

# Banbury Civic Society Quarterly News

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## Transport

### Traffic and Transport Update

The Banbury Traffic Advisory Committee (TAC) has always been helpful over matters brought to it by the Civic Society, referring them to appropriate bodies when necessary. Ongoing concern over the problems caused by illegal car parking in the town is being addressed. Difficulties and dangers to pedestrians brought about by people (not necessarily young) cycling on pavements are not being followed up however, because of a lack of reported accidents. Indeed, the TAC was told that far more pedestrians are hit by cyclists on roads than on pavements.

The Civic Society's continuing dissatisfaction over the lack of adequate car parking facilities at Banbury railway station seems to be widely shared. Possible solutions are being worked on and we look forward to hearing about positive moves soon.

A matter that the Civic Society had requested to be considered by the TAC is the phasing of the traffic lights at Bridge Street crossroads. Drivers approaching along Concord Avenue and wishing to turn right into Bridge Street are often held up for several cycles of the lights at busy times. These lights are causing particular problems for National Express coaches (including airport coaches) accessing the bus station. Some coaches are consequently diverting along Middleton Road, to the disapproval of many Grimsbury residents. It was agreed at the last TAC that the traffic-light sequences at the various approaches to Bridge Street Cross Roads would be reviewed.

## Planning

### 11/12 Church Lane

The Society was very disturbed to hear that CDC has approved an application to develop 11/12 Church Lane. The buildings are on the 'local list' and lie at the heart of the Banbury Conservation Area. When queried, a CDC planning officer responded 'as the buildings are not listed and are not within the primary shop frontage of the town, the change of



use and loss of the shop frontage was difficult to resist. If a reason to refuse on this ground was to be made, I am of the opinion that it could not have been sustained on appeal'.

It is a matter of concern that applications of this nature are still being considered under officer's delegated powers (i.e. not by Committee) when some individual planners remain of the opinion that historic buildings within a conservation area cannot be protected unless they are either listed or within a 'primary frontage'.

Buildings such as this, and areas like Church Lane, provide the authentic grain and texture that gives a historic area its real character and historic depth. They are very fragile and easily destroyed or disfigured by ill-considered redevelopment. Given the parallel regime of listing, the protection of such fragile, unassuming buildings are normally the very reason that conservation areas are designated in the first place.

We regard this approval as injurious to the town's historic character and damaging to the Council's attempts to regenerate the Banbury 'lanes' area



Top: View of nos 11/12 Church Lane. Lower left: Front elevation of 11/12, Church Lane. Lower right: The proposed new building, which in the words of applicant's design statement 'tidies up the appearance of this end of Church Walk (sic)'.

through pedestrianisation. We simply cannot afford to lose such historic assets in the town's most historic quarter.

The position of the Council is particularly depressing given the Council's recent successes at appeal, following refusals of similar proposals by the Planning Committee. The Planning Inspectorate's ruling regarding an appeal against the Council's refusal of consent for the development of 44 West Street sums up the position perfectly:

'The principal characteristic of the conservation area is the survival of a group of streets of diverse architectural styles that has historical importance... The existing house is very small-scale compared to its neighbours... is a simple building of no intrinsic architectural merit, narrow with brick walls and a pitched slate roof. It is not particularly prominent... It is part of the grain of the area, in which the mix of buildings makes a distinctive contribution to the character and appearance... Accordingly, I find that this small building is important to the character and appearance of the conservation area and it should be preserved... For this reason alone, I conclude that the appeal should not succeed. To permit demolition would be to disregard the significant historic interest that led to the designation of the conservation area as well as the duties imposed by the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and guidance in Planning Policy Statement 15: Planning and the Historic Environment which is reflected in Policies C22 and C23 of the Cherwell Local Plan as well as in Policy EN40 of the Non-Statutory Cherwell Local Plan.'

It is a pity that the guidance provided by the Planning Inspectorate was not heeded in this instance. We can only hope that the current economic crisis stalls this development long enough for the Council (or the applicant) to reconsider the dismerits of this consent.

## Planning Consultation

### Crown House

The RPS Group, on behalf of Axial Properties, has invited the Society to make pre-submission comments on an application for a large, 3-storey retail building, intended to replace the derelict office building between Matalan and Bridge Street. The proposals involve the demolition of most of the existing 'black and-white' building fronting Bridge Street and the creation of two undivided 2000 sq.m retail units and a 1700 sq.m premium unit for an 'anchor store'. This Society would, of course, welcome the long-overdue redevelopment of the derelict 1970s office building on this site and is relatively comfortable with the modern idiom proposed for the elevations.

We have nevertheless expressed concern over the loss of all but one bay of the early-20th-century black-and-white building fronting onto Bridge Street. This former pub, once the 'brewery tap' of Banbury's famous Hunt Edmunds brewery, is neither listed or locally-listed, but it is little-altered, attractively detailed and dates to before the removal of the cattle market from Bridge Street to Midland Marts in the 1930s. Bridge Street remains a key part of the Banbury Conservation Area, despite having been

robbed of much of its historic character when Castle Quay was built. We believe that the loss of historic buildings on the street's south side will further erode what remains of Bridge Street's historic character.

