

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting of Banbury Electors held on Monday, 07 March 2022 at 6.30 pm held at Banbury Town Hall.

Present: Shaida Hussain (Town Mayor and Chairman of the Meeting)
The following Town Councillors: Beere, Biegel, Bunce, Cherry, Colegrave, Garrett, Hodgson, Kilsby, Mallon, Mears, Reeves, Richards, Strangwood.
One member of the public.

Officers: Mark Hassall (Town Clerk)
Paul Almond (Director of Environment)
Martyn Surfleet (Executive Officer)

1 **Notice to Convene the Meeting**

The Town Mayor welcomed the electors of Banbury to the Meeting. He noted that the Council was required by law to hold an Annual Town Meeting and it provided a forum for residents to hear what the Town Council had been doing and for Councillors to hear views of the town.

2 **Apologies for absence**

Councillor Biegel, Councillor Bishop, Councillor Garrett, Councillor Kilsby.

3 **Minutes of the last Meeting**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on the 07 March 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor.

4 **Attendance Records**

The Town Mayor reported that the attendance record of individual Members of the Town Council had been circulated with the Agenda papers. There were no questions.

5 **Committee Reports**

a) Report of the Planning Committee presented by the Chairman, Councillor Tony Ilott.

“Madam Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am pleased to present this report as Chairman of the Town Council's Planning Committee.

The Planning Committee considers planning applications, traffic orders, and any statutory consultations that may be ongoing.

More than 300 applications have been dealt with in the past year with just over 30 over those being the subject of reports to this committee.

Major applications for housing on the periphery of the town and for commercial development to the east of the M40 at Huscote Farm have been dealt with by responding to CDC consultations. The latter is now to be determined following a public local inquiry conducted by a Government Inspector commencing in April.

We have been consulted by Oxfordshire County Council on the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan and most recently on the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan for Banbury.

Regarding the latter Banbury Town Council has responded that

- The Town Council understands the concept of improving the cycling and walking infrastructure in and around the town to try to increase the usage of these modes of transport but doubts if much of the detail is deliverable, affordable, or acceptable to residents and businesses. The specific cycling proposals often seem to include a reduction in carriageway or pavement width. The loss of carriageway for cars, buses and HGVs can only result in increased road congestion and impact upon safety. Increased congestion for cars will not result in modal shift but only add to frustration and annoyance for those road users and potential health impacts from increased queueing.
- The Town Council questions whether these proposals are truly deliverable with respect to cost, ownership of land and acceptability to residents. Local dissatisfaction at future detailed consultation points with modal filters, loss of on-street parking, etc will result in delay or abandonment of proposals.
- Many of the specific route proposals indicate that design solutions will emerge as a result of detailed design work. Whilst this is understood, the individual acceptability of these proposals is not known. Banbury Town Council insists that it be consulted on these later design solutions. Similarly, it is thought essential that affected residents and businesses are also consulted on these emerging schemes before implementation.
- We question why certain routes/locations are not included in this document but are said to be delayed for consideration to a future iteration, namely most of the length of Oxford Road (which is an obvious desire line and for much of its length has enough verge width to create a segregated cycle way), and the Hennef Way/Wildmere Road junction (which is almost impossible to safely cycle through due to traffic volumes and speed)
- We are concerned about the often-used “solution” of loss of carriageway width and/or removal of turn lanes to provide a segregated cycle lane. This will increase queue lengths, increase congestion and air pollution and reduce safety. In addition, it may increase difficulty for the manoeuvring of HGVs and buses.
- We have concerns about loss of on-street parking where this is indicated
- The Town Council believes that the concentration of this Plan on cycling and walking will divert the County Council from its essential role in promoting and protecting public transport. A high-quality public transport network is likely to be far more effective in achieving a modal shift.
- The document is misleading in hiding the potential introduction of modal filters and LTNs. We believe that modal filters are unlikely to be acceptable to local residents and businesses.

Another major issue this year has been ongoing consultations on the emerging Cherwell Local Plan and we are awaiting the principal consultation on the draft Plan that CDC will proceed with to inquiry.

