development team (BID) which is not part of the District Council and are pleased it now has a lively and committed Manager and Staff - as their recent organising of the Victorian Market showed.

We cannot 'buck the trend' in retail habits and have to be at one with both Councils in the light of financial stringencies, but we can, and do, continue to urge that our Town Centre remains the focus of our community and try to see that it can provide the services the inhabitants require. Belatedly the District Council has woken up to this challenge and we understand arrangements are afoot to seek residents' views on how and what should be done to revitalise the Town Centre. Members may have noted recent moves mentioned in the Banbury Guardian to improve the signage around the town, and your officers are contributing to these ideas, with a view to encouraging both residents and visitors to maximise use of the town and thereby increase 'footfall' and economic activity.

To help ensure the continuation of Castle Quay as a flourishing centre for community, trade and activity, we have suggested that a unit be re-purposed as a much-needed larger 'performance space' for the town's amateur and visiting professional entertainers, in addition to, or as a replacement for The Mill.

Highways and Transport

The BTAC continues to meet quarterly to receive information and updates from the County Council (O.C.C.) as Highway Authority on the schemes under development or awaiting implementation by that organisation. Attendee organisations (it is NOT a public meeting) can also bring forward ideas and problems which generally require action on the part of the County either to deal with maintenance issues (repairing potholes and the like) or, less often, items of road safety or similar concerns, so please draw our attention to any you might have to Peter Monk via our website (banburycivicsociety.org)

Presently there are a number of fairly major projects under development by O.C.C. including: -

- i) Updating the Local Traffic Plan (now referred to as Traffic and connectivity Plan) - to do something notably absent to date - keep infrastructure in-step

with developing needs and incorporate any changes arising from modifications to the District Council's Local Plan 2015 -31. As this activity has failed miserably over the last few years, it is important that the Society, with others, keeps pressing for action in this regard.

- ii) Implementation of highway 'improvements associated with on-going or completed developments under the Local Plan - for example works in Bankside necessary to meet the additional traffic needs of Longford Park area. These frequently generate vigorous debate, as it is not always clear whether what is being considered / provided is ambitious enough to meet the perceived needs of our community.
- iii) The traffic capacity of Hennef Way and the Junction 11 gyratory consequent on the HS2 works together with the development of the site east of the gyratory (Banbury 15 (i.e. the large grey buildings on the Chacombe side of the M40 which are now effectively completed).

Members will recall that the former came to notice when Tarmac sought to increase the 'through-put' of the rail to road aggregate transfer facilities in connection with HS2 thereby increasing traffic eastwards to the detriment of traffic movement and exacerbating noise and emissions and thus the air quality experienced by the residents of Grimsbury.

To mitigate this O.C.C. has proposed additional north-facing slip roads to the M40 from the Southam Road at the bridge over the motorway near the cemetery, but whilst this could achieve a reduction in traffic on Hennef Way, it is very likely to increase movements on Southam Road to the detriment of the ' Tesco' roundabout and the South Bar - North Bar route. Members may remember that an objective set out in the Local Plan and LTP3 was to reduce traffic on the South Bar - North Bar route and also encourage a greater use of Cherwell Street etc - and we all know how that has panned out! The O.C.C.'s traffic re-assignment for the proposal is awaited.

- iv) Members will be aware of the consultation by O.C.C. proposing access to the railway station for cars, taxis and buses via Tramway Road. This has been a long sought scheme which could benefit residents wishing to access the station from the west and south. The consultation was poorly responded to but deemed to be favourable and the scheme has, at last, received

planning permission by the relevant OCC committee. Watch our website for on-going information. www.banburycivicsociety.org

Cycling & Walking

Recently O.C.C. has proposed a raft of 'improvements' to encourage walking and cycling (referred to as LCWIP scheme) and the first consultation has ended but the results have not been made public - we hope this will not be another example of residents having things done to them, but not for them.

Your Committee's view is that this, like the proverbial curate's egg, is 'good in parts'. However, some of the measures are downright unacceptable and illogical as road space is being suggested to be taken from highway carriageways to enhance provision for cycling. What price the economic health of our town?

The public consultation on the proposals closed on 26 February 2023. It will be interesting to learn how many people were aware of the proposals, appreciate the likely impact the proposed measures would have on movement around the town and how many responded

The county officers claim that 40 'stakeholders' responded to the first consultation and that an analysis of the replies will be presented later this year, but from casual questioning of residents it seems that the 'consultation' was not very effective, and how that will affect decision making is anyone's guess.

However, let us hope it will be better than the aftermath of the Low Traffic Neighbourhood consultation in Oxford itself.

