

Banbury Town Council

Annual Report 2021-2022

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CLOSE TO THE PEOPLE

Banbury is one of the biggest town councils in the country with an annual budget of around two and a half million pounds. The council strives to improve the quality of life for the people of Banbury and works to enhance the attractiveness of the town as a place in which to live, work, visit and invest. Its objectives are

- * To provide a strong and independent voice for Banbury
- * To provide high standard and cost-effective services
- * To promote Banbury as a clean, safe, welcoming and prosperous town
- * To preserve and enhance the traditions, character and identity of the town
- * To work in partnership with others to achieve more for Banbury

Banbury Town Council was formed in 2000. It meant Banbury once again had its own voice after 26 years of being run by Cherwell District Council. The town had been without its own council since 1974 when the former Banbury Borough Council was disbanded under Local Government Re-organisation.

Banbury showed its support for Ukraine by lighting the town hall blue and yellow and raising the Ukrainian flag.



REVIEW OF THE YEAR BY THE TOWN MAYOR (Cllr Shaida Hussain)

I enjoyed my second term as mayor of Banbury and the experience gained during my first year in office in 2018 came in very useful.



Covid played a part in limiting my activities but it was still a busy and eventful period.

As the year progressed and virus restrictions eased, requests for my attendance became plentiful and I accepted as many invitations as possible.

I opened a number of shops including the Orinoco charity store in High Street – and attended the annual events that took place as coronavirus restrictions were relaxed.

A new event, Emergency Services Day in Spiceball Park, was educational as well as entertaining. The town's 999 services came together with demonstrations and exhibitions – and visitors, especially children, were able sit in fire engines and police cars.

Armed Forces Day was fairly low key as was Battle of Britain Day but Remembrance Sunday was back to its impressive best with a full street procession and wreath-laying ceremony.

It was good to see the return of Banbury Fair. I was at the official opening and walked around the amusements with a golden key – the magic key that gave free rides on whatever I touched with it.

I attended the launch of Banbury's Christmas film in November – arriving on the Hook Norton Brewery dray. Then, a week later, it was the always popular Christmas Lights switch-on which saw big crowds, great entertainment, and a local celebrity to press the magic button.



An important part of the mayoral year is raising funds for charities and good causes and despite it being a difficult period I raised £1327 which will go to my nominated charities Katharine House Hospice and Sands (the Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society).

I decided to walk for Katharine House Hospice and took on the challenge of doing 20,000 steps per day for 30 days. It was a real test of stamina but worth it because it raised £545.

I easily achieved 10,000 steps during working hours, so I needed to walk in the evenings or early mornings to make up the remaining steps.

I started my walks with music in my ears but as the days wore on I left my headphones at home and listened to the world around me. Birds singing, the crunch of twigs, sometimes rain lashing the ground, and the wind humming through the trees. Every step was full of life.

Exhaustion crept in for the last ten days but with friends joining me, we powered on together. I discovered the joy of walking and highly recommended this form of exercise – so go out and explore. We are very fortunate to have wonderful countryside and beautiful parks around us.

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE RESOURCES COMMITTEE (Cllr Kieron Mallon)

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. There are many things that contribute to being a happy town – and this council sees its job as bringing all the different parts together.

This committee deals with finance – and we have an enviable record of prudent spending and low taxation while providing excellent services. This year, however, after 11 years without a tax rise, increased costs, uncertainty in local government in Oxfordshire, and preparing for life after covid, have forced a rise in the town's portion of the total council tax bill for 2022/23.

It will be an increase of two per cent (that's an extra £2.44 a year)
It means that the current £122.12 a year for Band D properties will go up to £124.56 a year – the equivalent of a 20p a month rise. And that is per household – not per person.

The money pays for cemeteries, sports pitches and pavilions, parks and open spaces, children's play areas, the town's free annual events, allotments, bus shelters, dog waste bins and litter bins. Financially, this council is in good health and this committee's expenditure is within forecast.



The council's events programme has been decimated by covid restrictions over the past two years but some events did go ahead during the past 12 months. Our annual civic events including Armed Forces Day and Battle of Britain Day were held despite the COVID situation - and Remembrance Sunday was back to the full procedure.

The lights switch-on before Christmas attracted good crowds. I'd like to say a few words about the new Christmas lights scheme for the town centre. CDC withdrew from the joint funding arrangement before Christmas 2020, and they also withdrew from the storage and installation of the existing lights. This year the town council assumed full responsibility for the town centre Christmas lights. We bought new lights and though there were teething problems they were quickly overcome and we are now well set up for future years.