The paper discusses a number of issues that affect the area including; climate change, new housing, retail and town centres, the natural environment, community facilities, design and the choices for the plan.

The plan shows areas and sites for development, such as for new homes, offices, shops, and community facilities. It sets out how valuable historic and natural environments would be protected.

The plan covers the location of employment land, the type of commercial use, and public transport.

We would like to see that start-up companies and other small unit users are catered for in new commercial development and that new development should provide a percentage of the new floor space in units under 100 sq. metres.

With regard to the current situation in the town centre and the number of shops that are closing, we agree there should be more flexibility within our town centres for different uses including residential development while protecting key shopping areas.

It is considered that additional affordable housing should be provided above current rates whenever it is financially possible to do so.

We want to ensure that the traffic issues of Banbury are dealt with by identifying the need for a new link road from the south of the town to the motorway and/or new junctions.

All new development must deal with M40 junction capacity and the need for a new link road.

The proposed development around Nethercote, east of the M40, is a major issue.

We would like to limit development around Banbury to protect its landscape setting and maintain separation between the town and surrounding villages.

The Planning Committee notes the work of the Banbury Traffic Advisory Committee which brings together members and officers from the county, district and town councils with representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, bus companies, rail users, and Civic Society, to discuss all transport issues in relation to the town.

The Planning Committee also provides representatives on the Town Centre Partnership. This is a partnership of organisations that deliver services in the town centre.

The aim of the partnership is to improve Banbury Town Centre for the benefit of the people of Banbury and to create of a desirable, and attractive place to live, work, visit, and invest. To finish I'd like to thank the committee for its hard work and commitment."

b) Report of the General Services Committee presented by the Chairman, Councillor Martin Phillips.

"Madam Mayor, Ladies & Gentlemen,

I am pleased to present the annual report of the General Services Committee which manages the day-to-day services and facilities provided by the town council.

The general services committee is the council's 'green' committee.

It oversees....

Parks, open spaces and play areas that include the maintenance and management of 1000 acres of grassland plus the provision of play areas and play equipment.

We maintain around 11,000 trees, and five and a half miles of hedgerows.

Our five principal parks include Spiceball Park and People's Park

There are twelve neighbourhood parks, 52 play and teenage areas, and 90 open spaces.

We have five sportsgrounds – at Horton View, Easington Rec, Moorfields, Hardwick Fields and Chandos Close.

We have six allotment sites. Four are managed by allotment associations and two are run directly by the town council.

We have two cemeteries – at Southam Road and Hardwick Hill.

In addition, we look after St Mary's Churchyard.

Let's look at what we've achieved in the past 12 months.

One project that has attracted a lot of attention is our contribution to the Queens Green Canopy.

We have planted almost 50 trees at two sites that are positive additions to a project that is being supported nationwide.

We have planted an avenue of oak trees at Hanwell View and a circle of maple trees at Crouch Hill and both have been formally adopted by canopy project organisers.

They are now on the project's official map which shows all trees planted for the canopy across the UK and we have received official plaques recognising our contributions.

The canopy is a national tree planting initiative designed to be a living tribute to Queen Elizabeth II.

It was set up as part of last year's platinum jubilee celebrations to mark the Queen's 70-year reign, and was planned to finish on December 31.

But after Her Majesty's death it became a memorial project and its run was extended until the end of this month – March 2023.

More than a million trees have so far been planted around the country by councils, organisations, and individuals – and the finished 'national forest' will be a lasting reminder of the Queen's outstanding service to her country and her people.

We are pleased to be part of that.

Moving on, we are installing life-saving defibrillators at our five sports grounds so that athletes who suffer cardiac arrests can receive treatment during the crucial period before emergency services reach the scene.

The defibs will be attached to the pavilions at the sports fields and the move is in line with the council's commitment to encourage people to get active and play more sport.

We often read of people with no history of heart problems who suddenly collapse during a sports event and the defibs will help them and anyone else in the area who suffers a heart attack. They are a good investment costing just £7,500 over ten years.

Work has commenced on the design and refurbishment of the walled garden in People's Park to make that an added attraction and restore some history to the park.

St Mary's Churchyard landscape refurbishment proposals are also in hand.

