

## 50 years of the Civic Trust

The Society is affiliated to the Civic Trust, a national umbrella organisation for over 750 similar societies throughout the country and to which it provides a wide range of support services. 2007 is the Trust's 50th anniversary year. It seeks to influence policy, primarily by delivering campaigns on national issues. One such issue is the report recently released by the "Barker Team" at the Treasury on the Review of Land Use Planning. There is much concern that the report contains an unbalanced view of the planning system giving too much weight to business interests and reducing the voice of the wider community. If implemented proposals would give additional powers to regional planning bodies to review Green Belt boundaries. It also contains recommendations to remove controls on out-of-town retail developments, which would affect small independent shops, so undermining urban regeneration and weakening the vitality of local high streets.

The Civic Trust also considered another planning tactic, which is being used by developers – that is of having two identical applications running concurrently – one before the Local Planning Authority to run its normal course and the other on appeal to the Secretary of State with the clear intention of placing extra pressure on the L.P.A.

In addition the Civic Trust has long argued for injustices in the planning system to be remedied such as the absence of a Third Party Right of Appeal which works against the interests of the Local Community and its watchdogs such as the Civic Society. The Trust also argued against urban gardens being included in the definition of 'brownfield' land which encourages over development of suburban sites.

The Civic Trust has provided an increasingly effective forum for highlighting the many threats to both the urban and rural heritage.

## Flooding Control

### A key to the town's future development

The recent news that the town's proposed flood alleviation scheme may still go ahead is greatly welcomed. The control of flooding would be of

enormous benefit to the town, opening the possibility of putting to better use many areas of the town where the flooding risk, at present, is too high. One project to which the Society attaches high priority is the Multi-Model Interchange between trains and buses at the railway station with improved car parking, which could only sensibly go ahead if there were to be no repetition of the 1998 floods.

However it appears that the proposal will only proceed if all its funding is first secured. With the cost rising year by year and the government funding having dropped by £3 million, it seems that local businesses and potential developers are to be looked to to bridge the difference. Local businesses are already heavily taxed and developers will not be interested if large financial contributions are required for planning consent to develop difficult areas. Would it not be better to make a start by holding a public inquiry now and go ahead with the necessary preliminaries in the expectation that more realistic financial proposals will then come forward and the defences be completed with much less delay?

## Highways and traffic

### Traffic Advisory Committee Report

People in Banbury will have noticed a good deal of work going on to improve roads and junctions in certain parts of the town. Though these roadworks can slow down traffic, their completion should improve flow. Particularly noticeable at present is the work in Grimsbury just to the east of the railway bridge. The anticipated increases in traffic, resulting from the housing developments in the old cattle market area, have moved the County Council to undertake major improvements of the Middleton Road/Merton Street junction. Co-ordinated traffic light control of the whole complex of junctions at the end of the Middleton road is planned. The problems of traffic in this area are exacerbated by the use many motorists make of the Middleton Road as a short cut to and from the M40.

The Traffic Advisory Committee gives representatives of a number of Banbury organisations the opportunity to express the views of their members to those who hold the

purse strings and make decisions. Inevitably there are differences of opinion where the interests of road users seem to clash. *Civic Society members can always give the secretary any points they would like to make about travel within the town so that they can be raised at the next meeting of Traffic Advisory Committee.*

## Planning

Falling over the festive season, December and January are common months for launching proposals. For Christmas this year Banbury was served up with three ill-tasting planning morsels. Two of the planning applications – for 44, West Street and the Marlborough Arms – were both for complete demolition and replacement with 2 and 13 period-style flats respectively. The third contentious application was a variation to an earlier scheme approved in 2003 and again in 2005, involving the demolition of all but the central range of Neithrop House and the addition of two large new ranges to create a block of 13 flats and a townhouse. For various reasons, including the Council's desire to be seen to be turning round planning applications within the Government's target of 8 weeks, all were to be approved by planning officers using their delegated powers, without recourse to the North Area Planning Committee.



Above: Neithrop House as it is today and Below: as it will look if the developers have their way.



Regarding their conservation status: 44, West Street lies within the new Grimsbury Conservation Area, adopted by the CDC's Executive on January 8th 2007. The Marlborough Arms lies in the extended Banbury

Conservation Area, adopted in October 2004. It is also on CDC's Local List. Neithrop House has also been within the extended Banbury Conservation Area since 2004. Its national importance is recognised by it being a Grade II listed building.

