

Transport

Transport Update

Because the Civic Society is represented on the Banbury Traffic Advisory Committee, we are able to take our concerns about traffic and transport direct to the appropriate authorities. The Civic Society Management Committee recently resolved that more might be done to stop cyclists riding on pavements and in pedestrian areas of the town; that matter was taken up and is being referred to the Police. The thoughtless and often illegal parking of cars in certain roads is another matter that the Traffic Advisory Committee is trying to address. It is hoped to extend the Residents' Parking Schemes that already exist in some roads. The most recent Traffic Advisory Committee meeting looked at a number of locations in Banbury where minor alterations might improve the safety of motorists and pedestrians and enable traffic to flow more freely. Other issues being discussed are as follows:

- Car parking facilities at Banbury railway station – the matter is being treated as a matter of high priority and major improvements are highly likely.
- Speed limits – reductions from 40 mph to 30 mph along the Warwick and Stratford roads are proposed, largely to improve the safety of school pupils.
- Grimsbury traffic scheme – the experimental traffic scheme in Grimsbury is being continually monitored, as are the problems caused by greatly increased volumes of traffic where Merton Street joins Middleton Road.
- Buses – the needs and convenience of bus users are a significant concern of the Traffic Advisory Committee. Plans

are in hand for well-sited bus stops to serve the new Medical Centre in South Bar.

- Morrisons pedestrian crossing – a new pedestrian crossing involving changes to the phasing of the traffic lights at the junction of Swan Close Road and Upper Windsor Street will improve access to Morrisons from the Gatteridge Street area. This will be welcomed by nearby residents, particularly those in the nearby sheltered housing.

Readers of this newsletter are invited to contact the Civic Society secretary if they have comments, suggestions or complaints that they wish to be brought to the attention of the Traffic Advisory Committee.

Strategic planning

Options for growth

“Options for Growth” is Cherwell District Council’s public consultation on where new residential development should be situated in the period up to 2026. Following publication of the consultation document, the Society established a working group to co-ordinate its response. In its first week, the working group held a preliminary meeting, revisited all the proposed sites and made initial contact with the Parish Councils of all Banbury’s neighbouring communities. At a second meeting of the working group, it was decided which sites appeared unacceptable and which were more acceptable, subject to caveats.

On grounds of landscape, traffic and sustainability, it was felt that further development on the periphery of the town was generally undesirable, with development beyond the Salt Way being particularly so. The Canalside site was approved on the basis of the published

Restoration

Unicorn gates restored

The Civic Society was delighted to see the reappearance of the restored gates of the Unicorn Public House in Market Place. The restoration came about through an initiative by Banbury Town Council’s Built Heritage Working Party.

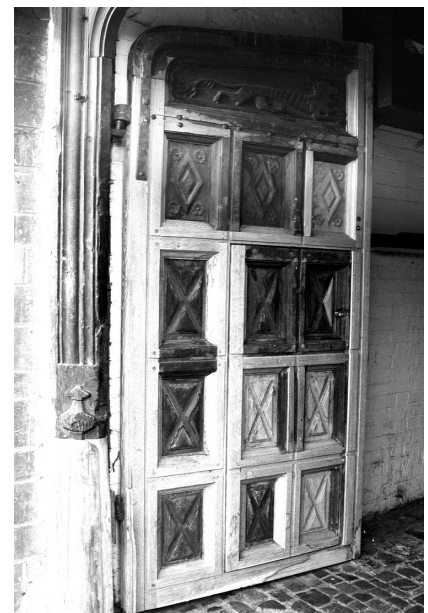


figure of 485 homes, as the area’s sensitive regeneration would be of great benefit to the town. Grave reservations were expressed about advice received from the Council’s partners, English Partnerships, however. This indicates that, in order to make the Canalside redevelopment financially viable, 1200 dwellings would be required and that

community facilities such as a school would be unaffordable.

