

Response to the major development at Castle Quay

Members are probably already aware of Scottish Widows' proposed Castle Quay 2 leisure development on the Council-owned former Spiceball site. The site is allocated in the forthcoming Cherwell Local Plan and Banbury Masterplan for a town-centre extension and a 'Cultural Quarter', to include and extended Mill arts centre and a new library.

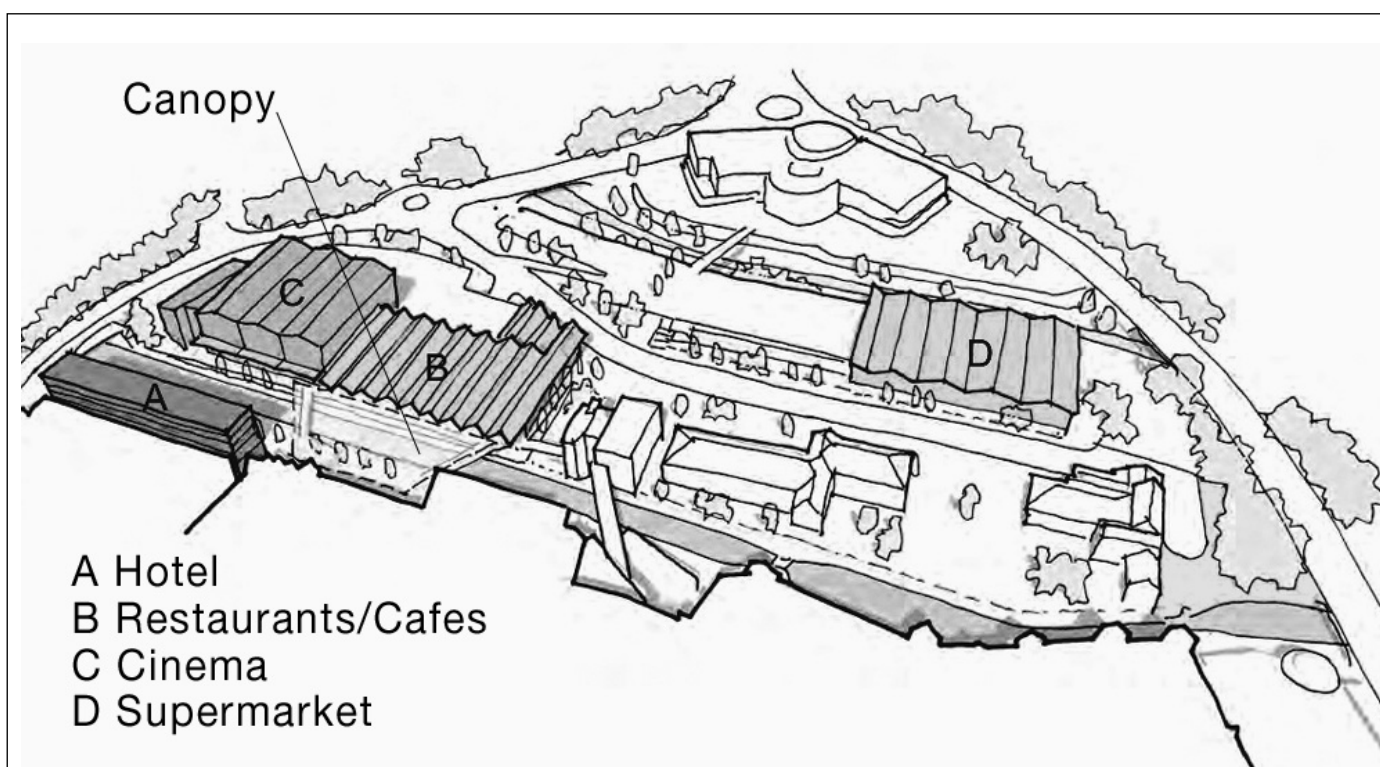
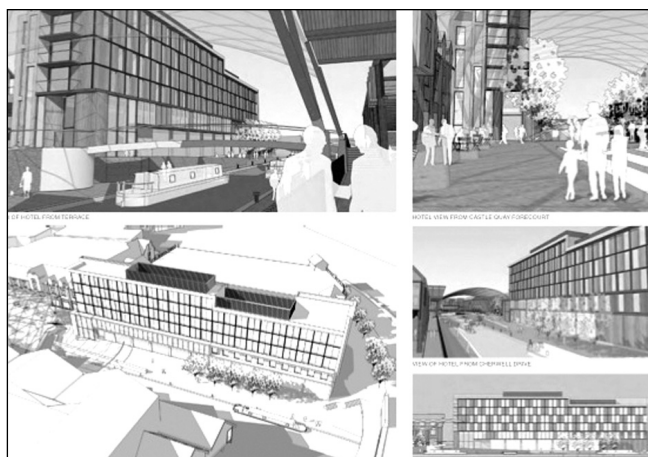
The Castle Quay 2 proposal has recently been the subject of public consultation exercise by Scottish Widow's PR consultants, Proteus. As part of this consultation Proteus organised three meetings between the Civic Society and the developer's planning consultants, architects and Scottish Widow's development partner, Hawkstone Developments

