

Blue Plaque for Tom Rolt

For more about the unveiling by MP Tony Baldry and Kate Tiller of the Blue Plaque dedicated to Tom Rolt see page 3



What worldwide movement started here?

See the next issue of the Quarterly News for the answer



Woodgreen open air swimming pool

This is the first full summer of open-air bathing in Banbury for 6 years. The pool had originally opened in 1939. It was facing almost certain redevelopment following closure at the end of the 2003 season. It opened again in August 2009 after being fully refurbished by CDC, following a grass-roots campaign strongly supported by Banbury Town Council.



Celebration in Parsons Street

On August 17th Banbury people celebrated pedestrianisation with a street party. See page 4



Oxfordshire Transport Plan

The Civic Society remains in close contact with Oxfordshire County Council over the formulation of the new Oxfordshire Transport Plan, particularly in so far as that relates to Banbury. The county's top priority objectives, following much consultation, have been identified as reducing congestion, increasing the quality and use of public transport (trains as well as buses), and making provision to encourage cycling and walking for local journeys, recreation and health. The means for pursuing those objectives are being carefully considered, and it is recognised that Oxford city, the larger towns in the county (such as Banbury), the smaller towns (such as Chipping Norton), and the rural areas and villages have quite different needs and problems from each other that have to be addressed. At the time of writing we await an interim report from the county, which will invite comments from interested parties, such as Banbury Civic Society. We have already responded to earlier questionnaires, and Oxfordshire County Council has expressed appreciation.

The Banbury Traffic Advisory Committee (on which the Civic Society is represented) was told at its last meeting of the major road closures and diversions in the town planned for this summer. Repairs to the canal bridges in Concord Avenue have caused southbound traffic along Concord Avenue between the Castle Roundabout and Bridge Street Cross Roads to be diverted along other routes; and quite serious congestion has resulted in places, especially Castle Street, sometimes stretching well back to near the Castle roundabout. Some bus services have been temporarily re-routed to avoid delays there. A short-term bonus has been a smoother traffic flow at the Bridge Street cross roads, helped by changes to the phasing of the traffic lights. The Civic Society's current concerns about Grimsbury include some traffic matters, and it is anticipated that they will be referred to the September

meeting of the Traffic Advisory Committee.

Planning

Recent applications

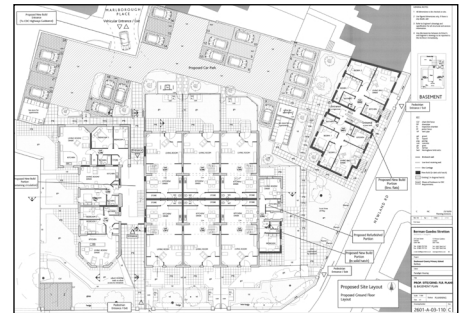
The Woolpack Public House, 28 Horsefair (10/00398/LB)

The Civic Society has responded to a proposal to convert and extend the former Woolpack Public House to accommodate 8 flats. Built in the 17th Century as a house, it is claimed by the prospective developer that their conversion proposal is sympathetic to this historic Grade II Listed building 'because it returns the building to residential use'. Nevertheless, the subdivision will require the insertion of 6 bathrooms, 6 kitchens, fireproof communal stairs, sound-proofing, new openings and a number of structural alterations and new partitions into the historic fabric. Both ourselves and CDC's conservation officer were particularly concerned at the very poor level of detail supplied with the application, making it almost impossible to assess the harm (or otherwise) that the proposed development would have on the historic fabric of the building. Despite our reservations and those of the conservation officer, the application was approved by CDC, subject to 30 conditions. There have been indications that the applicant may be attempting to have at least some of the conditions overturned.

Former Dashwood Community School, Marlborough Place (10/00664/F)

The Society has also responded regarding this proposed conversion and new-build scheme, providing 19 affordable dwellings. The application is in general conformity with a Development Brief prepared for the site by CDC and we are pleased to see the retention of the old school buildings, boundary walls and railings. The development would remove a number of extraneous outbuildings and additions and an attractive new glazed link between the east and west wings is

proposed. There was considerable local opposition, particularly over the use of Marlborough Place for vehicular access. Whilst supportive of the principle of conversion, our concern was that 'affordable dwellings' simply meant subdivision into the maximum number of small flats, meaning that the flats could not make the most imaginative use the building's exciting double-height interior spaces and requiring the insertion of new front doors throughout the building's exterior. The application has been approved, subject to conditions about the shape of the dormer windows in the new-build element. We are making enquiries why our concerns were not considered by CDC's Planning Committee.