There was also a good turn-out for the finish of the first stage of the women's tour cycle race in South Bar in September. It brought a lot of new people to the town and hopefully local businesses prospered from the event.

A full programme of events is planned for the coming year and our celebrations for the Queen's platinum jubilee will be second to none. Regarding the jubilee celebrations, a small working group was formed to oversee this and report back to the Committee. The group comprises the mayor, deputy mayor, high steward, and the chairmen of resources and general services committees as ex-officio members.

This council was approached last year by a number of third parties who wanted to organise events in our parks. They included the annual Banbury Playdays in People's Park and Princess Diana Park, a production by Cherwell Theatre Company in People's Park, Hatwell's funfair in PDP, a Park Run in Spiceball Park, and an Emergency Services Day in Spiceball Park in September to thank blue light services for their work during the pandemic.

A Community Governance Review is to be carried out by Cherwell District Council.

This review is the process that allows CDC to make changes to the governance of towns and parishes in the district and to ensure that such governance continues to reflect the identities of local towns and villages.

There has been a significant amount of housing development on the urban fringes of Banbury over the last few years and the problem to be addressed is the expansion of the town into adjoining rural parishes. New housing developments can often lead to existing parish boundaries becoming irrelevant as new housing estates are built across the boundaries.

In such circumstances, the review needs to consider the boundaries of existing parishes in the interests of convenient and effective local government and to reflect the identities and interests of the community. We therefore asked CDC to include Banbury in the Community Governance Review. It should be noted that asking for an issue to be included in the review doesn't commit either the town council or CDC to make changes. It just enables CDC to carry out consultation on the issues.

This committee also received a copy of this council's Four Year Plan – our financial forecast. It incorporates the proposed 2022/23 budget as the base case, and projects forward using the current economic environment and the council's agreed plans to date.

It is envisaged that this document will evolve with the direction taken by the council in the future and the forecast has been prepared in line with the council's current reserves policy that aims to maintain general reserve at around 50% of net budgeted annual running costs.

Finally, we have undertaken a full review to enable this council to face the future of local government whatever might happen. Already, with the separation of the partnership between Cherwell and Oxfordshire councils, this foresight could pay dividends. When changes occur, some extra responsibilities may devolve to larger town councils such as Banbury. We believe that finance must follow function and we must be flexible and capable of facing the future.

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE GENERAL SERVICES COMMITTEE (Cllr John Colegrave)

The General Services Committee manages the day-to-day services and facilities provided by the town council.

We are the council's 'green' committee and we own and maintain parks, open spaces and playgrounds that include 1000 acres of grassland plus 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 Country 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. They provide six full-sized football pitches, two mini pitches, one cricket square and one all-weather wicket.

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

The new community building and toilet block in People's Park is now complete and open to the public. Landscape planting around the building is finished thanks to the in-house green team. Work has also started on the refreshment facility in the park and on the design and refurbishment of the walled garden to make that an added attraction and restore some history to the park.



Cllr Colegrave

To commemorate the Queens Platinum Jubilee this year, a band of daffodil bulbs was planted each side of the central path underneath the avenue of cherry trees.

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 last year to extend Hardwick Hill Cemetery is being laid out with climate change and bio-diversity in mind until we need it for burials.

The drainage scheme to prevent water run-off from Princess Diana Park into Mold Crescent was completed in September by Oxfordshire County Council and our Landscape Officer worked with Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) volunteers to sow wild flower seed on the site.

The 4th Corner Landscape contract is being delivered and officers have no issues or concerns with the contractor's performance. Service delivery is very good and 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.

Following the retirement of Jeannie O'Brien at Christmas, an internal advert was placed for someone to take on the aviary maintenance role. Pete Holly is now doing the job outside of his duties as a park ranger.

We are concentrating on 'close-to-home' climate change issues and continuing projects that we have already started. In a joint venture with the BBOWT this council is involved in a wildlife makeover project that has transformed 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.

4th Corner are working on a number of specific open space and biodiversity projects. They have started a significant tree planting and biodiversity project at Spiceball Park. That project will add habitat, food and cover for wildlife. Crab apple and hazel trees have been planted on slopes and banks to reduce soil erosion and manage surface water. Planting smaller native trees which are hardy and tolerate high drainage and low nutrient levels will help to ensure success. Planting can also take place around the trees, using bulbs such as snowdrops and bluebells and plugs of cowslips and primroses.

