

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting of Banbury Electors held on Monday, 03 March 2025 at 6.30 pm held at Banbury Town Hall.

Present: Councillor Cherry (Town Mayor and Chairman of the Meeting)

Town Councillors: Beere, Biegel, Eaton, Harwood, Hussain, Mallon, Richards and Strangwood.

Officers:
Mark Hassall (Town Clerk)
Paul Almond (Director of Environment)
James Smith (Media & Marketing)
Helen Durkin (Executive Officer)

Other Attendees: One member of the public.

ATM-1.25 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.

ATM-2.25 Apologies for absence

Councillors Brant, Crichton, Dhési, Mears and Thornhill.

ATM-3.25 Minutes of the last Meeting

The Minutes of the Meeting held on the 04 March 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor.

ATM-4.25 Attendance Records

The Town Mayor reported that the attendance record of individual Members of the Town Council had been circulated with the Agenda papers.

ATM-5.25 Committee Reports

a) Report of the Planning Committee presented by the Chair, Councillor Andrew Beere.

As Chairman of the planning committee at Banbury Town Council, it is an honour and a responsibility to address you today on recent developments overseen by the Planning Committee. The past year has been one of great success and progress for Banbury, with our committee at the forefront of a number of important projects and critical verdicts. At the heart of each decision is our enduring commitment to ensuring Banbury continues not only to thrive but also to improve on its sustainability, efficiency, and inclusivity, whilst ensuring the highest environmental standards.

As many of you will likely be aware, our committee is tasked with providing feedback on a number of planning applications that will affect the Banbury area. While our partners at Cherwell District oversee and make final decisions on planning applications in the Banbury area, it is our duty to ensure that Banbury as a town continues to evolve and thrive.

As such, we provide our feedback to Cherwell with intimate and accurate knowledge of the town and its infrastructure, advising Cherwell District Council on potential impacts of planning applications on local areas, communities, and individuals. Change can be difficult to measure; too little and a town can stagnate, too much and it runs a risk of losing its identity and character.

Banbury is a historical town that has successfully developed with the changing times, and it has been a pleasure to work with this committee in overseeing some of the more recent developments.

In 2024 we dealt with around 240 applications overall, well within our expected range, and highlighting continued interest in Banbury from groups and individuals on a local and national scale. Approximately 50 of those applications have been reported to Planning Committee for

individual discussion and finalised comments. The remainder of the applications have been dealt with on our behalf by our Planner, Mr Duxbury.

Our feedback on these applications reflects the council's commitment to preserving Banbury's history and character while embracing its potential to develop. We have advised against the construction of new establishments on already-populated premises where we feel such businesses would help rejuvenate the centre of town. We have pushed back against what we consider overdevelopment of certain areas of town.

We have taken the concerns of residents and put them at the forefront of our decision-making, ensuring that developers and property owners also consider and appreciate such matters. We consider waste disposal and collection, the preservation of neighbourhood identities, and amenity of neighbouring properties.

We have also committed to work alongside the Banbury Civic Society in recognising Banbury's history, promoting proposals to the Oxfordshire scheme for historic Banbury people, places and events that is considered deserve recognition for their importance in the county's rich and detailed history.

Banbury stands within an environment that gives the town a distinctive identity. It is however also one that presents its own unique challenges that external businesses and developers may not be familiar with, and it is our duty to raise awareness of potential issues that may arise should the correct precautions not be taken. Recent months have demonstrated that appropriate flood defences are more important than ever before, while the town's road layouts and traffic flows must also be taken into consideration.

A further significant and crucial role for the Committee is the giving of comments on behalf of the Town Council on consultations on proposed planning policy and highway initiatives from Oxfordshire County Council and Cherwell District Council. Importantly for example we have just provided the Town Council's views on the emerging 2042 Cherwell Local Plan. That document will shape the development of the town over the period to 2042.

Looking forward, Banbury Town Council's Planning Committee remains dedicated to Cherwell District Council's Banbury 2050 initiative (which we were also consulted upon), including the transformation of Banbury Town Centre and ensuring it meets the diverse requirements of businesses, tourists, and of course Banbury residents, up to the year 2050.