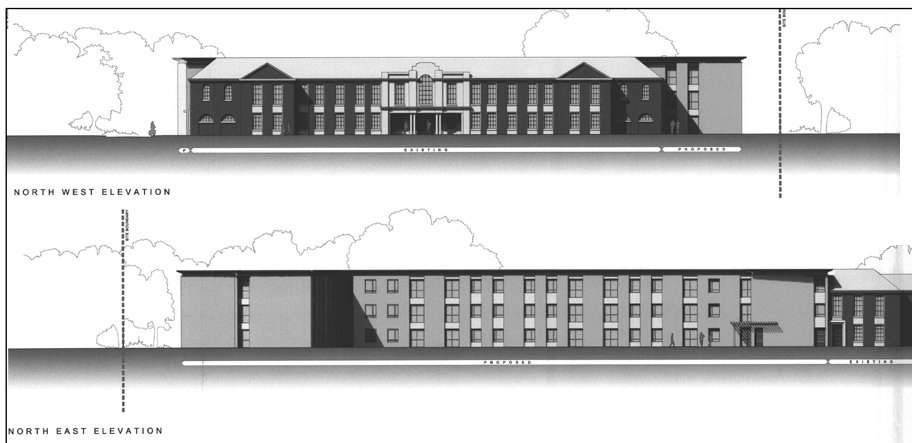
Former Dashwood Community School development

*Above: Plan view of development
Below: Photograph of building from the Marlborough Place gate*

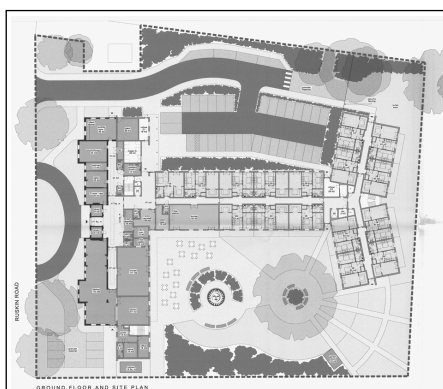


Old Stanbridge Hall, Ruskin Road (10/00907/F)

A side-effect of Banbury School's success in obtaining 'Building Schools for the Future' funding before the programme was cut has been the abandonment of the former Banbury grammar school building on Ruskin Road. As with Dashwood School, the Civic Society and the Town Council's Built Heritage Working Party have lobbied hard for this building's retention and reuse. A result has been the recent application to refurbish and redevelop Stanbridge Hall to provide 60 2-bed



Old Stanbridge Hall development
 Above: The top elevation shows the retention of the original frontage. The lower elevation shows the proposed back extension.
 Below: plan view, showing the retention of the front range.



and 10 1-bed 'Extra Care' residential apartments. The proposal entails the retention of the frontage block, with the remainder being demolished and replaced with two new 3-storey ranges. Whilst expressing grave reservations about the amount of demolition proposed, we asked that, if the application was approved, appropriate conditions be imposed to ensure the retention of the war-memorial plaque, dated cast-iron rainwater hoppers and the replacement of the present mix of inserted aluminium windows with double-glazed 'heritage' steel windows. The application has been approved, subject to appropriate conditions.

The Civic Society is always delighted to see redundant buildings brought back into viable and sustainable use. CDC's insistence on the retention and reuse of Dashwood School and Stanbridge Hall (in part at least) shows how far planning and conservation policy at CDC has come since this Society was established. The contrast with the unnecessary loss of

Spencer House and the old Police Station could not be more stark. The Civic Society and its partners should be justifiably proud of this changing attitude to our local heritage. National planning guidance has nevertheless also moved on, not least with the release earlier this year of the Government's Planning Policy Statement PPS5: Planning for the Historic Environment. PPS5 requires that any proposal for a heritage building should always be for the 'optimum viable use'. If there is a range of alternative ways in which an asset could viably be used, the optimum use is the one that causes the least harm to the significance of the asset. The optimum viable use is not necessarily the most profitable one'. Whilst we have clearly come a long way, we do question whether the proposals for The Woolpack, Dashwood School or Stanbridge Hall genuinely represent the 'optimum' viable use of any of these buildings, or whether there remains something of a hill still to climb.

Core Strategy – Update

Members may be aware that the Coalition Government has fulfilled the election pledge to revoke Regional Spatial Strategies, including the South East Plan. Local Councils are now free to plan how many new houses are built in their areas, without having to meet centrally imposed targets.

Whilst it was well known that this change would happen in the first year of a new government, the announcement of the revocation has caused consternation to Councils up and down the country, who, like CDC, have been busy consulting on

where the centrally-imposed housing should be put.

What a Government gives with one hand, it usually takes away with another.

In this case, to encourage house building, the Government is considering giving Local Authorities a grant equating to six years' Council Tax for each new dwelling consented to. With central government grants to Local Authorities being slashed, there is a significant concern that many local authorities will be tempted to allow 'development at any cost', especially of high-band homes, simply as a means of maintaining local services. Observing how these changes pan out in the context of 'localism' and 'the Big Society' promises to be fascinating.