A new 100-yard hedge was planted this Spring in a joint project with BBOWT and Banbury Trees. 450 native mixed hedgerow plants with a lean towards fruit and flowers will help attract birds and insects while strengthening this wildlife corridor through Banbury. It is bio-diversity at its best.

Going back to the café and toilets in People's Park. It's a 'green' project. The toilet building is constructed of sustainable timber and complements the town council's commitment to be climate change active. The café facility will be completed later this year and will 'recycle' an existing building.

Tackling climate change is a partnership with Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council – and CDC has taken the lead in tree planting. 30,000 trees have been planted in and around Banbury since the commitment to tackle climate change was made. They were planted mostly on land acquired by CDC after flood defence work – land that is now known as Banbury Country Park behind the Gateway retail centre. CDC has plans to plant up to three million trees on 3,000 hectares of land by 2045, working with private landlords and other community and public sector partners.

The General Services Committee is committed to providing high quality services while concentrating on truly green issues.

REPORT BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PLANNING COMMITTEE (Cllr Tony Ilott)

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

Perhaps the biggest talking point this year has been the county council's Oxfordshire Plan 2050 which sets out options that will shape the future of the county. It plans for the next 30 years, up to 2050, which is double the length of normal Local Plans.

We agree with the following options:

- a policy setting out sustainable design and construction requirements to be applied to major residential and non-residential development.
- to maximise the use of renewable energy in new developments.
- that the plan should require the most ambitious minimum water efficiency standards.
- the ambition to provide a strategic planning framework for managing flood risk.
- a positive strategy for the protection and enhancement of landscape and townscape features.
- a policy that would assess the impact on the historic environment and heritage assets.
- that the plan should set a minimum target for biodiversity net gain to protect and enhance the natural environment.
- that the plan should focus on the protection and enhancement of the green belt.
- the protection and enhancement of water quality and air quality to create strong and healthy communities.



Cherwell District Council has started work on a new plan for the district called the Cherwell Local Plan Review. The paper discusses a number of issues that affect the area including climate change, new housing, retail and town centres, the natural environment, and community facilities.

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 CDC plan is about the future we are seeking to create. Housing, education, the economy and healthy well-being are the most significant areas.

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.

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 should set sustainable design and construction standards for residential and non-residential development in Cherwell above those required by central government.

We should identify and allocate specific sites for renewable energy generation and use a criteria-based policy to assess proposals for renewable energy generation.

We want to ensure that the traffic issues of Banbury are dealt with as a function of new development 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.

We would like to limit development at Banbury to protect its landscape setting and maintain separation between the town and surrounding villages. We would be looking at protecting the town centre and Banbury's network of green spaces.

Going back to the key objectives we are keen to see policies that address educational attainment and the need for greater training opportunities. The improvement of community and leisure opportunities is also needed.

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

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

319 planning applications were received from January to December 2021.

DATES OF COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS 2022/23

All meetings are held at the Town Hall, Bridge Street, Banbury and commence at 6.30pm unless otherwise stated. The 2023 Annual Meeting will be held on Tuesday 16 May 2023, and the Annual Town Meeting on Monday 6 March 2023.

2022			
Council	General Services	Resources	Planning
Tuesday 17 May Tuesday 21 June Tuesday 20 September Tuesday 15 November	Tuesday 7 June Tuesday 30 August Tuesday 18 October Tuesday 13 December	Tuesday 14 June Tuesday 6 September Tuesday 1 November	Wednesday 4 May Wednesday 25 May Wednesday 22 June Wednesday 20 July Wednesday 17 August Wednesday 14 September Wednesday 12 October Wednesday 9 November Wednesday 14 December
2023			
Tuesday 10 January Tuesday 7 February Tuesday 11 April	Tuesday 17 January Tuesday 21 March	Tuesday 3 January Tuesday 31 January Tuesday 28 March	Wednesday 4 January Wednesday 1 February Wednesday 1 March Wednesday 29 March

Banbury Town Council looks after parks, play areas and open spaces, sports grounds, annual events, the town hall, cemeteries, allotments, bus shelters, civic events, crime prevention initiatives, dog litter bins.

Cherwell District Council oversees building regulations and planning, by-laws, council tax, environmental health, food safety and hygiene, footpaths and bridleways, grants for various activities, home safety, housing, local licensing, markets and fairs, museums, planning, refuse collection, parking, and sports centres.

Oxfordshire County Council is responsible for consumer protection, education, fire service, footpaths and bridleways, libraries, minerals and waste policies, police, refuse disposal, social services, transport and transport planning, highways, traffic, public transport, road safety, street lighting and footway lighting.



