

AGM

Retiring Chairman's Report

John Bell's Report reprinted for those unable to attend the AGM.

Although the AGM is normally an occasion for a report only on the previous year's activities, as it is the 10th Anniversary of the inaugural founding meeting of the Society, I thought it appropriate to also look back over those years to trace the Society's development.

To the best of my recollection, the Society came into existence as a result of the confluence of two situations: In 1998 a number of people in the Banbury area led by Rachel Kinchin Smith and her late husband Michael felt it was time for Banbury to have an Amenity or Civic Society. This coincided with the "Mayoral Year" of Steve Kilsby, who, like town Mayors before and after, hoped to leave a legacy from his year in office. He called a meeting, the Society was launched and the officers appointed. On a personal note, I might add that I attended that meeting and, having recently retired, was considered to be fair game for Chairman. I agreed on the basis that it would only be for a brief period – yet I still find myself in that office today! Whilst the work and the range of the objectives admittedly grew on me year by year, I never expected to carry on for so long.

The early days were quite a struggle. Sadly Banbury as a town had had a long history of failure to protect its heritage, culminating in the disastrous destruction of the Cake Shop in Parsons Street in 1968. We adopted as our motto "Looking after the Past –

Looking to the Future". We had to impress on both the public and the planners that the heritage of the past, both in terms of buildings and their associated history, was irreplaceable once it had been destroyed. Over the years our professionalism has increased, particularly through having been joined by those with professional skills – we could still welcome more!

An early stalwart was Canon Derek Palmer, who became a most efficient and enthusiastic Secretary. It was a great blow to us all when he died suddenly in 2002 shortly before we unveiled two Blue Plaques in the Town.

We have always been able to maintain a strong management committee, with a number of changes as the years have passed. We have also sought constantly to keep increasing touch with our membership – initially this was inadequate being based on the occasional general meeting. In January 2006 we took a great step forward by introducing this quarterly newsletter which still seems to be increasing in content and size, and now we have added a Society website:

www.banburycivicsociety.org.

To this end, we hope to add more active sub-groups of members which will discuss and take action on specific issues in which individual members have a particular interest.

Parallel with this expansion over the years of the Society's activities has been that of the Town Council – reformed on 1st April 2000. The return of the Town Council has meant there are two organisations in the town whose prime object is its welfare. Far from duplicating work, we have found that Council and Society have been mutually very supportive. The Society's input into highway matter has largely

been through the Banbury Traffic Advisory Committee, which has quarterly meetings attended by County council officials who can be closely questioned. Our concern was where possible to progress the more strategic matters relating to the town's highways particularly a south-east ring road with a spur to the station to relieve traffic in Grimsbury. We also greatly value our involvement with the Built Heritage Working Party with representatives from the Town Council and other town groups who consider together topical matters relating to the town's buildings – existing and proposed

Our relationship with the Planning Department of Cherwell District Council has strengthened over recent years and at an increasing pace, with much improved, better and regular communication.

We are seeking to have fixed meetings with Cherwell officials, particularly after the recent extensive changes in the Planning Department.

Last autumn we started a new initiative – that of "Living Over the Shop" or LOTS – combining additional opportunities for housing in the town centre and helping to put to good use less used parts of many of the town's central and older buildings. We thank our member, John Gazey, for his particular interest in this and are grateful to Cherwell District Council for providing the personnel to investigate the detailed feasibility of the proposal and for calling meetings of the interested persons.

We are also very keen to see the redevelopment of the canal and river-side areas to the west of the railway and to the south of Bridge Street. This was the first industrial area of Banbury and still contains a number of historic

buildings which must be adapted and preserved but which have become seriously run down during the post-wars years. The Town ought to revive this southern section of the canal and river features at the same time as forming a proper multi-modal interchange for rail and bus and taxi traffic adjacent to the west side of station.

With the development of the Castle Quay Shopping Centre there has been a major focus on other activities on the eastern side of the Town Centre, such as Spiceball Leisure Centre (existing and the proposed Mark 2), the Mill Arts Centre and the new Museum. Unfortunately all this has to some extent been to the detriment of the more westerly part of the Town Centre, most obviously seen in the recent history of the White Lion Walk. This westerly part is increasingly being regarded by Banbury people as their preferred after-hours relaxation area with a boom in restaurants and pubs. Pedestrianisation of Parsons Street will hasten this trend. The Fine Lady statue has given added interest to this area so cannot other attractions be placed in the vicinity, perhaps the new Library incorporating a gallery for local artists to exhibit? The rather bleak car park on the north west side of Calthorpe Street would seem like an ideal location.

It remains for me to thank our excellent team on the management committee for all they have done during the past year.