We also expressed concern at the effect of further 'big retail' in the lower town, given the obvious effect of Castle Quay on retailers in the 'old town'. We are of the opinion that a development such as this would be better sited on the under-utilised Farm Foods / TK Maxx site, where more dynamic retail would revive the 'old town', with High Street becoming an active thoroughfare between two major retail nodes.

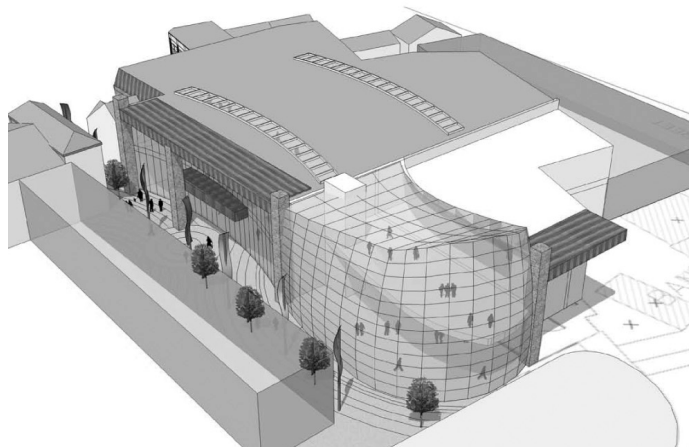
In terms of the overall massing of the proposed building, we have expressed concern that it does not address the visually weak corner between Bridge Street and Cherwell Street, the building instead presenting a tall and blank elevation to the existing used car lot and petrol station that blight the key eastern gateway to the Conservation Area at the Bridge Street / Cherwell Street crossroads. We also stated that the building's large and unrelieved roof would be too tall and alien to the area's medieval grain, dominating the retained buildings on the south side of Bridge Street and views from Upper Windsor Street and from the higher parts of the conservation area to the south and south-west.

We hope that our concerns will be addressed, in part at least, in the planning application which is expected to be lodged with CDC shortly.

*Crown House: View from north west*



*Crown House: View from south west*



## Planning Applications

### Land at Overthorpe Road

Outline consent for distribution warehouse between the M40 and the 3663 warehouse was approved by CDC's Planning Committee, subject to a reserved route for the future 'southeast link road', as requested by the Society.

### Calthorpe House Calthorpe Street

Oxfordshire County council have applied to demolish their offices in Calthorpe Street and to redevelop the site as 13 flats. A decision is awaited.

### Iceland store, Calthorpe Street

A proposal to redevelop this site as a new shop, with three storeys of flats above, was refused by Cherwell District Council. Whilst the Society did not oppose the application, believing it to be difficult to resist given CDC's exclusion of Calthorpe Street from the Banbury Conservation Area, we wrote in support of the Council at the ensuing appeal, at which the Council was unfortunately unsuccessful.

### 22A West Street

Despite significant opposition from the Ward members and residents, an application for the further subdivision of this three-storey terraced house was approved by the Planning Committee, subject to conditions requiring retention of timber sash windows, as requested by the Society.

### 19 Marlborough Road

Following an unsuccessful application by CDC to have this fine row of townhouses listed by English Heritage, the Council has consented to the subdivision of this locally-listed building into four flats, under officers' delegated powers. The application was a reduced version of a previous scheme to subdivide the building into five flats, which would have involved a large extension at the rear. The approved scheme, which was opposed by the Society, nevertheless involves the loss of all internal walls, floors, stair and other historic features.

### 34 Springfield Ave

Despite strong opposition from the Civic Society, the ward member (Cllr Mallon) and local residents, the application for

demolition of the corner shop and replacement with five flats was approved by CDC's Planning Committee. The property is now on the market with planning consent, the successful applicants being unwilling to pursue the development in the current financial climate.

## Other planning news

### Former Northern Aluminium Works, Southam Road

Regrettably the Civic Society's appeal to DCMS against English Heritage's refusal to list the rolling mills has been unsuccessful. The listing of the offices, gates and war memorial remains however.

### Library (former Mechanics Institute), Marlborough Road

Rose Todd, Cherwell District Council Conservation Officer has been very busy with bids to get Banbury buildings listed by English Heritage. Having met with success with the Alcan / Sapa offices etc, English Heritage have now also confirmed the listing of Banbury Library.

### Other Listing proposals

Unfortunately Rose Todd's bids to persuade English Heritage to list other Banbury buildings, including Dashwood School, the Marlborough Road Methodist church, 17-23 Marlborough Road and the lighting shop (ex Co-op) on the corner of Broad Street and George Street are understood not to have succeeded. All of these buildings lie within the Banbury Conservation Area and thus enjoy a measure of statutory protection.

### Stanbridge Hall (former Grammar School), Ruskin Road

This building has been vacated and its future appears very uncertain.

