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Banbury Civic Society

# Quarterly News

Issue No. 10

April 2008

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Civic Society Membersip

## Calling for help from our members

**This year is the 10th anniversary of the founding of Banbury Civic Society and it was thought by the Management Committee an appropriate time to review the work and organisation of the Society in our fast-changing world.**

With current building development pressures there is an increasing need to "look after the past" and look to the future: which means more work than ever for the built environment sub-committee. Environmental issues have become a major issue too as have the changes in the NHS and in the provision of education. Banbury town is expanding and its Civic Society also needs to expand its watching brief over these changes.

To carry these objectives into effect a decision has been made to encourage wider participation by setting up meetings each specifically dealing with a single aspect of the Society's activities, such as heritage sites and

buildings, Transport and Highway needs and Social amenities such as art and sports facilities, parks and the natural environment. During the coming months a member of the Society will make a personal visit (by prior appointment) to discuss the particular interests of each member. Also, if the member is willing, he would see what further involvement might be taken to pursue such interest. Small groups could then be set up to discuss and take action on issues as and when they arise. Our present experience is that many more matters arise affecting the town than there are persons to handle them effectively!

## Cherwell's response

In the January Issue we summarised a number of points raised by the Audit Commission in their recent report on the Planning Services of Cherwell District Council. Our article raised considerable interest, including a response from John Hoad, the new Strategic Director for Planning, Housing and Economy at the Council.

Constraints of space prevent us from including his response in the newsletter itself but a copy is enclosed herewith.

The same constraints in the January Newsletter prevented us from giving fuller information from the report. We had to limit ourselves to highlighting some of the problems raised by the Commission, which we ourselves, as a Society had encountered in recent years. Our concern has particularly been with the applications involving the built heritage where decisions were sometimes made with inadequate consultation both locally and with national bodies. We now sense that a much improved approach is being made by the Council not only regarding the evolving Local Development Framework but also in the way it has dealt with specific sites: for Dashwood School "Development Principles" have been prepared based on retention of the 19th century buildings. Alcan, Banbury's aluminium factory is in the process of closure: the first phases of this historic factory were completed in 1931 to designs by the celebrated interwar factory designer, Thomas Wallis, best-known today as the designer of the art-deco Hoover factory on the A40 in Perivale. CDC have prepared draft Development Principles for the site requesting the retention of the buildings. They have also put forward an application to English Heritage to list the gates, war memorial and offices range (the latter built in 1937 to designs of Gilbert J Gardiner of Oxford).

The Society is grateful to Mr Hoad for his offer to speak to the Society on the

issues behind the Report and the Improvement Plan.

We have already asked the Council if we can have meetings with their officers on a regular basis, as do other organisations in the town. We might therefore welcome the chance to discuss these issues with John Hoad at such a meeting or at a specially arranged meeting as he suggests.

### Planning

## All Change in CDC Planning

Mary Harpley's appointment as Cherwell's Chief Executive has ushered in a period of unprecedented restructuring throughout the Council, with many new appointments made. The wind of change has been blowing particularly strongly through CDC's Planning Department. Almost immediately after Mary Harpley's appointment, Alan Jones (Head of Planning) and Patrick Burke (Planning Policy Manager) both voluntarily took immediate early retirement.

Alan Jones has been replaced by John Hoad whilst Nigel Evans took up the new position of Head of Planning and Affordable Housing Policy. Nigel is due to retire in May and will be replaced by Philip Clarke, who starts in post in July. Cllr George Reynolds (Planning Portfolio Holder) has moved to the Community, Recreation and Health portfolio and has been replaced by Cllr Michael Gibbard, whose portfolio now links planning and housing.

In the last month a number of highly significant further reforms have taken place.

\* Duncan Chadwick (Head of Development Control and Major Developments) has moved into private practice and is replaced by an interim manager, Robert Young, until further notice.

\* Area Planning Officer (North) Mike Buxton has been moved to head up planning enforcement, an area where CDC has historically been identified as

being less than effective.

\* Bob Duxbury is now leading on mainstream planning cases, whilst Jenny Barker remains in charge of major developments.

In a highly significant move, the North and South area planning teams have been merged, as have the North and South Area Planning Committees. The most publicly noticeable differences will be:

\* The elected councillors who comprise the new combined Planning Committee will now meet every three weeks rather than every month

\* Ward members will now have a right to both speak and respond at planning committee meetings

\* As from the start of 2009, the public will have the right to address planning committee meetings, something that is common in other authorities, but which had previously been resisted in Cherwell

The Society welcomes many of the changes as significant steps forward in local democracy and accountability. We wish all the new appointees well in their new posts. We look forward to getting to know the new faces and to developing an amicable and constructive dialogue.

