



# Banbury Town Council

## Annual Report 2020-2021

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*Banbury Town Hall.*

### 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.



**Part of the Christmas Lights show in Cornhill**

The town had been without its own council since 1974 when the former Banbury Borough Council was disbanded under Local Government Re-organisation. The town council works with other councils and public agencies – including Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council.

Coronavirus was a serious issue in 2020/21 and although it meant massive changes in the way things were done, it made little difference to the end result. Services were delivered as normal.

In January 2020, the council committed to tackling climate change and a great deal of work has been done in that area (see reports).

## REVIEW OF THE YEAR BY THE TOWN MAYOR (Cllr John Colegrave)

This has been my second year as mayor and while it is not unknown for councillors to hold the office more than once it is quite rare for someone to hold it for two years in succession. The last time it happened was during World War One.



The traditional mayor-making ceremony, held annually in May each year – at which the new mayor is elected – could not take place in 2020, and I agreed to keep the robes for a second term.

The Covid-19 pandemic has made it a quiet year with virus restrictions preventing me from carrying out many normal mayoral duties. Requests for my attendance also fell way behind other years because everyone and all organisations were affected by coronavirus.

I did, though, manage some engagements. I opened the new Sainsbury's Local in Warwick Road (pic left) and opened new offices for Bretherton's Solicitors.

I also laid a wreath at the war memorial in People's Park on Remembrance Sunday (pic below left) and one at the cenotaph in Bodicote.

An important part of the mayoral year is raising money for town charities and good causes. Sadly, again for virus reasons, I was only able to raise a fraction of the sum I wanted.

Many charitable groups have suffered fund-raising problems because of coronavirus and I tried to help them in a different way.



In February this year I invited representatives from around 100 local charities and voluntary organisations to a virtual speakers evening. The on-line event was to encourage and support local good causes and provide advice for future funding – and to let them know they weren't forgotten.

The event was hosted by Sir Tony Baldry with speakers including Brian Buchan (Vice Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire), Amanda Ponsonby (High Sheriff of Oxfordshire), Angela Cristofoli (Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action), Adrian Sells (Oxfordshire Community Foundation), Keith Davies (Citizens Advice), Bee Myson (Age Friendly Banbury), and Tim Tarby-Donald (Charity Ninja).

Banbury Town Council has also set up an emergency grant fund to help Banbury-based good causes that are struggling for funds. Details are on the town council's website.

I became mayor 52 years after my mother Patricia held the same office in 1967. It is with great sadness that I tell you that she passed away last November aged 92. I've been extremely proud to have worn the same robes and the same chain of office that she wore more than 50 years ago.

## Report by the Chairman of the Resources Committee (Cllr Kieron Mallon)

The Resources Committee is responsible for finance, property, policy and personnel matters.

Coronavirus caused problems throughout the year though most were admin difficulties behind the scenes. 'Front of house' things went according to plan and we delivered our essential services as normal.



The town's annual events were badly affected and did not take place.

The exception was Remembrance Sunday and in addition to a scaled-down wreath-laying ceremony at the cenotaph in People's Park a series of moving Armistice Day pictures were projected on to the side of the town hall,

Christmas was not forgotten. Moving light shows and seasonal magic lantern shows in Cornhill celebrated the festival and the Christmas street lights lit up the town as normal.

This committee deals with money – and Banbury Town Council has an enviable record of low taxation while providing excellent services.

For the 11<sup>th</sup> year running, the town's portion of the council tax bill for 2021/2022 will stay at £122.12 for Band D properties.

Our council tax precept works out at £2.35 per week – and that's per household – not per person.

For that, this council provides cemeteries, parks, open spaces, children's play areas, the town's free annual events, sports pitches, allotments, bus shelters, dog waste bins and litter bins.

Wise policy decisions in previous years mean we can continue to provide and improve our services without asking residents to pay more.

We are delivering on our pledge to provide toilets and café facilities in People's Park. The toilet block is almost ready to open and the café facility will be completed later this year. The final phase of a three-year refurbishment of paths and facilities in People's Park is in progress.

Last year we spent well over £200,000 up-dating and maintaining our play areas.

More than £60,000 went on up-grading Hillview and Stanbridge multi-use games areas. Timms Road play area has been up-dated at a cost of £80,000, and nearly £48,000 was spent on the refurbishment of Ferriston play area.

In addition, we spent around £33,000 on essential running repairs at a number of play areas with a further £50,000 put aside for safe surface work on other play areas throughout the town.

In the coming year we year we will fund improvements to Hill View play area at a cost of £115,000.

There will be an increased investment in the Woodgreen Outdoor Pool following a year of restricted opening and reduced income in 2020/2021.

We have taken over the full £50,000 running costs of the Christmas street lights after our partnership with Cherwell District Council came to end

Our annual grants scheme helps tremendously with the amount of work that the town's good causes – run by volunteers – can do. The grants mean that many small good causes can be helped and a greater number of people who need assistance with their everyday lives, can benefit.