The applications we have received over the last twelve months show that Banbury very much continues to strike prospective businesses, organisations and visitors as a town with plenty of potential.

I'd like to close out by thanking vice-chairman Councillor Wendy Woodward and all other members of the committee for their support and dedication, as well as members of the council for their continued support in ensuring Banbury continues to enjoy future prosperity and success.

b) Report of the General Services Committee presented by the Chair, Councillor Barry Richards.

Mr Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure as Chairman of the General Services Committee to inform you all of the updates and developments members have overseen in order to ensure that Banbury residents receive a comprehensive range of outdoor services.

As Banbury's 'green' committee, it is our responsibility to manage and maintain more than 1000 acres of Banbury's Green Infrastructure comprising of:

- Over 100 Parks and Open Spaces,
- 70 Children's play areas and youth facilities,
- 5 Recreation Grounds, offering football, cricket, bowls, & tennis,
- 6 Allotment sites,
- 2 Cemeteries and 1 closed churchyard.

As you may have gathered from this vast selection of facilities, there is a lot to cover, but even more so, a lot for the Banbury to be proud of. We've had a very busy, and very successful year, and I would like to share some of the achievements and developments with you now.

In keeping with the council's commitment to reducing its carbon footprint, we have installed work place electric charging points at the Southam Road Dept. This will provide the infrastructure required as the fleet vehicles come up for replacement, which can now carry out utilising newer, more sustainable electric vehicles.

We have also introduced and developed a cricket facility at the Hanwell Fields Sports Ground. Meanwhile, we have also carried out weekly health and safety inspections of all our children's

play facilities to better ensure the wellbeing of the families that use them. Furthermore, we adopted a new children's play area in Thenford Way, in the Hanwell View estate.

We held a successful 'Planting in the Park' day with 348 children from Banbury's local schools. Each group was encouraged to get creative with wonderful centrepieces each themed to the 2024 Olympics. Around these designs, students then planted their flower arrangements. In total, an incredible 8854 bedding plants were used, making for some truly impressive displays.

Meanwhile, at Hardwick Cemetery, we installed a new row of concrete headstone beams. This is to ensure provision is in place for future burials and adapt Hardwick Cemetery to serve the Banbury population for years to come.

Thanks to a partnership with the Lawn Tennis Association we also saw a refurbishment of the Tennis Courts and the introduction of a booking system at People's Park. In that same park we have installed new LED lighting columns to help improve safety while simultaneously reducing the Council's energy use.

The Banbury Urban Orchard scheme came into fruition this past year, with schools, Banbury's Rotary Club, and local residents all volunteering to take part in looking after the fruit trees planted last year. The creation of wild flower meadows at Spiceball Park, Crouch Hill Open Space, Princess Diana Park and Saffron Close Open Space was completed this year. The yellow rattle seed should germinate this summer improving biodiversity of these sites.

If you were out and about over the Festive Season you would have seen the new improved Christmas Lighting Scheme across the Town Centre. These new and improved designs included 100% LED lighting, and their production incorporated the recycling of 14,000 plastic bottles.

While winter brings with exciting initiatives such as this, so too does it bring rather tumultuous weather. The council dealt with numerous emergency tree works as a result of severe storms, including Isha in January 2024, and Burt and Darragh in November and December 2024.

We have purchased new mowing machines and sports equipment to help manage the estate more efficiently over the next five years.

Following a grounds maintenance performance review, a two-year extension of the Grounds Maintenance Contract with 4th Corner Ltd has been agreed until 31/03/27.

The Council has been successful in receiving grant funding for two new PlayZones, one at Princess Diana Park and Chandos Sports Ground, from the Football Foundation and Cherwell District Council, which will be installed in this year.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our environmental team and contractors for their service delivery throughout the year, ensuring that our community facilities are properly maintained safe and accessible to all members of the public.

Finally, I would like to conclude by thanking every member of the General Services Committee, including Vice-Chairman, Councillor Matt Hodgson, for the support in delivering the services relating to General Services.

Thank you.

C) Report of the Resources Committee presented by the Chair, Councillor Shaida Hussain.