## Recent applications

**6, Pepper Alley** This involved the demolition of the second hand furniture building and its replacement with a pastiche of the 19th C. building next door. Against the Civic Society's advice consent has been given.



**12, Gatteridge Street** This involves conversion from a 3-bedroom family home to three flats. This has been permitted with chimney breasts and

chimneys retained ensuring minimal impact to the street scene in the Conservation Area.

**56-60 Calthorpe Street** This major development would involve the demolition of the existing Iceland building and its replacement with a three storey block of 14 flats over a retail area on the ground floor. Against planning officers' advice the North Area Planning Committee refused consent on April 10th.

**19, 21, 23 Castle Street** This is a proposal to convert three houses to 12 studio apartments. Initial proposals show an extra flat in the back basement area. This was overturned by planning officers who also insist on retaining the chimneys. The most recent version has been given consent.

**3, West Bar Street** Conversion and change of use of existing offices to create 10 no. apartments. This requires demolition of an original Victorian single storey wing with fine brickwork and its replacement with a two storey wing to match. Also a two storey extension to the south east corner of the building. The merit of this application relies on the ability of the applicant to match perfectly the design and brickwork of the existing building – Decision pending.

#### **Town Centre House, Southam Road**

This would require demolishing the existing 3-storey modern office building and replacing it with a 4-storey block with 46 flats. As well as being higher than the existing building this would extend further on to the pavement area. The application has been withdrawn.

### **Communications**

## **The Civic Society is moving on-line**

In a new initiative the Civic Society is currently in the process of establishing a web site. The technical input and design advice is being provided free of charge by Steve Paxton of AHM Media Ltd, lately of South Bar, now of Twyford Mill, Adderbury.

The main purpose of the planned website will simply be to provide

contact information for the Society and to briefly set out the Society's aims and areas of interest. In time, an archive may also be provided. This will include past issues of the Society's newsletter and may also include letters of comment and objection made by the Society on its members behalf on matters such as the Horton consultation and planning matters.

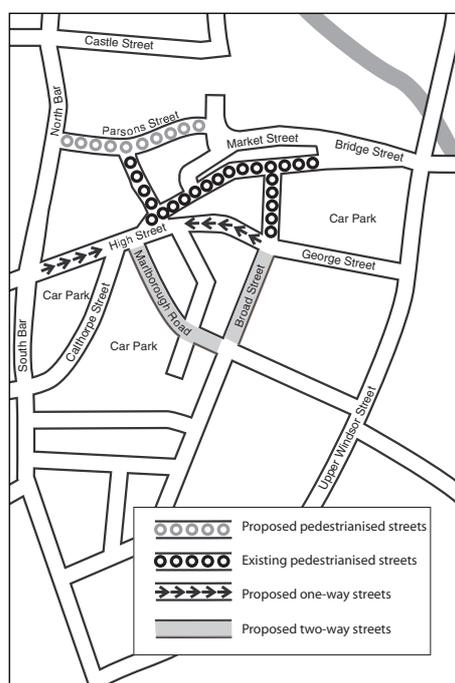
As soon as the website is up and running, members who have provided email addresses will be contacted. Anyone wishing to add their details to the Society's membership database should contact Adrienne Rees-Brown at [adrienne.brown@btopenworld.com](mailto:adrienne.brown@btopenworld.com)

### **Town planning**

## **Banbury town centre: A 'New look'?**

Banbury town centre continues to suffer from traffic congestion. One solution, long advocated by the Civic Society, is a south eastern by-pass to join the Oxford road with the motorway. For a scheme of this size, the County Council's head of transport tells us that there is absolutely no money. However there are simple measures available to reduce traffic, which would discourage the use of the town centre streets as "rat runs" by through traffic.

One idea highlighted in the Banbury



Guardian proposed changing the traffic flow to make part of George Street one-way west-bound, with Marlborough Road and Broad Street two-way. At the same time the western end of the High Street would be one-way east-bound. In theory the only traffic using the town centre streets would be heading towards one of the car parks at either end of the scheme. This change would make it far more attractive for through traffic to use Castle Street or Upper Windsor Street.

The historic centre in the town is characterised by small unusually wide sections of road (some of which were formerly livestock markets). The reduction of through-traffic would give road planners the opportunity to extend pavements in these areas to provide more space for pedestrians space.

