

Recent White Papers

Planning White Papers

Mention was made in an earlier Newsletter of the Planning White Paper released by the Department of Communities and Local Government and containing major proposals to change the current planning system. These proposals included:-

- The abolition of the need for full scale planning permission for small scale improvements which make no impact on neighbours.
- Greater freedom for industrial and commercial building development.
- A fast track appeals system.
- More freedom for shopping development outside urban centres.
- Government appointed independent commissions to consider and give consent for large scale infrastructure projects such as roads, airports and power stations with consultation usually being limited to a 9 month period.
- Developers having to consult public and main interested parties.

The Society's parent body, The Civic Trust, is participating in a coalition of organisations such as Friends of the Earth, RSPB and CPRE campaigning against some of the more damaging proposals in the White Paper. Responses are flooding in as a consequence of this campaign. The following are a brief selection:-

- In deciding major infrastructure projects all other options should be considered and locally affected people must be consulted,
- Decisions to be made by democratically accountable politicians, not an unelected commission.
- There must be a legal right for local people to challenge projects at a public inquiry, which must include the chance to reconsider the need for the infrastructure and not simply the details of its implementation.
- The proposal that a developer must consult with the public from the earliest possible stage is welcomed. Of equal importance is that consultation should continue thereafter through all stages of the planning process.
- The proposed removal of about one quarter of "householder" applications from the planning process by making them "permitted development" will inevitably lead to environmental degradation by

admitting lower standards of design.

- The burden of objecting to such developments should not be placed on neighbours, who may have little knowledge of what is acceptable or may be afraid to object.
- The proposal to allow "minor" appeals to be dealt with by local councillors ("Local Member Review Bodies") is unrealistic, since they cannot be expected to exercise the same level of detachment as the Planning Inspectorate.

A further White Paper has been raised by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. The Heritage White Paper aims to produce a more unified approach to the protection of the historic environment which it proposes should be placed at the heart of the planning system. The Civic Trust again worked with interested bodies to provide a collective response to the government. It is very likely that there will be a conflict between the respective objectives of the two White Papers and it will be interesting to see which will prevail!

Canal Day

Transport Theme

The Society again had a stand at the recent Canal Day Celebrations in Banbury. This time our publicity related to the strategy for the town's highways in response to the ever increasing traffic demands

We highlighted, in particular, the need for measures to enable traffic from the north of the town and from the motorway to access the south and west without the need to go through the town centre – achievable by a new road from the southern end of Ermont Way leading through what is still open countryside to the Oxford Road south of the town.

A spur off such a road, possibly along the line of the former LMS railway track, to the southern side of the new development on the site of the former cattle market, could give direct access to Banbury railway station and any new parking facilities created by Chiltern Railways. It would also relieve traffic along the Middleton Road and help to reduce traffic accessing the station from the west.

Our publicity attracted considerable support and was of particular interest to representatives of Chiltern Railway, who were principle sponsors of the event.

On the very next evening it was opportune that

we had Steve Howell, head of transport at Oxfordshire County Council and Jacqui Cox, a senior member of his department, to answer questions at a Forum open to all members. They made it clear that the main impediment to our proposals was, inevitably, cash. Having regard to the overall County Council budget, remarkably little was available for expenditure on new road construction, and most of this



Revd. George Fryer at the Civic Society stand on Canal Day

was, inevitably, committed to the Oxford City area – a project regarded as being of regional significance. He indicated that the only real prospect of such work being done at an early date was through developer funding. Is the local planning authority maximising its opportunities to raise finance from this source and is it ensuring that the road scheme is part of the long term local plan?

The speaker dealt with a wide variety of topics, such as possible Park and Ride facilities for the town and also the concept of a Banbury Parkway railway station, which has proved so successful at Warwick and Haddenham.

The next Banbury Traffic Advisory Committee meeting takes place in early December and members are asked to notify the Secretary of any matters they would like to be raised by 16th November.

Planning and the historic environment

Planning issues

In late July an application was made to restyle the Coach and Horses public house in Butchers Row as a modern drinking hall catering to the younger market. The proposal involved opening out the interior and back yard and replacing the sash-style windows and door on the ground floor facade with a full length glass shop front. The proposal also involved opening out two original blind windows on the upper storeys, even though these were original features designed to give

architectural symmetry to the front elevation. Following our observations the application was approved, but only after a more sympathetic scheme had been submitted, leaving the ground floor windows and door unaltered. The replacement of the two blind windows above with matching sash-style windows was allowed. We are content that this will not significantly harm the building's external appearance.