All this data presented in the report, and the conclusions derived there from, are probably all good stuff but two factors appear to have been overlooked i.e. topography and demography.

Banbury is situated in a bowl so, whilst a walk into town might be an enjoyable event, returning home up the slope, perhaps with heavy shopping, is a serious disincentive.

Also there is an aging population and it follows that there is an increasing number of residents who are not able to walk, or cycle, the relatively modest distances inherent in moving around Banbury.

The County's plan envisages a new walking route - specifically Longford Park to the station and town centre via the canal towpath, and eight other 'improved routes focussed on Market Place. Included in the package are 'improvements' and alterations to pedestrian crossing and the like.

It also envisages more than twenty cycling routes on which much effort is made to prioritise cycling facilities by reducing road space for motorised vehicles, removing resident's on-street parking facilities and banning key turns in the highway network in order to provide for 'safe' cycle facilities.

The consultation report, which runs to 119 pages, does not evaluate the impact on either 'through', local servicing (including bus movements) or 'in-town' motorised movements and seems to rely on improved public transport to provide for those residents who are not nimble and fleet of foot!

As already stated, the consultation is now 'closed', but a copy of the study is available to read on <[www.https //letstalkoxfordshire / closed consultations](https://letstalkoxfordshire.com/closed-consultations), then scrolling down to 'Banbury - consultation on LCWIP' and searching for the particular location or route of interest.

More importantly, a progress report will be provided from time to time to keep members informed of the current situation.

Highway Improvements

There are, of course, other, unquantified schemes for which developer contributions have been obtained from the various developments, either still in progress or yet to be started, and we urge the County to clarify which schemes are favoured and the timetable for bringing these to fruition.

Review of the Local Development Plan

As noted in the Chairman's Report (above), review is under way of potential development sites to be included in the update of the Local Plan (see recent articles in the Banbury Guardian) so we expect an interesting debate when these are offered for public consultation.

At every opportunity we seek to promote the South-to-East Link road as a means of diverting 'through traffic' away from the Town Centre, but thus far the 'Powers that be' do not see it as an affordable project - notwithstanding the cost of the proposed slip roads to the M40 north of the town

Again, we await possible decisions with interest!

Infrastructure Social and Physical

Hardly a conversation in Banbury goes by that the issues of infrastructure does not arise and now that the excitement (?) of the general and local elections are over it is, perhaps, now a good time for Society members to 'bend' your councillors' ears on the subject.

Infrastructure is not just roads and sports / play areas, but also those social features that make a group of dwellings into a community i.e. the schools, the primary medical facilities, the bus services, allotments and so on.

The first five years of the Local Plan 2015-30 have elapsed and a review is in hand to update and revise the Plan to ensure it better meets the current situation which has evolved since the Plan was first approved. A change of government is bound to affect the outcome of the Review, but the Society would urge that no more green fields are given up for housing until those areas already allocated for that purpose are completed.

There are a number of locations which have planning permission but the appearance of dwellings is remarkable slow - no doubt because of 'market forces'. In one case land is still fallow since pre-2020. Perhaps resources should be made available to the District Council to take over such sites, install the highways and services and then parcel areas out to local small builders to produce a modern version of the Council House that has served the community so well in the past - it is clear that the big corporations have not met the 'affordable' (in the Banbury context) challenge.

Thus far the jury is 'out' insofar as physical infrastructure is concerned because, although Banbury's population has ballooned, very little has occurred to ensure that the town's facilities are augmented to meet the needs of the expanded population.

So far as the writer can recall nothing has happened to 'improve' Banbury's physical infrastructure except the improvements(?) to the traffic management features along Bankside.

What is clear is that the County has an enormous sum of money in its coffers resulting from Developer's contributions towards the very thing that exercises us all - infrastructure.

We believe it is time for some of that to be used to develop alternative solutions to issues for residents to consider and comment upon.

The Society continues to attend the quarterly meetings of the non-public committee, Banbury Traffic Advisory Committee, to receive, and comment on, information and updates from the County Council (O.C.C.) as Highway Authority, on the schemes supposedly under development or awaiting implementation by that organisation. Attendee organisations can also bring forward ideas and problems which generally require action on the part of the County either to deal with maintenance issues (repairing potholes and the like) or, less often, items of road safety or similar concerns. The Society can only contribute to this debate by pointing out the needs and shortcomings of the administration as your officers see them, so your help and suggestions as to what is needed is vital.

We end with a repeat of the question posed above.

'Why a Civic Society'?

.....because it is your town, your environment and your children's livelihood and future!

Watch our website for further developments and on-going information.

www.banburycivicsociety.org

PETER MONK – CO-CHAIRMAN