We launched a covid-19 grant scheme in March last year to help good causes in Banbury that were facing financial difficulties because of the virus. Since then we have given 24 grants worth nearly £12,000. Those grants are still available and full details are on the council's website.

As founder members of the Cherwell Crime Prevention Scheme, we support a number of important crime prevention initiatives.

We are continuing to work with the BID project – the Business Improvement District – to regenerate the town centre and keep the old streets alive and thriving.

This council is a key partner in a range of other formal partnerships, including the Town Centre Partnership.

We will continue to work with our partners to improve the quality of life in the town and to preserve the unique character of Banbury. On-line meetings have enabled us to keep going over the past year.

We have excellent relationships with Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council, and the three authorities work together on important projects.

In January last year, this council committed to playing its part in tackling climate change.

The town council entered into a partnership with Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council so that each council does its bit.

Banbury Town Council has always been a 'green' council and for us it is a matter of doing more of what we've been doing for the past 20 years.

This council owns and maintains more than 11,000 trees, over five miles of hedgerows, and 1000 acres of grassland in its parks, sports fields, open spaces and cemeteries.

We know that trees, hedges and grass absorb carbon dioxide and produce oxygen.

Younger trees do this better than older trees and this council has a history of planting new trees over the years. We planted an orchard in Browning Park that now bears fruit each year – fruit that members of the public can pick, free of charge.

Figures regarding this matter are in the General Services Committee report.

The Town Hall had an Energy Efficiency Report in March 2020 which found that the Victorian building has a better energy rating than one would expect of such a building.

That is due to the works and refurbishments we have recently undertaken including double glazing, heat recovery system, air handling system, low energy lighting etc.

In the new budget we have introduced a Vehicle Replacement Fund, currently standing at £140k so that we can introduce electric vehicles as we replace older ones. When the time to change comes, the money will be in the bank.

A new industrial wood chipper has been budgeted for at £15,000 to allow us to chip and recycle on site rather than transport green waste elsewhere.

This council is taking its climate change commitment very seriously. Again, see the General Services Committee report for more details.

## Report by the Chairman of the General Services Committee (Cllr Colin Clarke)

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

Despite coronavirus restrictions, 2020 was a busy year and we achieved a great deal.

Coronavirus played a part in our activities but we obeyed the lockdown rules and other virus requirements and still did everything that was planned.



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 over 400 hectares (that's 1000 acres) of grassland. The committee also provides 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, Hanwell Fields and Chandos Close. They provide six full-sized football pitches, two mini pitches, and one cricket square.

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.

Last year we continued our programme of up-dating and maintaining our play areas.

Multi-use games areas at Hillview and Stanbridge were improved while Ferriston play area was completely refurbished with Timms Road next on the list.

The work included new equipment and soft surfacing. We've also carried out essential running repairs at a number of other play areas.

Hill View play area will be refurbished this coming year. 2021 will also see the completion of landscaping projects in St Mary's Churchyard and the walled garden in People's Park, plus fencing replacement in a number of other parks.

Going forward, the accent is on tackling climate change.

We decided last year not to renew our grounds maintenance contract with an out-of-town company – and at the start of the 20/21 financial year we took on our own staff to maintain our cemeteries plus People's Park and St Mary's Churchyard.

Other parks and open spaces are being maintained under a new contract with local company 4<sup>th</sup> Corner Landscaping.

This has given us more control over the work done in important areas and we have local people doing local work. It has given us the opportunity to concentrate on 'close-to-home' climate change issues.

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.

It is bio-diversity at its best.

The people of Banbury asked for a café and toilets in People's Park them and we're providing them.

The toilet building is a 'green' project. It is constructed of sustainable timber and complements the town council's commitment to be climate change active. Sustainable timber retains the carbon the tree absorbed while growing and is, therefore, a 'green' material. The internal lining of the building is a recycled material which is ecologically approved and fire-resistant.

The café facility will be completed later in the year and will 'recycle' an existing building.

This council's trees, parks, open spaces and hedgerows mentioned earlier also contribute towards Banbury's aim to become carbon neutral.

During the next few months 4<sup>th</sup> Corner will begin a number of specific open space and biodiversity projects.

For example, they will create a sensory garden in Princess Diana Park which will include bee and butterfly-friendly borders to help biodiversity. They have also planned a significant tree planting and biodiversity project at Spiceball Park.

That project will add habitat, food and cover for wildlife. Trees will be 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.

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 on land, now known as Banbury Country Park, behind the Gateway retail park.

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.

Banbury Town Council has just acquired land in the Spital Farm area of Grimsbury and this committee will consider turning that into woodland. We will, of course, continue to plant trees as we always have.

Tacking 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.