As detailed in the Chairman's letter to the Banbury Cake (published in our last newsletter – available online at banburycivicsociety.org), the working group also concluded that the Council's apparent rejection of the South Grimsbury site (Site D – Thorpe Way / Spittal Farm waterworks / Grundon) was premature. It was felt that the allocation of this site could potentially eliminate the need for development on the Council's preferred greenfield sites around the town and that it presents much the best opportunity for the sustainable expansion of Banbury over the next twenty years.

To generate a coordinated response, further discussions were subsequently held with representatives of the parishes and Banbury Town Council. The Society presented its proposals to a well-attended public meeting of Hanwell Parish Council, chaired by CDC's former Head of Planning, Alan Jones. Another meeting of the working group was held to finalise our response to the consultation before the timely submission of the Society's response to CDC.

Following submission "Options for Growth" was discussed in detail at the Society's December meeting with CDC Planners. At this meeting CDC's Planners dismissed the South Grimsbury option, stating that its allocation could be challenged by developers as being not financially viable and therefore 'undeliverable'. Despite government requirements that new housing should be on pre-developed sites wherever possible, it was explained that Banbury could not afford to lose its industrial land and that the housebuilders require more easily-developed sites. The Council would thus be obliged to provide the housebuilders with some large greenfield sites.

The Society continues to contend that a coordinated mixed-use masterplan for the regeneration of Canalside and South Grimsbury together represent the best option for Banbury's sustainable growth and that only the regeneration of the two sites together could deliver the riverside park, public transport hub and third river

crossing that the town desperately needs. The findings of a recent audit that Banbury has over 1,000,000 square feet of unused industrial space appears to add further weight to the argument (Banbury Cake, 08.01.09). We shall continue to lobby Council officers and elected members on this ongoing issue and would encourage our members to do the same.

Planning Applications

Springfield Avenue

Whilst the Society's scrutiny is normally focussed on Banbury's historic core, it also keeps track of developments in the town's suburbs. One application we are currently objecting to is the proposed demolition of 34 Springfield Avenue and its replacement with five two-bedroom flats.

The building is situated on a key corner site and served as a newsagent's shop until recently. The existing building and its counterpart shop on the opposite side of the Ruskin Road were built as integral elements of a model 'homes for heroes' housing estate, developed from 1919 on the 'garden suburb' philosophy. The existing building is fondly viewed by the local community as a local landmark and as a cherished element of the local street scene. It could be sensitively reused, subject if necessary to limited extension.

The proposed replacement building is felt to be a poor design that takes inadequate opportunity of its landmark site. Five flats is argued to be over-development of the site, not least because the new building would entirely

conceal St Hugh's church, which is currently prominent in views down Horton View. The application is recommended for approval by CDC planners, but faces considerable opposition from the elected members, most notably Cllr Kieron Mallon. The application will be determined following a site visit by the CDC Planning Committee on Thursday 29th January.

Subdivision

Banbury has a long tradition of private landlords dividing family homes into bed-sits. More recently the property boom and popularity of 'buy-to-let' has led to a trend of landlords and speculative developers buying small properties to divide into self-contained apartments. The immediate attractions for the speculators are obvious, as the combined rental or sales value of the new properties created is greater than that of the original house. Such subdivision is also attractive to the Council, as it increases Council Tax revenues, increases the supply of small 'starter homes' and reduces the land they need to allocate for new house building.

Whilst sub-divided houses and bed-sits fill a social need, they can have a detrimental effect on areas where the mix between family homes and rented accommodation becomes unbalanced, as is the case in Grimsbury and parts of Newlands. In these areas parking is a major problem, whilst longer-term residents complain that landlords and transient tenants show low commitment to both local community life and the maintenance of houses and gardens. Noise between upper-floor flats and



34, Springfield Avenue, on the crossroads with Ruskin Avenue

bedrooms in neighbouring homes can also be a significant problem.