A simple adjustment like this would greatly assist Banbury Town Council in its aspiration as set out in the draft document: **Banbury Town Centre: Vision 2026 Life at the Heart of the Town** "We want our town centre to be about people. It should be a pleasant place to spend time, and a usable space by all members of the community which will bring people together and foster a stronger sense of community."

### **LOTS Project**

## **'Living Over The Shop' (LOTS) project**

As was previously reported the L.O.T.S. Project was Initiated by the Civic Society in July 2007 with a view to "the Regeneration of Banbury's Town Centre". In the Society's view the project has the potential to achieve regeneration through the restoration of former living accommodation over retail premises much of which has fallen into disuse and even decay. The project brings together the aims of urban regeneration, historic building conservation and housing provision.

There has now been a further development. Cherwell District's

Housing Services Department has decided to adopt the project. The monthly meetings will be held at Bodicote House.

Interestingly, C.D.C. had, several years previously and along with many other District Authorities, been keen to set up a local L.O.T.S. project but had regretfully concluded that it was impracticable due to lack of staffing resources. The Civic Society's initiative and the wide interest in the town, together with recent developments in the Housing Departments policy and staffing, now permit them to be involved. The department's priority for "affordable housing" is necessarily also District-Wide. We know that successful L.O.T.S. schemes could promote vitality in Banbury town centre and assist historic building conservation. Three Civic Society members on the working group will ensure that this aspect of the L.O.T.S. Project is represented and we hope also to have a representative from the town's Commercial Sector, maintaining the present "Banbury Consortium".

#### Post Offices

## Planned Closures of Post Offices

The Civic Society Management Committee discussed this contentious matter, with particular reference to the closing of Grimsbury and Orchard Way post offices in Banbury. It was recognised that considerable hardship would result for many of the less mobile people in the districts affected. The committee has made further inquiries about the matter, and has made known its support for all the efforts to keep these post offices open. The Leader of Oxfordshire County Council wrote an extremely helpful reply to our letter, explaining the big efforts made by the County Council to make known its opposition to the closure of the 22 threatened post offices in the county and its exploration of ways by which some post office services might be retained in certain places.

The use of council tax payers' money to subsidise local post offices, in place of the former government subsidy, was not thought to be appropriate.

Banbury Town Council have written in rather similar terms about their efforts, emphasising that the proposed closures in the town are in the very areas where social need is especially great. The Post Office Customer Service Centre has in its letter drawn attention to the local public consultations which are always held before any post office is closed, and to the inevitable effects of government guidelines. Post Office Ltd., we are told, is very careful to ensure that all people who lose their nearest post office have another post office in reasonably easy reach. Unfortunately, these closures will cause real difficulty and not just inconvenience.

#### Horton Hospital

## Society salutes the Horton's heroes

Readers will wish to join with us in congratulating George Parish and the 'Keep the Horton General' campaigners for their recent success in fighting for Banbury's hospital services. Names too numerous to list have worked tirelessly away from the public eye, but George Parish, Kieron Mallon, Dr Peter Fisher, Tony Baldry and Kate Spencer have been of particular note as the inspirational public faces of the campaign. Julian Dancer of the Banbury Cake and Roseanne Edwards of the Guardian also deserve special mention for keeping the Horton as front-page news throughout the campaign.

Following a tireless and brilliantly argued campaign, the Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust (ORHT) was panned by the Independent Reconfiguration Panel (IRP) and the Secretary of State for proposing changes that did not offer an accessible or improved service to the people of north Oxfordshire and the surrounding area.

The fight is not over yet, as the IRP and the Secretary of State both recognised that services at the Horton General Hospital must change to ensure they remain appropriate, safe and sustainable. A new Stakeholder Panel including local doctors, politicians and leading council officers has been convened to represent local views as new plans are developed.

We all wish George Parish a speedy recovery from his suspected pancreatitis and echo the calls for some form of official recognition for his public work.



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Please send your letters via e-mail to [design@h-and-p.demon.co.uk](mailto:design@h-and-p.demon.co.uk)

**Banbury Civic Society**  
AGM will be on Wednesday 14th May  
at St. Mary's Centre, Horsefair,  
Banbury at 7.30 p.m.

**The Speaker:**

**Adrian  
Shooter**  
Chairman of Chiltern Railways

## Banbury Civic Society Membership

If you are not already a member, or you know of others who might be interested in joining please write to the Membership Secretary at the address below. The widest possible membership greatly increases the effectiveness of our work in Banbury.

Please write to:

The Membership Secretary  
Banbury Civic Society, Pitts Orchard,  
Station Road, BLOXHAM,  
Banbury. Oxon, OX15 4QG  
or telephone: 01295 722925