Blue Plaques

Tom Rolt and Tooley's boatyard

Tom Rolt (11 February 1910 – 9 May 1974), whose home base was Tooley's boatyard between 1939 and 1951, is regarded as the founding father of leisure cruising on Britain's inland waterways. In 1946, he was a co-founder of the Inland Waterways Association, whose aims were to campaign for proper management, conservation, funding and restoration of the inland waterways. This year's Banbury Canal Day (Sunday 3rd October) will be a celebration of the centenary of Tom Rolt's birth and his lifetime achievements.

Long before the current green movement, Tom Rolt was aware of the importance of our environment. In the 1930s he was writing about the relationship between modern technology and the natural world, in many periodicals and notably in his book "High Horse Riderless". A lover of craftsmanship in motor cars, Rolt was joint founder of The Vintage Sports Car Club in 1934. In 1973 he was co-founder of the Association for Industrial Archaeology, having done much to popularise the subject over the preceding 25 years with his many books

and biographies on great engineers. It is ironic that the town that Rolt saw as home for over 12 years has since relentlessly targeted its industrial heritage for redevelopment.

In the next issue of the Newsletter we will reveal how Banbury was connected to Tom Rolt's other passion and to the birth of a new worldwide movement.

Banbury Bridge

Bridge No.76

Between the canal and railway bridges on Bridge Street the section over the former mill stream is officially designated by Network Rail as Bridge 76. There are two things of note about Bridge 76. One is the neglect that has allowed a small sycamore tree and other vegetation to take root, fracturing the brickwork of the northern cutwater. The other is that Bridge 76 predates both the railway and canal impressively – for lurking beneath the widened road deck are the two surviving ribbed, gothic arches of Banbury's 13th-century bridge which at one time had seven arches. Network Rail are being approached with a view to getting them to remove the vegetation and restore the bridge to sound condition. Watch this space.

Outside the town

World Heritage Site Status for RAF Upper Heyford?

Following the last Government's abandonment of its Tentative List of candidate World Heritage Sites, one of the first acts of the Coalition Government was to invite nominations for a new Tentative List. One of the 38 nominations accepted by the Government for the new Long List, of candidate sites (which include Merthyr Tydfil and Blackpool) has been the former RAF Upper Heyford, nominated as: *"the best preserved of any site involved in the global strategy of Mutually Assured Destruction. Its nuclear capability and state of preservation makes it the outstanding example of its*

type in western Europe if not in the world. Its nuclear capability and state of preservation makes it the outstanding example of its type in western Europe if not in the world."

Coincidentally, last March, Rob Kinchin-Smith (Chairman) had written on his own behalf to CDC suggesting that they nominate the site, together with RAF Bicester (Europe's best-preserved inter-war bomber airfield.). The reasoning behind the suggestion was that these two sites are Cherwell's only sites of genuine international heritage interest and, between the two of them, they could become a heritage hub with national and international education and tourism potential. CDC did not pursue the initiative, but an Oxford-based group, the Oxford Trust for Contemporary History, independently nominated RAF Heyford.

Whilst the site's new owners, the Dorchester Group, are undecided whether or not to support the bid, they have publicly been very supportive of the site's heritage. Rob Kinchin-Smith has written again to CDC, asking that they support the bid, stressing how unusual it would be for them not to, given the very real regeneration and tourism benefits that World Heritage Status confers. Initial reaction has varied from neutral to openly hostile. Official concerns have focused principally on the implications for the redevelopment of the site. Unofficial reaction has included the slating of the nomination as 'ridiculous'.

The Society hopes that opinion will shift once it is realised that World Heritage Site status would bring no additional statutory controls over and above those already in existence due to the site's existing conservation area designation, its numerous listed buildings and the extensive area that is already a Scheduled Monument. Existing World Heritage Sites are not only such iconic structures such as the Taj Mahal and Pyramids, they also include the post-war town planning of Le Havre, the Cornish Mining Landscape and the desolate industrial terrain of Blaenavon, Gwent. In each case, these places have turned a local liability into an international asset,

with significant and demonstrable benefits to tourism, education, inward investment and local pride.

Parsons Street Party

Celebrating pedestrianisation in Parsons Street

Cherwell District Council's Old Town Party took place on Saturday July 17th to mark the completion of pedestrianisation in Parsons Street and the market. By all accounts it was a great success. Rob Kinchin Smith, Civic Society chairman, attended the party and wrote this to the Banbury Cake.

Letter from BCS Chairman printed in the Banbury Cake

Cherwell District Council, the traders and performers really are to be congratulated for putting on a truly magnificent event. For the first time the newly-pedestrianised Parsons Street really demonstrated its potential to be a key space for local people and visitors. Everybody there seemed truly amazed that such events were actually taking place in Banbury. We must all now work together to ensure that the atmosphere and colour provided by the street trading, musicians and entertainers is not limited to a single, one-off event, but that it instead becomes a regular feature of a resurgent Old Town.

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

Banbury Civic Society Membership

Help us recruit new members. Membership forms can be obtained from the Membership Secretary.
More members = more action.
More members = a louder voice.
Help us help Banbury.

Please write to:

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