

Highways and traffic

Committee Report

The following matters were considered at the September meeting of Banbury Traffic Advisory Committee:-

1. As part of their plan to reduce street clutter the County is embarking on a review of the larger signage in Banbury. Many redundant or unnecessary smaller signs have already been removed but members are asked to write to the Society's Secretary with details of any still remaining. A letter from Mr Coley of OCC in our July issue outlined the county's approach to street clutter.

2. Following concern by Cherwell's planners about the setting of the Grade II listed Elephant and Castle in Merton Street there are to be revised proposals for the junction with Middleton Road. The proposals are to include traffic lights, not a roundabout as previously understood, meaning four sets of lights over less than a quarter mile – surely a prescription for congestion!

3. A proposed roundabout at the junction of Bloxham Road and Queensway will now have a much reduced specification, the original having been costed at £810K. It may also be planned as a mini double roundabout with Springfield Avenue.

4. A new taxi rank of five bays in Broad Street near Crofts is being considered by C.D.C. This is principally to serve the evening trade in this part of town. It will be trialled during the Michaelmas Fair.

5. The Civic Society asked that there should be an additional phase in the Bridge Street Traffic lights to allow traffic to exit from the eastern side of Bridge Street separately from that from the western side. The present phasing results in traffic making conflicting movements particularly when turning right.

Again, please send to the Society's secretary by the 20th November details of any matters you would like us to raise at the December meeting of the Committee.

The Wood Green Leisure Centre including the Open Air Pool

A positive future in sight

The Society has long been concerned at the continuing loss to the people of Banbury and district of this facility particularly when we are



Successful day for the Society

Despite the awful weather on Sunday October 1st there were good crowds at the Banbury Canal Day. Included among the many visitors to the Civic Society stand were MP Tony Baldry and Banbury Mayor John Donaldson (seen here with the town crier, Anthony Church).

experiencing longer and warmer summers. It has therefore supported the action taken by Banbury Town Council in commissioning consultants to investigate the options available and assess their feasibility.

Their first report was made in January 2006. At that date, although Cherwell District Council owned the Centre, it had refused to modernise it. That Council was then unable to make any other decision until the future of the Spiceball Centre had been determined – there is the option of rebuilding it at a higher level to avoid flood water on its existing site or to move it to a new, apparently flood free, site to the east of the river.

In the first report various options for Woodgreen were put to the Town Council each proposing the continuance of the existing indoor bowls facility but with different possibilities relating to the use of the pool for swimming and as a canoe polo centre.

A final report by the consultants came before the Town Council last month. This shows the possibility of the British Canoe Union participating and also the involvement of the Cherwell Canoe Club. The indoor bowls facility, it suggested, should be independently run.

The swimming facilities are proposed in the report to cover an 8 week period during the school summer holidays only. It is emphasised that the overall cost would have to include the

employment of an experienced manager backed by a strong management structure.

The British Canoe Union would make a capital investment of up to £100K and Cherwell District Council has now indicated that, if it considers the plans are deliverable sustainable and low risk, it will commit £500K to the scheme. Together these would cover the initial capital needs for the site. However, it also believed that the site can only be run at a substantial loss. At its meeting on 28th September the Town Council agreed to a commitment of at least £50k per annum towards running costs.

What can members of the Civic Society do to help? Firstly they can seek to persuade Cherwell District Council to match, at the very least, the contribution of the Town Council to the running costs. The District admittedly has to finance leisure facilities in each of the 3 urban centres of Banbury, Bicester and Kidlington and may feel that its Banbury commitment should be limited to Spiceball. However, Banbury's population is considerably larger than the other two and the town's location being further from Oxford means that it also has a much larger catchment area for its facilities – both pointing to more finance being justified for the town. So please write to Ian Davis, head of Leisure Services at Cherwell District Council, making this point and

welcoming the more supportive attitude shown by the Council's recent executive meeting.

Secondly, the Leisure Centre's swimming and other facilities will undoubtedly be used by people from outside the town and even outside Oxfordshire. It is therefore quite appropriate for members living out of town to lobby local parish councils to consider including in their precept for the parish rate (shortly to be decided) an additional sum as a contribution to the running costs. The Town Council will be approaching them direct but support from residents in these parishes could make help from these sources more likely.