To Rev. George Fryer for dealing with the Minutes . Also his interest with the out-door swimming pool group and traffic problems in the Town Centre.

To Rev. Henry Ormerod for his particular interest in transport issues .

To John Batts for his interest in railway matters and his deep knowledge of Banbury.

To Kay Smith also for her knowledge of the town as it was and her very firm views as to how it should be.

To Lynda Pamment, a resident of Grimsbury, who keeps us in the picture as to the issues there.

To the Heritage "Watch Dogs" - Robert Kinchin Smith with his great knowledge of planning procedures and regulations and Laurence and Penny Carey - also to Laurence for his work on editing this Newsletter.

To Rachel-Kinchin Smith and Adrienne Rees-Brown for looking after the membership and our finances.

To Mo Mant and Chris Mant - for their respective contributions on amenity matters generally and for new ideas on running the Society.

I think the Society is now in as good a shape as it has ever been and really beginning to flex its muscles and becoming seriously effective.

The next ten years will see it go from strength to strength.

Transport

Update

The Banbury Traffic Advisory Committee met in September. These are some of the issues raised.

The revised traffic scheme for Merton Street has come into force for an experimental period. So far local reaction has apparently been favourable.

The Transport Department has given consideration to improving safety on the "western corridor" linking Bloxham Road, Broughton Road and Warwick Road. Problems are caused by speeding and by poor visibility of approaching traffic at certain links between the two carriageways. More and clearer warning notices will be installed to improve the situation.

The planned improvement of parking facilities at Banbury Railway Station is now regarded as a priority and it is hoped that talks between the various bodies responsible will lead to definite decisions being made and the plans put into effect as soon as possible. The Civic Society committee strongly welcomes this.

The Civic Society awaits with interest the outcome of the Public Inquiry (on December 2nd) into the plans for pedestrianisation of Parsons Street.

There are arguments for and against the scheme, which is so strongly supported by the District and Town Councils.

The Civic Society Committee has requested that the next meeting of the Banbury Traffic Advisory Committee Meeting should address the problem of cyclists riding on pavements endangering pedestrians.

On the Rails

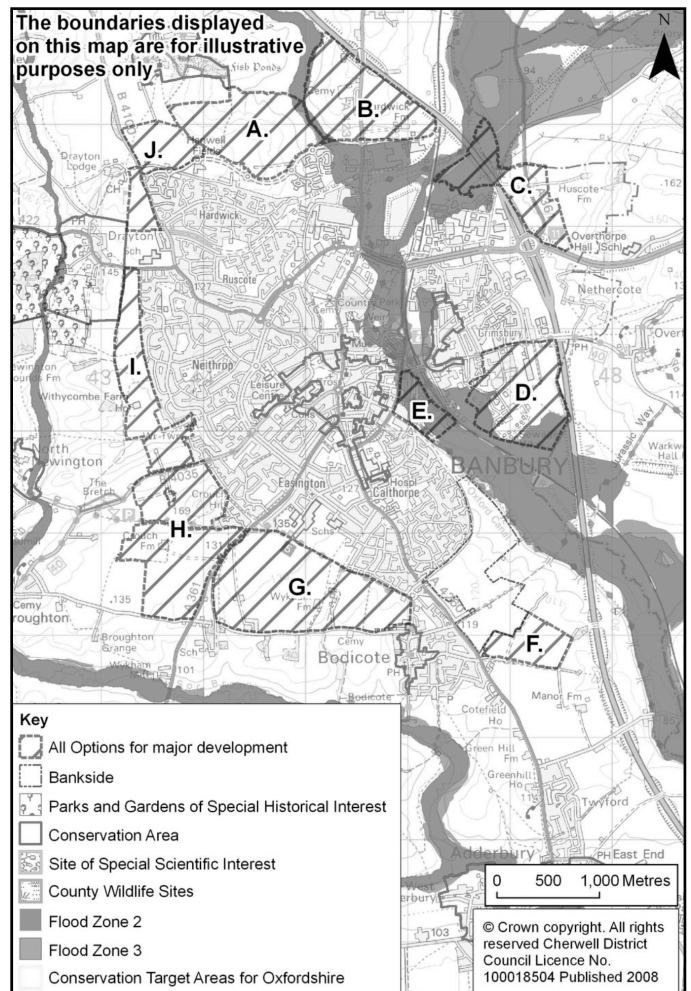
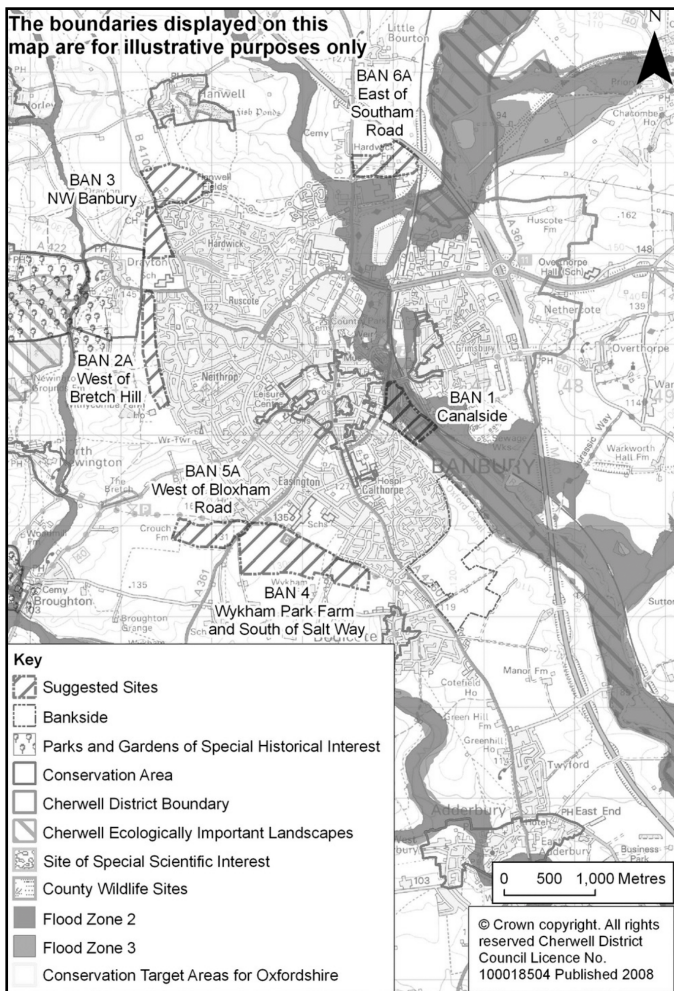
December 14th. approaches. What is so special about that date? It is the inconvenient internationally agreed time for the annual timetable change - not a natural break between summer and winter traffic patterns. How will it affect us? Quite differently for each of our four train operating companies.