The proposal involves four main elements:

- a row of bars and restaurants opposite British Home Stores. This would involve the demolition of the General Food Social Club;
- a 70 bedroom hotel in front of and adjoining the existing multi-storey car park on the west of the canal next British Home Stores;
- a multi-screen cinema on the east side of the canal facing the hotel and adjacent to the proposed bars and

restaurants. This would be built on the site of the existing 2-storey car park;

- a medium sized food-only supermarket on the old Spiceball sports centre, currently a temporary car park.



New car parking would be in low-level flood-attenuation areas (emergency ponds!) beneath the new buildings.

The new bridge that currently accesses the Spiceball leisure centre will be re-orientated to point towards the existing Castle Quay, rather than towards the town centre. There would be an extra footbridge (and possibly a large glass roof over the canal) to link the new development to the existing Castle Quay 1 shopping centre.

The proposal has subsequently been submitted as an Outline planning application. The one significant change from the scheme as consulted on is that the top floors of hotel have been pushed back from the canal, to lessen overshadowing effects. This, together with £100,000 for towpath re-surfacing, was needed to persuade the Canal & Rivers Trust to withdraw their objection to the scheme.

Civic Society Response: While broadly supportive of the development, the Society is anxious that 1) the completed leisure development should work as an integrated extension to the town centre, rather than being a rival to it and 2) that the opportunities to put right the mistakes of Castle Quay 1 the past are not missed.

Our concerns are:

- Dislocation from rest of town and lack of permeability through and around the existing Castle Quay. When the original Castle Centre was built, Factory Street was lost, resulting in the canal being largely cut off from the north end of Market Place. The building of Castle Quay resulted in the loss of Mill Street and Mill Lane, cutting off Spiceball site and The Mill arts centre from Bridge Street. The replacement access, provided through the Castle Quay development, is privately-owned and time-limited. The proposed pedestrian access between the new Castle Quay 2 development and the town centre will again be wholly through the existing Castle Quay centre, albeit with a promise that the doors be left open until 12.00pm. The grossly inadequate alternative 'public realm' access routes, both through the bus station and from Cornhill / Market Place over the Castle Street roundabout, will remain as existing. Regrettably we believe that this makes the proposal

an extension to a shopping centre, not an extension of the town centre.

- With the completeness and range of the facilities proposed, all of which can already be found in the town centre, the development is inward looking, with little room for the sort of meaningful co-operation with the town-centre that could stimulate the fortunes of both and enhance the total experience for visitors. We fear that in its current, physically isolated form, the development risks being a privately-owned rival to the town centre, rather than a beneficial extension of it.

- The proposals use up the land required for an extension of the Mill's theatre, leaving The Mill isolated behind a supermarket car park. The supermarket's delivery and service yard is directly adjacent to the Chamberlaine Court retirement flats. As has been well publicised, the leisure development requires the removal of the General Foods Social Club from the site. Both the Social Club and the residents of Chamberlaine Court are objecting to the development.

- Boat-owners concerns about Canal Day, annexation of public moorings and worries about the massing of the buildings causing a wind tunnel effect. It is now generally acknowledged that in the changing nature of retail centres, events like Canal Day are an increasingly important contribution to their success. The Inland Waterways Association and Banbury Canal Partnership have objected.

- Parking facilities: Parking is raised from the present 650 spaces to around 750. As Scottish Widows envisage the shops staying open for longer hours once the leisure complex opens, we have questioned whether an additional 100 car-parking spaces are adequate for the existing demand plus a multiplex cinema, 70-bed hotel, a supermarket and a number of new bars and restaurants. The increased usage will certainly impact on the parking for the Mill, Museum and Spiceball leisure centre, whose current overspill car park will become a supermarket. As all the existing car parks are already well used, and because no provision is made for pedestrian access from the town centre, the travel emphasis will be on car usage. As there will be only

a single vehicular access/exit point, as at present, there is clear potential for traffic congestion. Oxfordshire County Council have objected.