In late August a proposal came forward to replace the Texaco service station on Middleton Road with a gated courtyard of 14 apartments. Whilst the site is currently an eyesore, we felt obliged to object to the application on grounds of design and proposed use. With regard to the former, we felt that the proposal was a weak example of 'developer pastiche' that did not do justice to this key gateway to Banbury, which also lies on the edge of the Grimsbury Conservation Area. With regard to use, we were disappointed that the proposal was for yet more small flats. Cherwell planning policy is particularly clear about the council's aspirations for this part of Middleton Road to develop as 'Grimsbury Local Centre', where the Council is keen to extend the range of local services and facilities. In particular, the Council has identified the need to create a strong frontage and regards the sites of the former Bridge Motors and Texaco Garage and the STS Tyre and Exhaust Centre as having potential for small-scale employment or retail uses on the ground floor with residential above. With the former Bridge Motors site already having consent for yet more flats we were disappointed that Cherwell's officers chose to approve this major development using their delegated powers, thereby avoiding committee scrutiny.

Also in August a retrospective application was made for the construction of an unusually massive brick, concrete and tarmac ramp in front of 14 Dashwood Road, at the heart of the Calthorpe "character" area of the Banbury Conservation Area. Whilst this unconsented and unusually intrusive addition attracted protest from numerous residents of nearby properties (thereby precipitating the retrospective application), CDC's officers had proposed to use their delegated powers to approve the application. On this occasion the ward members managed to get the application to committee, where it was thrown out by the elected members. In our objection we had pointed out that the applicant had also not sought consent for the demolition of the historic stone gate piers in front of no. 12 next door or for their replacement on the old front boundary with the same flimsy railings they has also installed on the ramp. The resulting additional retrospective application was also due to be approved under officer's powers, prior to the rapid intervention of the ward members who once more brought the application to the planning committee, where it was also thrown out. We hope the same vigour will be put into enforcing the committee's insistence for a more sympathetic ramp and for the reinstatement of the original stone piers and boundary wall.

Highways and traffic

Parsons Street

A consultation document has been produced by CDC for extending pedestrian circulation in the town centre. At this stage it only deals with Parsons Street. If integrated into the existing pattern of movement by foot it should boost the town's attractions. Once pedestrians have priority over vehicles for much of the day this street should attract more shoppers and encourage further specialist trading. Much of the report's language is the sort urban environmentalists use and it could be seen as an implementation plan for this part of the Central Conservation Area.

Added environmental improvements would allow scope for re-surfacing, much more flexibility in the use of town centre spaces and good public seating. Security would be enhanced by good lighting. Opportunity for relaxation, open air events and meetings would be much improved. Money has been set aside for making a start on this and further consultation on the physical design proposals will be made in 2008.

The Society has welcomed the concept with a few reservations. Much consultation with existing traders has yet to be undertaken. With regard to the issue of living accommodation over shops, highlighted elsewhere in this newsletter, the effect of the scheme on future Parsons Street residents will need to be assessed. There must be assurance of adequate funding so that the entire scheme is carried out as a consistent and unified design. The overall approach does deserve support, for as it is now Parsons Street is not serving the town well and with this scheme it could reclaim its position as a successful hub for shops, restaurants and urban living.

Horton Hospital

Keep the Horton General

Health Secretary Alan Johnson has referred to an independent review panel the Oxford Radcliffe Trust's proposals to close the Horton's Special Care Baby Unit (SCBU) and reduce paediatric and obstetric services to daylight hours only. This change would make the Horton's maternity unit one of the country's largest midwife-led units, and by far the largest that is not within easy access of consultant support. (For details see: <http://www.keepthehortongeneral.org/>)

The Civic Society strongly opposed the changes during a previous round of local consultation. The Committee has again chosen to voice the Society's opposition to the proposals and has submitted a letter to the review panel.

The panel will review all the evidence, but it is likely that the strength of local opposition will help determine how "in-depth" their review will be. We would urge all our members to join the Society in its opposition to the proposed changes.

Please write to:

The Independent Reconfiguration Panel
Kieran Cross, First Floor, 11 The Strand
London, WC2N 5HR

-Or email your comments to the panel at irpinfo@dh.gsi.gov.uk

If you have Internet access, please also add your name to the Downing Street petition <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/SAVE-THE-HORTON/>

Enclosed is a copy of the open letter from the Civic Society sent to the Independent Reconfiguration Panel re. the proposed reorganisation of the Horton Hospital.

LOTS Project

'Living Over The Shop' (LOTS) project

Following the well-attended preliminary Seminar in July, a Working Group has now been set up as a Sub-Committee of the Civic Society. Its Chairman, Cllr John Gazey, will report to the Society's Committee at its monthly meetings.

At the Working Group's first meeting on 20th September, attended by eight Society members and Mr Noel Towe (Chair of Banbury District Housing Coalition), good progress was made towards a plan of action. This will begin with a survey of premises and their ownership in the High Street, Parsons Street and Church Walk. The purpose will be to identify premises which are capable of being adapted to accommodate living space over the shop and where a pilot venture might be attempted. Cherwell District Council's Housing Department, within its limited resources, has offered welcome support and the Group also looks forward to input from the Chamber of Commerce, estate agents and architectural/historical consultants.

If any members have any information about a premises over a shop, anywhere in Banbury, which they consider might be suitable for a pilot LOTS scheme please notify the Secretary.

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