The physical effects on the housing stock are also often negative. Once a house has been subdivided and sold off as separate apartments it is impossible to return it to a single house. Also, internal walls, floors, chimney-breasts and staircases, as well as historic architectural features are normally removed. Chimney stacks are often lost and historic windows and front doors are replaced in upvc. Exterior elevations often sprout external stairs, vents, foul-water pipes and multiple satellite dishes, whilst front gardens become choked with multiple wheelie bins.

In the case of Listed Buildings, the Listing affords protection to all historic internal and external fabric. Proposals need to demonstrate that they are sympathetic to the historic and architectural interest of a building, both inside and out. If a building is un-Listed but falls within a Conservation Area, there is no primary legislation to prevent subdivision, although it should be demonstrated that the subdivision has no adverse effect on the character or appearance of the Conservation Area. Notwithstanding the obvious ill effects of additional noise, bins and cars, this is interpreted locally as meaning that subdivision is acceptable so long as the front of the building is left unchanged. In some cases we have asked that the adverse effects of subdivision be mitigated by the removal of existing intrusive features (upvc windows, satellite dishes, etc) in line with Council policy, although so far we have been unsuccessful in our arguments.

Subdivisions in Grimsbury are becoming a major local political issue, with increasingly bitter local opposition. Following hot on the heels of approvals for the subdivision of nos. 60 and 78 West Street is an application to divide no.22A. The house has already been divided into a ground-floor flat and a maisonette and the current application seeks to further subdivide the maisonette into two flats. This will involve internal alteration and the replacement of the traditional sash windows with upvc. The application is

being opposed by neighbours and Ward members, led by Cllr Ann Bonner. We are supportive and, should the application be approved, we have requested that conditions be imposed about satellite dishes and requiring the retention of the historic timber sash windows and chimneys. The application will be decided by Committee, following a site visit on Thursday 29th January.

The Society is objecting to the proposed subdivision of 19 Marlborough Road into four apartments. This is part of a very attractive locally-listed terrace adjacent to the Library. The terrace was recently proposed for full Listing by CDC, unfortunately refused by English Heritage. The proposal follows a series of unsuccessful applications involving a large extension and significant external alteration. The current application will entail the gutting of the building internally. It is claimed the exterior will be unharmed, but the small front garden will have to accommodate four sets of wheelie bins, contrary to CDC policy. The application is to be decided under officer's powers on Tues 27th January. If approved, we have asked that conditions be imposed regarding satellite dishes and retention of historic timber sash windows and chimneys. This is a result of similar applications (most notably 27 Gatteridge Street) where promises to leave exteriors unharmed have been instantly reneged upon by developers.

Another application we are objecting to involves the subdivision of 8 Calthorpe Road, a Regency-style Grade II Listed Building, currently in multiple occupation. The proposal, the third in recent months, is to demolish and rebuild the back service wing as a garden flat and to subdivide the remainder of the house into three apartments. The front elevation would be marred by external gas meter boxes, whilst internal walls would be moved and doors blocked up or removed. We understand that there is little support for the proposals within the CDC Planning Department, who have recently successfully withstood appeals on two similar proposals for Listed Buildings on Oxford Road.

Town Hall and People's Park

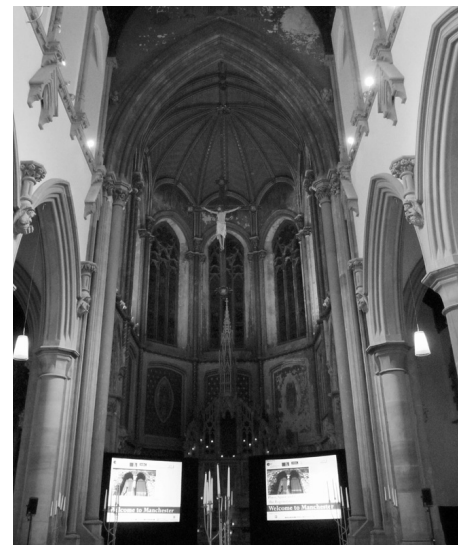
The Society wishes to congratulate Banbury Town Council on its successful restoration of the previously walled-in 'minstrel's gallery' in the Town Hall. We hope to be able to report on the Town Council's plans for the further restoration of the Town Hall and for regeneration of the People's Park in a future issue.