- Finally, the current Castle Quay development has frequently been criticised because it turns its back to the canal. Nothing is proposed to improve the existing Castle Quay in this respect.

The Society has tried everything it can to work with the developers and their designers to address the key issue public-realm pedestrian connectivity through and around the existing Castle Quay, but sadly Scottish Widows has steadfastly refused to consider any improvement to any route that does not pass through Castle Quay 1. Until such time as this development may be freely accessed from the town centre using public rights of way, we cannot support the claim that the Castle Quay 2 development is a 'town centre extension'.

This Society came into being as a result of the community's disappointment over Castle Quay 1. Like Castle Quay 1, Castle Quay 2 enjoys substantial support from Cherwell's officers, and will undoubtedly continue to do so. This is confusing, given the Council's ownership of the site and its stated aspiration for the redeveloped site to accommodate a town-centre extension and a 'Cultural Quarter' for Banbury and the district. As land-owner, the Council has a statutory duty to ensure that this site is developed in the public interest. The applicant's scheme requires that all of the community benefits envisaged for the site be abandoned. This seems like a very big 'ask' indeed. By the time you read this, the application may well have been approved. If it has been, it might be reasonable to question whether the distinction between 'public interest' and the Council's financial interest has been lost somewhere along the way.

Revised application for Care Home in Bath Road

In the last issue we highlighted an application to build a 60 bedroom Care Home on Bath Road on the former site of Holly House. Backed strongly by the Civic Society and local residents, CDC rejected the

application on design and conservation grounds and persuaded the applicant to withdraw their application, pending the submission of a better design. The applicants then put forward a new design illustrated below. This has met all of the Society's concerns and the concerns of local residents.

We look forward to seeing construction start in the near future.



Application for a Care Home overlooking Peoples Park

On the opposite side of Peoples Park, another care home application has been submitted. This is for a 73-bed home on North Bar Place, on a neglected site between The Leys and North Bar. Access to the site from North Bar is very tight, but our main concern is again over design, as the proposed building will be very visible from within the park.



Traffic and Transport

New OCC Plans

The Civic Society Executive Committee has been aware that quite a lot had been going on behind the scenes regarding planned road improvements in and around Banbury. The two main drivers have been Cherwell's emerging Banbury Masterplan and its supporting

'Banbury Movement Study'.

While realising that those were far from complete, the Executive Committee felt that it would be very helpful to better understand what sort of measures were being anticipated, in view of the increased traffic that will result from the planned 25%-33% increase in the town's population. We felt that some urgent matters were not being dealt with quickly enough and that the 'Banbury Movement Study' was kicking into the long grass measures that ought to be put in hand with minimum of delay.

Consequently a letter was sent to Oxfordshire County Council from the Civic Society's Transport sub-committee, with the authority of the Executive Committee. This letter pinpointed some locations in Banbury where serious problems continued to arise.

We are grateful to Ian Hudspith, Leader of Oxfordshire County Council, for his full reply. His response may be summarised thus:

Bridge Street Crossroads. This location figures strongly in the Banbury Masterplan and 'capacity improvements' are seen as a priority. The 'accident record' of this junction is nevertheless regarded as too low to require actions to make it safer. Following the abandonment of the south-to-east link road concept, OCC's preferred north-south route through Banbury will be via the Bridge Street cross-roads.

Sainsbury's Junction on the Oxford Road. Long-term solutions to alleviate traffic problems are to be linked to the Bankside development highway works. (Many feel that an adjustment of the traffic-lights phasing could help the situation now).

Railway Station Multi-Storey Car-Park. Some money has been made available through Chiltern Railways to improve the connecting road network. Chiltern and OCC are hoping that the peak times for cars going into and out of this new car-park (opening next spring) will not clash with the main 'local' rush-hour. It looks as if we shall just have to wait and see whether this turns out to be the case.

Hightown Road / Bankside Junction. The present road priorities can cause traffic queues on Bankside at busy

times. Traffic lights are planned, funded by the developers of the Bankside housing scheme.

South-to-East Link Road. As noted previously, the South-to-East Link Road concept (linking Bankside to Junction 11 of the M40) has been struck from the Banbury Masterplan on the advice of OCC. OCC argue that national grants cannot be applied for, as the road 'would only serve local traffic'. They also argue that it would be unreasonable to ask developers to pay for additional road infrastructure, suggesting instead that "it would be more effective to make improvements to the existing road network" (i.e. using developer funding to pay for OCC's road maintenance obligations). Unfortunately the only plan OCC are putting on the table is one that funnels more traffic through the town centre and over the hopelessly congested Bridge Street crossroads.