CHILTERN TRAINS have announced full details of their new services on their web site: www.chilternrailways.co.uk and as expected are making no big changes.

CROSS COUNTRY have now been operating for several months under the new Arriva (though they are being shy about their name) franchise. So far the timetable has not much changed but in December they are required to make drastic alterations. Full details are still under wraps but will be revealed in due course on their web site. The general picture is that trains will be more frequent but journeys north will frequently require a change at Birmingham New Street, where some ongoing trains will now be operated by Virgin West Coast.

FIRST GREAT WESTERN have not announced their plans yet, but no drastic changes are foreseen. See www.firstgreatwestern.co.uk.

Finally, WREXHAM & SHROPSHIRE, our newcomers have been getting established during the summer. As an open access operator, they are restricted in competition with established franchises. Therefore Banbury passengers are only accepted to or from Tame Bridge Parkway (where?), Cosford and points north. Their website is www.wrexhamandshropshire.co.uk.



The two site allocation maps of Banbury as published in the full consultation document. The map on the left was captioned as Map 2 “Reasonable Options for Major Development at Banbury” The one on the right, captioned “All Options for Major Development at Banbury”, includes area D part of which was proposed for residential use by the Society in the 2006 consultation.

Strategic planning

Options for growth

from a letter to the Banbury Cake by Rob Kinchin Smith

‘I write with regard to the recent coverage in the Cake concerning Cherwell District Council’s ‘Options for Growth’ public consultation and particularly the four page consultation advertisement attached to last week’s edition.

Whilst the advertisement urges readers to consult the Cherwell website for the full consultation document, we are sorry that the map attached to the advertisement, as well as CDC’s consultation handout given away at CDC’s consultation events, only shows the six headline sites that CDC are regarding as ‘practical’ sites for major

developments. With the exception of the Canalside, all of these lie on greenfield sites to the south, west and north of Banbury. These rural sites would clearly be most attractive to developers but are all, to a greater or lesser extent, unsustainable with regard to car use, distance to the town centre, shops, station, motorway and employment sites. They are also unsustainable due to their impact on the countryside (farming and landscape).

In the full consultation document, residents are asked to comment not only on the 6 headline ‘practical’ sites, but also on a number of other sites that CDC has considered and rejected (Chapter 7, Figure 3). One of these is a large area of brownfield land referred to as ‘D - Thames Water Land / South of Thorpe Way’, put forward previously by this Society.