Conservation

Gorton Monastery: leading by example

"Good urban design interprets and builds upon the historic character, the existing landscape and the aspirations of the local communities, and arrives at a vision of what a place might become".

This quote was taken from 'Where We Live', a recent urban design guide sponsored by the South East England Development Agency amongst others, but it could well have been the sub-title of a two-day conference sponsored by a



number of heritage agencies including the Civic Trust which was held at the Monastery of St Francis, Gorton (Manchester) in November: at which BCS was represented thanks to David Luckham Consultants Ltd.

The Place, Space and Conservation – The Regeneration Game conference was organised to explore "the impact of heritage-led regeneration on crime reduction, health and social and community cohesion", and the delegates came from a wide variety of

organisations including preservation trusts, English Heritage, civic societies, local government, architectural practices, community groups, the Council for British Archaeology and the Institute of Historic Buildings Conservation.

Speakers included Jenny Abramsky (Chair of the Heritage Lottery Fund) and Ian Lush (Chief Executive of the Architectural Heritage Fund) who offered financial advice and support for future projects. Other speakers were leaders of successful regeneration/restoration projects and heritage organisations, who illustrated the variety of Third Sector (voluntary) involvement in this area. An example of regeneration thinking which seemed particularly relevant to Banbury was presented by Paul Hartley, the

Conservation and Heritage Manager of Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council. The wide nature and the tangible, and intangible, consequences of regeneration were illustrated by a number of inspiring examples of successful projects, not the least of which was the building in which the conference was held. The Gorton friary, built between 1863 and 1872 by the friars and local community to a design by Edwin Pugin, had become derelict during the 1970s as had the suburb of Gorton, when locally based but major railway engineering companies closed. The friary continued to deteriorate until ten years ago when a handful of local people, with the friars, decided to rescue the buildings and, after the third application to the Heritage Lottery fund,

they received a grant towards the cost of converting the much-loved buildings into a successful conference centre with a separate community centre.

This conference offered an inspiring catalogue of achievements across Britain by determined small groups of individuals with vision, who were able to harness the opportunities that exist to create better environments and communities, through the regeneration of their built heritage. Speaker after speaker emphasised the role of the Third Sector in the regeneration of towns and villages in the current financial climate of uncertainty, and the opportunities that it has created. Breaks between sessions offered opportunities for discussion with a wide variety of enthusiastic and experienced individuals. At the final, excellent dinner, Kevin McCloud spoke with humour about his commitment to building conservation and to the built heritage.

Where We Live was written by Deer Park Alpha (www.deerparkalpha.org) and published by the Solent Centre for Architecture + Design (www.solentcentre.org.uk).

The website of The Monastery is www.gortonmonastery.co.uk.

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

Derick Ingram

Derick Ingram, who died shortly before the publication of our last Newsletter, 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.

He was born in East London in 1927 and made an auspicious entry into architecture during the Second World War, when he was articled at the age of 16 to the distinguished architect E. Vincent Harris. After 2 years National Service as a gunner, he studied architecture at the Northern Polytechnic in London.

In the Sixties he moved to Banbury and worked with the architect Peter Lewis. Later he set up his own practice in Oxford. Locally, his buildings included the rear annexe at the Whately Hall Hotel, The Oast House

Public House (sadly demolished), The General Foods Sports and Social Club, the Bradley Arcade on Bretch Hill, Badgers Farm in Swerford and Town Wood House in Wroxton, where the family lived for a period.

The Society was always grateful for the experience he brought to bear on many of the Society's issues, particularly with regard to planning and urban design.



Left: The Oast House Public House, Top right: Bradley Arcade, Bretch Hill, Lower right: General Foods Sports and Social Club, Spiceball Park

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.

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