Our contractors are delivering as they should and we have no issues or concerns with the contractor's performance.

The work programme is being delivered as per the schedules.

The Park Ranger team has continued to keep up to date with Health and Safety inspections in children's play areas and have overseen any necessary repairs.

We have continued our programme of up-dating and maintaining our play areas. Last year we renovated all play areas identified in the annual play inspection report marked as urgent.

Tackling climate change is the target in everything we do.

What's happening isn't always obvious to the public, but we are doing what we can as fast as we can – and the Queen's Canopy trees are an example of that.

Climate change action includes the creation of municipal compost bays at Spital Farm in Grimsbury. The compost will be used by the council in its parks and open spaces to reduce the use of herbicides. The move will cut landfill disposal and reduce the amount of green refuse taken away in skips.

We are continuing projects that we have already started.

In a joint venture with the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust this council is involved in a wildlife makeover project that has transformed the River Cherwell in Spiceball Park.

The project began in October 2015 and has opened up the riverside and improved natural habitats for fish, birds and river plants.

New woodland trails have been laid out and these are proving popular with members of the public.

That work has been extended to Hanwell Brook Wetland Area, Bridge Street Park and the Mineral Railway.

A new 100-yard hedge was planted in the Spring last year. It was a joint project with BBOWT and Banbury Trees.

450 native mixed hedgerow plants - with a lean towards fruit and flowers to help the birds and insects – were planted, strengthening this wildlife corridor through Banbury.

In other areas, our two cemeteries are a credit to the town.

They are maintained in immaculate condition and are true places of rest. Land purchased to extend Hardwick Hill Cemetery is being laid out with climate change and bio-diversity in mind until we need it for burials.

The town's allotments are in great demand.

Cemeteries and allotments are 'green' and bio-diverse areas.

The General Services Committee is committed to providing high quality services at the lowest possible cost to council tax payers while concentrating on truly green issues.

Myself and my colleagues will continue to strive to achieve all that is best for Banbury.

I would like to conclude by thanking the members of the general services committee for their valuable contributions during the year and I also recognise the superb work done by the council's officers and staff members who have conscientiously carried out their duties for the benefit of the town."

**c) Report of the Resources Committee presented by the Vice-Chairman Councillor
Alana Powell**

“Madam Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen.

As Vice-Chairman of the Resources Committee, it gives me much pleasure to present this report.

The committee is responsible for

- Finance
- Property
- Policy
- Personnel matters

Banbury Town Council concentrates on making our town a better place in which to live, work, and visit.

Let’s have a look at what we do.

This committee deals with money – income, outgoings and council tax.

Financially, this council is in good health. Expenditure is within forecast and no major issues or concerns have been identified.

This council has an enviable record of low taxation while providing excellent services.

We have set our priorities and can be proud that we have provided and will continue to provide those excellent services with a minimum council tax increase.

This year, however, costs that are affecting all businesses and households have forced a rise in the town’s portion of the total council tax bill for 2023/24.

We have, by prudent planning and careful costing, limited the rise to two per cent. This means that the current figure for Band D properties will go up by £2.49 a year to £127.05.

That works out to £10.58 a month – and that is per household, not per person.

For that, this council provides and maintains all of the town’s parks and play areas, cemeteries, sports grounds, allotments, bus shelters, dog litter bins, and organises the full calendar of free annual events.

The parks maintenance programme continues with new paths and play area revamps in the budget recently passed.

We have also supported the business and traders of the town centre by working with and supporting the Banbury BiD whose members are the real retail and commercial heart of our town.

Something new in this council year has been the creation of the Warm Spaces scheme that helps people stay warm without running their home heating systems all day.

This council has offered and awarded grants to enable local communities, clubs and other organisations provide the warm spaces.

The council’s grants scheme offers up to £500 to enable charities and other groups maintain warm spots in parts of the town where they are most needed.

The grants are aimed at organisations that already run daily or weekly meetings such as coffee mornings, activity sessions etc so that they can open more often or extend their current opening hours to provide warmth for longer – particularly during extreme cold periods.

At the last count we had 16 places offering warmth and good company at various times during each week.