Despite calls to have all three applications brought to Committee, the Marlborough Arms application was approved under officers' delegated powers on January 5th. Councillors were more successful with 44, West Street and Neithrop House, both of which were rescheduled to come to Committee on February 1st.

In the time gained, the internal representations of the Council's Conservation Officer (Dr Rose Todd) surfaced, as did representations from the eight statutory consultees for the Listed Building Consent application (including English Heritage, the Victorian Society, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings et al.). The unanimous view was that the proposals would be injurious and should be refused.

In the event, the February 1st committee meeting was far from routine. Many Members were clearly unhappy, with Ward Members Cllrs. Kieron Mallon and Anne Bonner being particularly vocal. Votes finally cast by the Committee were 8 to 2 against the Neithrop House proposal and 11 to 0 against the application for 44, West Street.



This positive turn of events was too late for the Marlborough Arms application however. Neithrop House also remains under threat from the 'live' planning consents granted in 2003 and 2005. The results of February 1st may nevertheless signal more than just a couple of small, and possibly pyrrhic, victories for conservation. At the very least, the Grimsbury result has set a strong precedent that may halt the historic erosion of this newly-designated Conservation Area.

Much more strategic have been the questions these cases have raised with councillors about conservation and planning decision-making – Is it appropriate that demolitions in Cherwell conservation areas can be approved without recourse to elected members? Why has CDC committed resources to appointing specialist

officers and to creating and extending conservation areas, if members are advised that they cannot resist demolition? Why are members not normally advised of the recommendations of their appointed conservation staff and how is it that they can be recommended to approve applications when this is in direct contradiction to the expert opinion of their conservation officers and their statutory consultees? Only time will tell on these issues, but on February 1st it felt that a corner may possibly have been turned.

### Open Forum

As a further means of keeping in touch, the management committee held an open forum following their March meeting, when we were pleased to see a good turnout. The discussion covered a wide range of topics. Concern was expressed by members at the state of repair of two town centre buildings and it was agreed to draw these to the attention of the Council. A number of members were strongly critical of what appears to be developing policy at District and County Councils to re-site the Library to the Spiceball area. Whilst the existing library building is outdated and the building not easily adaptable, it was thought that the Upper High Street and Cross area was preferable for the typical library user. The Spiceball site would add

to the town's imbalance created by the Castle Quay shopping Centre, whereas either of the Calthorpe Street car parks would provide adequate space for a new building with easy access whether on foot or by vehicle. A well designed modern building on part of one of the car parks would bring added activity to this part of the town and reduce the impact of the existing rather bleak area of tarmac.

Have the council sought the views of Banbury people before they proceed with behind the scenes planning and the subsequent inevitable assertion that nothing else is feasible?

### AGM

## SAVE at the AGM

This year's talk at the AGM will be given by Adam Wilkinson, Secretary of the national organisation SAVE since 2001. He is also on the board of 'Maintain our Heritage' and the Council of Europa Nostra, the pan-European heritage federation and the Churches Conservation Trust's conservation working group.

SAVE was founded in 1975 as a public reaction

to an exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1974, demonstrating the dramatic post-war loss of historic country houses. SAVE's purpose is to protect historic buildings and facilitate the creation of sustainable futures for them. Current campaigns include the Smithfield Market in London and Pathfinder, the government's initiative to demolish up to 57,000 terraced homes in the Midlands and North.

The Trustees of SAVE include broadcaster Dan Cruikshank and journalist Simon Jenkins. The President is Marcus Binney, former editor of Country Life and currently architecture correspondent for the Times. Ptolemy Dean, architect of the television series "Restoration" is on the committee.

As can be seen by the names associated with SAVE, it is a society with an accomplished voice.

The committee hopes that lessons learned from SAVE can be used to protect Banbury's own historic buildings and we need as many people as possible to be involved so please come along and enjoy listening to a dedicated and enthusiastic speaker giving a most interesting talk ...with lots of pictures!

**The AGM starts at 7.00pm at the Dupuis Centre (entrance in Dashwood Road). The SAVE talk starting at 8.00pm so invite a friend or two, three....Entry is free and there will be refreshments.**

## WANTED

The Committee is looking for volunteers to promote the aims of the Society:

- Publicity – to advertise the activities of the society to the widest possible audience within the town and surrounding area.
- Events organising – to devise and arrange meetings and outings of interest to members.

*Offers of help gratefully received by the Membership Secretary (address below)*

## 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