### Banbury Town Hall refurbishment of main chamber

Following the restoration of the clock-tower and opening-up of the 'minstrels gallery' in the main chamber, Banbury Town Council is now restoring the remainder of the main chamber. This includes removal of the textured paint finish, stripping of stonework details and redecoration of the walls with a period scheme. The works also involve insulating the ceiling, restoring the wooden floor and installing reproduction cast-iron radiators. As the new heating system involves the loss of the distinctive

original cast-iron 'column' radiators, the Society has been in discussion with the Town Council over the retention of some radiators in-situ and the long-term storage of removed radiators in the basement. We have also asked for care to be taken over paint stripping, in case genuine early decorative schemes are concealed behind the later 'institutional' paint. The unveiling of the restored chamber is eagerly awaited.

## Open spaces

### The Peoples Park

Most of my working life was spent in the urban setting of East London. During that time several reports were issued by various Church authorities concerning urban regeneration – Faith in the City (1985); The Cities (1997); and Faithful Cities (2005). One issue that these Reports increasingly noted was the essential contribution that green spaces make to the making of a 'Good City'.

Banbury of course is not a city, but it does have a number of urban characteristics. Whilst it is surrounded by the wonderful green pastures of North Oxfordshire, this does not mean that we can afford to ignore those green areas that have been bequeathed to us by former Banburians.

One of the most important and easily recognised of these is the Peoples Park. The Park was left in trust to the People of Banbury and our Town Council is charged with its stewardship and maintenance. For over 100 years it has provided a place of meeting and recreation as well as a well-worn path from the Horsefair to the Warwick and Bath Roads.

18 months ago a small group from the Banbury U3A (University of the Third Age) decided to set up its own Peoples Park Group whose aim was to explore the Park in its several guises: botanical, historical, social and ecological. These studies demonstrated to ourselves that this was indeed the People's Park and therefore needed to be 'owned' by all of us.

At about the same time, Banbury Town Council decided that as part of its



stewardship the Children's Play Area and the Tennis Courts needed refurbishment. To this end, and in order to satisfy legal requirements, a Peoples Park Support Group was set up, consisting in the main of local residents and Council officials. This Group has had several meetings and has been consulted over the various plans for refurbishment and five of the tenders for consideration were recently exhibited in the Town Hall.

The Children's Play Area is to have a Gulliver's Travels theme. This will be unique to Banbury and may well become an important icon for Banbury – competing with the Lady and her Horse.

The refurbishment plans include two new

Tennis Courts and a Games Court. Your correspondent is seeking support for an idea of his own – a permanent open-air Table Tennis Table. At the time of writing this has not been included, but I would welcome any offers of help to see this included. Banbury has a fine reputation for providing table tennis stars. It would be great to see young and old battling over an iron net in the Park!

In addition to the refurbishment plans the Council also has a wonderful Community Garden in the Park. This has nursery facilities, providing plants for the town and members of the community. Cheshire Home and Frank Wise School have assisted with the work and each year local Primary Schools and the U3A



take part in a Planting Bonanza - this year on June 9th. Our own U3A Group has also carried out a tree audit with the help of Council lists.

I personally joined the Civic Society some years ago encouraged by the then Secretary – the late Canon Derek Palmer (who took a great personal interest in the Park and was influential in the Park achieving 'Green Flag' status). I hope that the Society will encourage a proper concern and interest for the green areas like The Peoples Park which are so vital in making Banbury a 'Good Town' to live in.

John Whitwell.

*Incidentally for those interested in Banbury U3A details can be found on the following website -*

*<http://banburyu3a.googlepages.com>*

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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 can be obtained from the Membership Secretary. **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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BCS Membership Secretary  
34 Wodhams Drive, Brackley  
Northamptonshire NN13 6NB  
m. 07747 884770 t.01280 706240  
mailto:BCS@chris.seddon.name

## **The Civic Society AGM will take place at the St Mary's Centre, Horsefair on May 13 at 7.30pm**

The evening will feature a talk by Professor Brian Goodey

### **Just a lot of old buildings? *How popular heritage is changing***

Local concern for historic buildings has a long and honourable history. It is an essential element in shaping and re-shaping the image, and memories, of a town.

But the built heritage still relies heavily on professional architectural knowledge and language, and on the studied concerns of enthusiasts.

The use of electronic media and changes in education have encouraged new understandings of time, chronology and culture. For younger generations such changes endorse a very different view of culture and heritage.

Using Banbury as a setting, Professor Goodey's talk will explore the way in which memories, events, patterns of gathering and individual life experiences shape individual 'heritage'.

There is much to learn for the revitalisation of community concern for place.

*Brian Goodey is Professor Emeritus in Urban Landscape Design at Oxford Brookes University. He still teaches at Oxford and at Anglia Ruskin Universities, is a consultant to the Council of Europe, and is Chair of the Postal Heritage Trust, responsible for the Bristol Postal Museum and Archive.*

Your chance to have real influence in Banbury -

### **Join the Civic Society Management Committee**

Nomination papers will be sent out in advance of the AGM. Any members keen to take an active role in the Society are cordially invited to speak to the Chairman (Rob Kinchin-Smith – 07818 091862)