Mr Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen,

As Chairman of the Resources Committee, it gives me great pleasure to present to you this report covering updates, projects and achievements from the last year, as well as our goals looking forward towards the rest of 2025.

For those that aren't aware, this committee is responsible for: Finance, Property, Policy, and Personal Matters.

I'm pleased to report that, in continuation of last year's successful and strategic expenditures, our council continues to be in excellent financial health. There have been no short supplies of financial challenges facing communities, businesses, and households up and down the country, and as such it is extremely important that Banbury Town Council continues to maintain its enviable record, especially with the upcoming raising of council taxes. We are determined to continue our commitment to delivering exceptional services in areas that benefit the town both economically and socially.

It is important to note that, unlike upper-tier district and county councils, Town Councils do not receive financial subsidies from government. While this presents its own unique set of challenges, we have nevertheless managed to deliver more for less.

Our warm spaces scheme continued to provide Banbury residents with somewhere warm to stay without having to rely on the heating of their homes. In the face of continued uncertainty surrounding energy bills, I'm pleased to say that Banbury currently has 20 local communities, clubs and organisations committed to the scheme, an increase on the 15 from last year. This highlights not only the committee's dedication to organising these spaces, but the generosity and community spirit exhibited by many local organisations.

Another important and much-requested scheme has been the implementation of eight brand-new bus shelters. These have been installed by Clear Channel, with many of them situated across a number of entry roads across Banbury. We're hoping these contribute to the Council's commitment to improving Banbury's road and traffic infrastructure, creating more viable and more appealing public transport services.

We continue to seek to streamline council services by working alongside our partners at Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council. An example of this would be the hosting of the OCC wedding registrar service on the upper floor of Town Hall. The council has also overseen changes to the staff handbook to better reflect current procedures and national policies.

Events continue to be extremely popular with Banbury residents, with last year's calendar seeing excellent attendance levels throughout the year. It has been fantastic to see the community coming together to enjoy these celebrations of food, music, history and culture. In fact, Armed Forces Day 2024 was so popular that we believe it has now outgrown its usual setting in Market Place, and have moved the event to Spiceball Park. This will allow for bigger and better attractions than ever before.

We are pleased to report on the most successful Town Mayor's Funday ever, with record attendance in People's Park. Meanwhile, Banbury Canal Festival's extension to a 2-day event continues to draw in audiences on a national scale, and provides a fantastic opportunity for local traders and businesses to engage with a wider customer base.

However, it is important that the key values and objectives of these events, one of which is to ensure that visitors and residents of the town continue to be drawn to the town centre. For this reason, popular events such as the food festivals and Banbury Music Mix will continue to take place around Market Place and High Street, while larger events with proven appeal to those beyond Banbury will be located in areas better capable of accommodating greater numbers such as Spiceball Park, increasing the town's reputation as an enjoyable and unique place to visit and spend the day.

In addition to the events, we oversaw the return of the enduringly popular Remembrance Sunday and Christmas projections, which were displayed on the northern face of Town Hall. Looking forward, Banbury Town Council hopes to continue its exceptional track record of financial planning and spending, while homing in on exactly what projects and initiatives will serve the public and improve life in Banbury.

We will continue to ensure public wellbeing by providing warm spaces and working with partners to further explore opportunities to support struggling residents. We are actively growing our focus on events that continue to draw in sizeable audiences, while also looking at ways to more effectively embrace Banbury's diverse communities. We plan to further develop a comprehensive campaign to highlight Banbury's landmarks and attractions and capitalise on their national appeal and potential.

Above all else, the council is dedicated to ensuring Banbury is a town that not only changes with the times, but evolves, expands and prospers. I am proud of the achievements of this committee over the last 12 months, and I look forward to another year of seeing this committee ensure Banbury benefits from outstanding financial management, dedicated community welfare, and preservation of heritage while embracing a future of diversity and development.

I would like to finish by thanking Vice-Chairman Councillor Rebecca Biegel along with all committee members for their time, engagement and ideas.

Thank you.

ATM-6.25 Questions from Electors
None

The Meeting ended at 6.51pm.