The Leader of OCC wants the Civic Society to be assured that Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council have Banbury's traffic problems very much in mind, with the aim "to deliver the required transport infrastructure and services to tackle current and future issues so as to promote the economic vitality and to enhance the historical characteristics and well-being of the town, making it an attractive place to live and work". Some are still a bit sceptical about how it is all going to work out. It seems that congestion and road safety issues will be with us for quite some time yet!

Heritage

Blue Plaque for Bill Trinder

The Society has long advocated a Blue Plaque to commemorate Bill Trinder, who in 1950 resolved with



Bill Trinder cuts the tape at Wharf on the first day of TRPS operation in 1951

LTC (Tom) Rolt to save the Talylyn Railway in Mid Wales and to run it entirely using volunteers. The decision and first moves took place in Bill Trinder's radio shop at 84A High Street and Bill Trinder went on to be the Talylyn Railway's first Chairman. The events initiated the railway preservation movement that has now become a worldwide phenomenon.

Last year a joint proposal was put to the Oxfordshire Blue Plaques Board by this Society and the Talylyn Railway Preservation Society, for a plaque to commemorate Bill Trinder and Banbury's place in the history of railway preservation. Unfortunately the Oxfordshire Blue Plaque Board was unable to support the initiative, as they cannot commemorate historical events.

Undeterred, the Society has approached the building's owner, who is fully supportive of a plaque, as are Cherwell's planners (consent is required as the building is Listed). We are currently creating a design for a suitable plaque, to be co-sponsored by ourselves and the Talylyn Railway Preservation Society. We will shortly be applying for Listed Building Consent and anticipate a public unveiling ceremony in the early summer.

Bridge

Medieval Bridge and the sycamore growing out of the Victorian pier

Since 2010 the Society has been concerned at the lack of action to deal with sycamores and other trees growing out of Banbury's Grade II-Listed medieval bridge. Following pressure from ourselves, in concert with Cherwell District Council, a visual structural examination carried out in November 2010 by the bridge's owner, Network Rail. This revealed that, whilst the medieval 'mill stream' arches were safe, the bridge was indeed in need of works to remove trees growing out of the structure. Action to remove the sprouting trees was promised 'within months'.

Late last year a chance discussion with Sir Tony Baldry M.P. brought the matter to his attention, prompting a letter from him to Network Rail's Chairman. This coincided with Network Rail needing to carry out works in the main river

channel, work that required the Town Council to provide access and a work site in the adjacent park. We asked the Town Council to ask Network Rail to carry out the long-promised tree-removal at the same time. This they were happy to do and work is now underway. We look forward to working further with the Town Council towards increasing the public profile of this last standing vestige of medieval Banbury.



Above: Sycamore growing out of the Banbury bridge, showing the medieval arches of the original bridge beneath.

Below: Welcome clearance and landscaping undertaken by Network Rail.



Swindon trip

Discovering Swindon

On October 21st the Society had its outing to Swindon, taking in the old Swindon railway works (now a designer outlet shopping centre) and the railway workers' village. We went by bus and were entertained as we approached the centre of the town with a commentary from an old Swindonian, Vaughan Lovelock, including a detour to enjoy the delights of the 'magic roundabout' and, in passing, Swindon Town's football ground.



Everyone was impressed by the way the shopping units and signage has been integrated into the old workshop buildings, with cranes and some machinery left in situ. Well worth a visit, both for the shopping and as an exemplar of 'adaptive reuse'. The trip included a visit to 'Steam', the museum of the Great Western Railway, and the National Trust's 'Heelis' headquarters building, voted 'Sustainable Building of the Year' in 2007. We wandered through the beautifully preserved Railway Village Conservation Area, with its terraces of 1840s railway cottages designed by Matthew Digby-Wyatt, noting en-route the proposed new course of a revived Wilts & Berks / North Wilts canal. Everyone thought it a hugely successful day out.

Out of town perspective

Villagers' Voice on Town Topics

Again we are keen to hear from our many members who live in the villages surrounding Banbury. While our work is focussed on Banbury, much of what happens in Banbury also affects village residents. Our Society covers many topics which include Transport, Built Environment and much more. Let us have your observations on any relevant topics so that we may be able to address any problems.

Please let me know:
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All comments to Laurence Carey
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Banbury Civic Society Membership

Help us recruit new members.

More members = more action. More members = a louder voice.

Help us help Banbury. Membership forms can be obtained from the Treasurer

Please write to:

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