The café in People's Park has opened. It is an amenity that was requested by the public and delivered by this council – as were the toilets that opened a year ago.

This council is also looking at alternative energy solutions at the town hall to reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

The council has also invested in a simplified booking system for halls and sports facilities and details will be on our website in the near future.

I touched earlier on our annual events.

This council has, over more than 20 years, organised a wide range of annual events. They are family days out – free at the point of entry – and they include the district show, food fairs, music festival, canal festival, Christmas Lights switch-on, Town Mayor's Sunday, Armed Forces Day, Battle of Britain Day, and Remembrance Sunday.

Last year the district show was replaced by a three-day platinum jubilee event and this year it will be replaced by a coronation special.

The events attract many thousands of people.

I mention the events for a reason.

A big issue in town at the moment is the traditional Old Town

People ask 'what is the council doing about it?'

This council is aware of the situation and if there was a simple solution we would have helped to provide it.

It's not just Banbury. Traditional Towns across the country are facing challenges.

What can we do? We can offer support and work in partnership with the BiD.

We and they are concerned that Policies to restrict car use, access and parking in the town may add to the problem and a robust response to the County Councils proposals has been submitted.

Cllr Kieron Mallon invited the Banbury BiD to give evidence at the County Council's scrutiny committee of the importance of Banbury's town centre trade to a wide rural hinterland.

A lot of people find it cheaper and more convenient to drive in, pay to park, than to come by bus or taxi.

And if there two or more of you, or say a mother and children, it is even cheaper and very much more convenient to drive in than use public transport.

We must remember that most of our rural hinterland does not have a bus service. This is not new, the decline in rural busses goes back over the last thirty years.

It's interesting that the most expensive council car park, the Market Place, is nearly always full and the NCP car park on the old brewery (malthouse Walk) site is busy most days – and NCP parking fees are not the cheapest around. Those car parks are convenient for people who want to shop.

As are the on street carparking for both commuters and residents.

Changes in people's shopping habits over the past decades have a part to play, Supermarkets have taken over.

Street markets have declined for the same reasons. Market traders must evolve. Not just in Banbury but elsewhere too. They can't beat supermarket choice and prices.

People talk too about councils encouraging shops to come to Banbury.

Councils don't own the properties in High Street/Parson's Street etc. Councils don't set the rents, set the rates or draw up leases. As for business rates many small businesses are exempt from that tax

So, is the decline in town centres something that can be reversed?

We believe they can, Not overnight. There's no magic wand.

It's more likely that town centres will become, once again a true mixed economy. Retail, office and – as is already happening – become more residential.

Increased quality residential use of land will provide the footfall, residents with money to spend in the town.

Entrepreneurs are already moving in to empty units and the breadth of food shopping is better than it has been for decades.

This, in the long term, will see a different type of retail, social and leisure use as people who live in the town centre will walk to shops and not drive to out-of-town retail parks. But we still need those in the suburbs and villages to be able to access our town.

By encouraging town centre living – as this council has and will continue to do when consulted by the district planning authority – we will see a true mix, as in yesteryear.

So, as we are a distinct voice with county council policies that could hinder access to our town and businesses, we will be robust and scrutinise the proposals emanating from the District council on economy and regeneration and if they have merit we will support and work with them.

Our allegiance is to the town, its residents and businesses, not other tiers of local government

In the meantime, Banbury Town Council works to make the town an attractive destination.

Going back to our events, we organise them to increase the footfall in our town to help local traders. That was the reason we started the events 20 years ago. To combat the already declining town centre.

They are successful. They bring many thousands of people into the town – past Gateway, past the retail park, past the supermarkets.

The idea is that while people are at our events they will walk around town and use the shops, pubs and restaurants, in the daytime and in the evening.

The town council produces a town guide with editorial content that shows Banbury in a positive way. We get requests for that from far afield.

We work in partnership with Banbury BID and CDC to promote the town.

We're doing all we can, and will continue to do so.

It just remains for me to thank all committee members for their time, application and ideas. And we will continue in the future to do all that is right for Banbury.”

6 Questions from Electors

There were no questions.

The Meeting ended at 6.59pm.