TOWN CLERK RETIRES

Banbury's town clerk Mark Recchia has retired after 15 years in the post. Before joining the town council, Mark enjoyed a varied career in local government working for county and metropolitan boroughs in the north of England before joining Cherwell District Council in 1990.

The highlight of Mark's career in Banbury was arranging the visit of The Queen in 2008 as part of the town's 400th Charter Anniversary celebrations. He will continue to live locally and retain his away-from-work interests. He is an active Rotarian, a member of the Cherwell Strollers Walking Football Club and a keen supporter of Banbury United. He will devote more time to all activities.

TOWN HALL VACCINATION CENTRE

A town centre vaccination centre was described as a life-saver by residents who needed covid booster jabs but didn't have their own cars.

The centre opened at Banbury Town Hall in January 2022 after Banbury Town Council persuaded health authorities that a local vaccination clinic was a necessity for families who relied on public transport.

Without the close-at-hand clinic, job-seekers faced journeys of 20 miles or more to places including the Kassam Stadium in Oxford.

The council offered a number of buildings in Banbury and the NHS decided the town hall was the easy-to-get-to choice.

The council-owned sports pavilion at Hanwell Fields was already being used as a covid test centre. The town hall clinic operated for walk-ins and people with appointments booked through the NHS national booking service.

Town councillors were volunteer helpers at the clinic – they took turns to make sure the operation ran smoothly.



PLAY AREA REFURBISHED

A children's play area on Banbury's Timms Estate was given an £80,000 makeover that included the installation of top-of-the-range play equipment and safe soft surfacing.

The updated playground – with the improvements financed by Banbury Town Council – was opened in June 2021 by Easington councillor John Colegrave.

The new facility, in Timms Road, is designed for up to 12-year-olds and is disabled-friendly. The play area was closed for eight weeks to allow the refurbishment to be completed.



ALL THE FUN OF THE FAIR



All the fun of the fair returned to Banbury in October 2021 after missing 2020 because of the coronavirus outbreak. The atmosphere and the excitement plus a host of new rides thrilled visitors young and old.

The fair was opened by town mayor Shaida Hussain and Cllr Phil Chapman, Cherwell District Council's lead member for sport and leisure with funfair boss William Wilson.

After the official opening, Cllr Hussain and Cllr Chapman toured the fair with a large golden key and every amusement they touched with the key gave lucky fun seekers a free ride.

TOP CYCLISTS RACE INTO BANBURY

The world's top female cyclists raced into Banbury on Monday 4 October for a spectacular sprint finish to the opening stage of this year's Women's Tour. It was a massive event for cycling fans – and for the town – as hundreds of onlookers packed the streets to be part of the excitement.



The influx provided a trade bonanza for shopkeepers, pubs and restaurants with some businesses providing special 'race-day' deals. Crowds lined the streets to see the cyclists. After a gruelling 90-mile route around Oxfordshire the 89 riders completed a loop that took them out through Bloxham and Hook Norton to Sibford Ferris before returning to Banbury via Swalcliffe, Tadmarton and Broughton to the finishing line in the shadows of Banbury Cross just after 3pm.

The stage winner was Italian rider Marta Bastianelli

who got home in a close finish ahead of Australia's Chloe Hosking and Clara Copponi. It was the first time Banbury had hosted the prestigious event that attracts competitors and fans from around the world.

DAFFODILS LOOKED GOOD IN PEOPLE'S PARK

People's Park was looking very special early this year.

Two thousand daffodil bulbs planted for the Queen's platinum jubilee came into flower just as the cherry trees blossomed on what is known as Queen's Jubilee Avenue – through the centre of the park.

The delightful show was part of Banbury Town Council's programme leading up to the jubilee celebrations planned for early June.



REMEMBRANCE DAY

Remembrance Day in Banbury in 2021 was a traditional show of respect for the servicemen and women who died in two wars and later conflicts – with a street parade, church service and wreath-laying ceremony

The day started with a military and civic procession from Broad Street, up High Street and along Horsefair to St Mary's Church for a memorial service which was broadcast on speakers outside the church for those who couldn't be inside. After the service, crowds gathered at the war memorial in People's Park for a wreath-laying ceremony to see around 50 wreaths placed on the cenotaph.



From November 2, a film – a moving tribute to Banbury's war dead – was projected on to the side of the town hall. The film showed scenes lifted from photographs taken during WW1 of Banbury servicemen.

BANBURY TOWN COUNCILLORS 2021 - 2022



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