Planning and the historic environment

Local Development Framework

The most recent stage in the ongoing saga of the forthcoming replacement of the Cherwell Local Plan has involved a consultation on the Banbury and North Cherwell Site Allocations Development Plan Document. This document



The future shape of Banbury? The shaded areas are suggested for development by Cherwell. This illustration was assembled from the maps provided.

sets out to canvass opinion on where future development should be situated. Several hundred possible development sites of varying sizes having been identified by the council or put forward by eager site owners. The study included 83 areas in the greater Banbury area, mainly for proposed future residential development. Realising the huge importance of this document the Civic Society reacted as follows:

1. We addressed a letter to fellow consultees, principally North Oxfordshire parish councils, sensing that many would be likely to take an interest only in the section involving their own village. In our letter we pointed out the impact the proposals within Banbury would have on

the outlying communities which it serves. Our edited submission included:

a. The potential loss of services: the suggested allocation of the Horton Hospital site, Orchard Lodge, the fire station and parts of North Oxfordshire college

b. The potential loss of amenities: the possible allocation of Banbury United Football Ground and current car parks, including all of those at the station.

c. The loss of countryside and valuable agricultural land from the approaches to their market town, notably on the south and west sides of Banbury including Wykham Park Farm, land west of Crouch Hill and Banbury Self-pick.

2. Our completed submission, as sent to Cherwell District Council included a detailed response to every one of the 83 Banbury sites put forward. The gist of our response was that, given the choice between large-scale suburban development on greenfield sites, or higher-density regeneration of the less used parts of the town's inner area, we would generally

favour the latter, but only subject to an increased commitment to ensuring that such development respected the town's historic character and buildings. We suggested that in the longer term it might be worth relocating the Thorpe Way industrial area closer to the motorway, which together with the former cattle market, would allow the development of a new inner suburb of South Grimsbury.

3. Our letter to Cherwell started with what we considered was a well deserved rebuke on the Consultation process: We have previously been concerned at how the list of consultees includes 82 national house-builders, developers and planning consultants, mainly based outside the town. This most recent consultation was carried out in August, coinciding with the summer holidays when few parish councils meet and when many individual consultees are likely to be away. Furthermore, the amount of time allowed for the proper consideration of the many complex

issues was quite inadequate. We also criticised the mapping supplied. The maps, especially those, for instance, intended to identify small areas of the centre of Banbury were quite inadequate. The scale chosen was completely inappropriate for smaller or overlapping sites where it was impossible to see precisely what was being referred to.

The Market

Market looking dowdy

At this time of difficult retail trading the Banbury Market is suffering. Are there ways to help this long established important feature in Banbury life? Is the market in need of improvement?

The original market was held in the Market Place only. Now it spreads from Cornhill to beyond the Town Hall. This has left large open spaces between stalls and even empty stalls can be seen, so there is little evidence of bustle and vitality. Closer together stalls, with a smart uniform covering within a smaller area (ie the Square) would attract and benefit shoppers, so the market would hum again.

Shoppers look for good quality goods at reasonable prices. The stall holders need to display well and be enthusiastic while selling! A greater variety of stalls is needed perhaps including some local craft display to encourage buyers. On grey, overcast days there are difficulties:- surely there is some form of lighting "to brighten the area" which could be made available for the stalls. The local authority may have this in mind but something is needed now.

We need few suggestions here – Do write with your views for other improvements. The market is an integral part of Banbury life and should be available for future generations.

Horton Hospital

The summer holiday season appears to have been a popular one for carrying out consultations on controversial subjects. The proposed withdrawal of 24-hour critical services from the Horton Hospital has been the other subject that has invited the public's opinion, although the recent statement by Sir William Stubbs, Chair of the Radcliffe Trust that a 40,000 person petition would 'not make an iota of difference' does not instil much confidence in the consultation process. We feel that the Civic Society has a civic duty to object to the proposed reduction of the Horton's critical services however and enclose a copy of our letter to the Trust.

Your letters

Please send your letters to:

The Revd. George Fryer, Hon. Secretary,
Banbury Civic Society, 7, Spencer Court
Britannia Road, Banbury, Oxon, OX16 5EY
or e-mail: design@h-and-p.demon.co.uk

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