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 town's allotments are in great demand with waiting lists for all sites. Cemeteries and allotments are 'green' and bio-diverse areas.

We continue to have a substantial number of snow wardens (about 100) on our books – though more are always wanted – and, in addition, more businesses have signalled their intention to help keep roads and pathways clear of snow and ice.

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. We will continue to strive to achieve all that is best for Banbury.

## Report by the Chairman of the Planning Committee (Cllr Tony Ilott)

The Planning Committee normally meets every four weeks to consider planning applications, traffic orders, and any statutory consultations that may be ongoing.



But things have been very different this year.

The Planning Committee met in January and February for business as usual. Since then, because of the virus, the committee has been suspended.

A new system was put in place which meant that the applications that would have gone to committee became the subject of briefing papers prepared by the council's planning officer and circulated to the relevant ward councillors.

They were then sent to myself as the chairman of the planning committee for clearance.

This arrangement has worked well in that effective comments have been produced in a timely way – taking into account the views of the local elected representatives.

It seems that coronavirus has reduced the number of planning applications – but not dramatically.

We received 325 applications from January to December 2020, which is a reduction from the 394 in 2019, but not significantly down from the 340 of 2018.

This may be considered somewhat surprising with the prolonged periods of lockdown in March to June and in November.

But the building industry has clearly been resilient – and the proposals to extend domestic properties has also held up well.

Major applications this year were

1. Reconsultation on a proposal for 850 houses on Oxford Road
2. Proposed new warehouse alongside M40
3. Conversion of the former Magistrates Court to flats
4. Reconsultation on proposal for 200 dwellings at Grundons Higham Way
5. Proposed 49 dwellings at Balmoral Avenue

6. Conversion/extension of former Elephant and Castle in Middleton Road to flats
7. Conversion of offices to flats at 2-4 Middleton Road
8. New teaching block/main hall at Blessed George Napier School
9. Proposed gas off-loading facility adjacent railway off Higham Way
10. Continued multiple applications for conversion of first and second floor space in the town centre to flats

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, 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.

## Dates of council and committee meetings 2021/2022

All meetings of the council are held at the Town Hall, Bridge Street, Banbury. They take place on Tuesdays and commence at 6.30pm unless otherwise stated. Meetings are open to the public. The 2022 Annual Meeting will be held on Tuesday 17 May and the Annual Town Meeting will be on Monday 7 March 2022.

2021			
Council	General Services	Resources	Planning
Tuesday 18 May Tuesday 22 June Tuesday 21 September Tuesday 16 November	Tuesday 8 June Tuesday 31 August Tuesday 19 October Tuesday 14 December	Tuesday 15 June Tuesday 7 September Tuesday 2 November	Wednesday 5 May Wednesday 26 May Wednesday 23 June Wednesday 21 July Wednesday 18 August Wednesday 15 September Wednesday 13 October Wednesday 10 November Wednesday 15 December
2022			
Tuesday 11 January Tuesday 8 February Tuesday 12 April	Tuesday 18 January Tuesday 22 March	Tuesday 4 January Tuesday 1 February Tuesday 29 March	Wednesday 5 January Wednesday 2 February Wednesday 2 March Wednesday 30 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.



# MEMBERS OF THE TOWN COUNCIL 2021



Alana Powell  
Calthorpe South  
Conservative  
07852 285273



Eddie Reeves  
Calthorpe South  
Conservative  
eddie.reeves@  
oxfordshire.gov.uk



Mike Bishop  
Calthorpe North  
Conservative  
01295 550714



John Colegrave  
Easington South  
Conservative  
01295 262049



Kieron Mallon  
Easington South  
Conservative  
01295 269177



Martin Phillips  
Easington North  
Conservative  
07785 390228



George Ayers  
Town Centre  
Conservative  
07884 057438



Helen Mears  
Grimsbury  
Labour  
07598 774543



Andrew Beere  
Grimsbury  
Labour  
01295 255996



Shaida Hussain  
Grimsbury  
Labour  
01295 277096



John Donaldson  
Hardwick West  
Conservative  
01295 271712



Fiaz Ahmed  
Hardwick West  
Conservative  
07946 624222



Tony Illott  
Hardwick West  
Conservative  
07854 258889



Johnny Bunce  
Hardwick West  
Conservative  
07768 374925



Ben Dalton  
Hardwick East  
Conservative  
07308 675837



Matt Hodgson  
Neithrop North  
Labour  
matthodgsonlabour  
@gmail.com



Simon Garrett  
Neithrop South  
Labour  
07427 683398



Steve Kilsby  
Park Road  
Labour  
01295 255512



Barry Richards  
Ruscote  
Labour  
01295 369518



Mark Cherry  
Ruscote  
Labour  
01295 261937



Rebecca Biegel  
Ruscote  
Labour  
07936 028830



Jayne Strangwood  
Ruscote  
Conservative  
07787 427560