This site, lying to the south of Grimsbury and east of the railway, comprises the Spittal Farm Waterworks, the Grundon site and parts of the Thorpe Way Industrial Estate. Unlike Canalside, the site lies almost completely outside of the Cherwell flood plain.

We believe that this site has much to commend it in that it is within walking distance of the town-centre and station, and is highly convenient for local employment sites and the motorway. Development of this area would also restore the town’s geographical balance and, most importantly, would deliver the desperately needed south-eastern link road connecting the south and west of Banbury to the motorway. This south-east link would greatly reduce the present gridlock in Cherwell Street and on the railway

bridge and Hennef Way, caused by existing east to west and south to east traffic.

We realise that this site would be more expensive to develop than the preferred greenfield sites, as it would require the purchase of industrial land and would involve significant infrastructure costs, not least an additional bridge over the railway. If extended onto significant parts of Thorpe Way, it might also involve payments to existing businesses to relocate them to vacant business sites elsewhere in the town (e.g. Alcan) or closer to the motorway. We nevertheless believe that, if land is to be allocated for additional housing, the allocated sites should be in the locations that are best for the town, rather than those that are most desirable or profitable to the major house-builders.

We applaud Cherwell District Council for investing so heavily in its public consultation, but would urge readers* to consult the full public consultation document before making decisions based simply on the six advertised 'headline' sites.
**and Civic Society members*

Rachel Kinchin-Smith

A Personal Reflection

My husband Michael and I had been founder members of the "Mortlake with East Sheen Society" in SW London before retiring to N.Oxon, and we came to feel that Banbury could benefit from a similar group to care for its heritage and amenities. This should not only preserve but also enhance them, for the benefit of both town and local village residents. The national "Civic Trust" provides a widely followed pattern, plus guidance and resources.

As Michael's health declined, it fell to me to work for this project. Supportive letters from prominent groups in Banbury led to the enthusiastic support of Steve Kilsby, who chaired the open meeting (mentioned on Page 1); as I

recall this was funded by a grant from Banbury Charities for the costs of publicity and the hire of a hall. It was well attended, the Civic Trust provided the name of an excellent Warwickshire speaker and it was agreed to proceed to an inaugural meeting. As he has mentioned on page 1 John Bell, as a well-known and widely respected local figure, had been invited to accept Chairmanship. We owe a great deal to the ten years he served.

There are many people in Banbury and the surrounding villages who claim that the Town has been "spoilt" beyond redemption; that the focus of planning had been, successfully, on employment and housing to the neglect of both heritage and the quality of style/design. Such people, who may rely on the many amenities provided by the Town, sometimes appear to be unwilling to actively engage in influencing its destiny. This may result from a feeling of impotence or for the "out of towners" a wish to concentrate on protecting their own village. However, it is interesting that approximately half of our members live in local villages.

I believe it is not too late to protect and to enhance "Our Town" – though it may be a close-run thing. Our Society's Quarterly Newsletter to members and to local bodies regularly features news on planning, transport and flooding issues, while we have also been involved in campaigns for the Town's amenities such as the Horton Hospital and the Peoples' Park. Our Society's expertise, particularly on planning matters, is increasingly recognised by District planning officers and elected members (as is the case in other towns and cities.) The extension of the Banbury Conservation Area, the adoption of the Grimsbury Conservation Area and a local "list" of buildings meriting special consideration, and the erection of the beautiful statue of the Lady on a White Horse, can be counted as positive developments for the Town. I am proud that the Society has been so closely linked to them all.

Canal Day

Good turn out despite rain

Despite dire weather warnings, the hardy folk of the BCS turned up at Canal Day, set up the BCS stall and, throughout the day, handed out a goodly number of the new BCS membership forms. Discussion of the buildings that Banbury has lost and those now threatened was brisk, and we hope that some of that interest will translate into increased membership.

Derick Ingram

Following his death aged 81 Derick was cremated on October 22. He was a founder member of the Civic Society and for many years our treasurer. He had a distinguished career as an architect both in Banbury and beyond and was mentioned in Pevsner's "Oxfordshire". We hope to include an extended obituary in our next Newsletter, but in the mean time we extend our condolences to his family and record our appreciation of him as valued colleague.

Please send your letters via e-mail to design@h-and-p.demon.co.uk

Banbury Civic Society Membership

The committee is seeking your help. Do you have friends, family or colleagues who share your interest in Banbury's well-being? Help us recruit new members with the recently updated membership form, a copy of which is included with this newsletter. More members = more action. More members = a louder voice. Help us help Banbury.

And don't forget to fill in your own details in the box on their form before it is sent so we can thank you.

Please write to:

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