

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting of Banbury Electors held on Monday, 11 March 2019 at 6.30 pm in the Town Hall, Banbury.

Present: Shaida Hussain (Town Mayor and Chairman of the Meeting),
Colin Clarke, Lucy Donaldson, Alastair Milne Home, David Beverly, Claire Bell,
Hannah Banfield, Surinder Dhesi, Tony Mephram, and Tina Wren.

Officers: Mark Recchia (Town Clerk)
Glenn Speakman (Planning & Administration Officer)

Also in attendance: Councillor Tony Ilott (Chairman – BTC Planning Committee)

1 **Notice to Convene the Meeting**

The Town Mayor welcomed the electors of Banbury to the Meeting. She 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**

Apologies were received from Councillor's Cherry, Kilsby, Ross, Mallon, Colegrave, Woodcock, Beere and Harrison

3 **Minutes of the last Meeting**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on the 15 March 2018 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 was appended to the Minutes of the previous Meeting. 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 be presenting this report as Chairman of the Town Council's Planning Committee.

The Planning Committee meets every four weeks to consider planning applications, traffic orders, and any statutory consultations that may be ongoing. In total, between February 2018 and February 2019, the town council has considered 340 planning applications compared to the 449 of the previous year. The Town Council has a system in place whereby members are informed of applications in their ward. If they have no objections or concerns and it is a routine matter, it will be handled by the Town Clerk and myself, as chairman, under our scheme of delegation. However, if a town councillor has concerns about an application, if it is deemed to be of strategic importance to the town, or it is a contentious issue, the application will be considered by the full Planning Committee. The Planning Committee tries to make decisions that are in the best interests of the town as a whole.

The main issues this year have been:

- Monte Blackburn Ltd development of the land adjacent to the M40 J11 and west of Daventry Road Banbury. Part A: Full planning application - the development of a new priority junction to the A361, internal roads and associated landscaping with 2 commercial buildings having a maximum floor space of 33,110m² and with a flexible use within Class B2 or B8 and ancillary Class B1 offices. Part B: Outline planning application – the development of up to 2 commercial buildings having a maximum floor space of 16,890m² and having a flexible use within Class B2 or B8 and ancillary Class B1 offices, with all other matters reserved for future approval. This offers an opportunity to build on Banbury's strength as a storage, distribution and industrial hub in Oxfordshire and the wider area. This revised application does not include the petrol station which was part of the original application for this site.

- A reserved matters application for the Banbury 16 allocated site - layout, scale, external appearance and landscaping for 216 units. This will assist with providing Banbury with much needed new homes.
- An outline proposal by Trinity College for up to 320 dwellings at the Banbury 18 allocated site at Drayton Lodge Farmhouse. The proposal includes affordable housing, a local centre of 0.5Ha providing (retail and community facilities), landscaping, public open space, playing fields, allotments, access and associated infrastructure. This development will assist Banbury in fulfilling its housing supply aspirations by providing a sustainable urban extension.
- A full planning application by Bellway Homes Ltd for 83 dwellings. The site is located within the Banbury 2 policy site on Hardwick Hill. This development will further contribute to Banbury's ambitious housing targets.
- An approved application for up to 63 apartments on the caravan park at Station Approach by Land Group (Banbury) Ltd. This will be one of the first developments within the Banbury 1 Canalside area. The development will open the gates for the regeneration of this area and provide central, sustainably located accommodation.
- An approved application for 25 flats where Robert Keith Cars currently resides by Darlow Hemphill Ltd. The development is free of car parking and will encourage residents to use sustainable modes of transport. The development is visually attractive and provides well designed edge of town centre accommodation.
- A reserved matters application for 232 dwellings at the Banbury 5 site off Warwick Road by Persimmon Homes Ltd. This application covered the second phase of the development and dealt with the appearance, landscaping and layout of the scheme.

Banbury is well on its way to providing a large amount of high quality and sustainably located housing for its residents. This should also help with rising house prices in Banbury which will allow future generations the opportunity to live here.

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, and together to discuss all transport issues in relation to the town. By working in partnership with other organisations we can achieve more for Banbury, and the Planning Committee also provides representatives on the Town Centre Partnership. This is a partnership of organisations delivering 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 the creations of a desirable, and attractive place to live, work, visit, and invest in. Madam Mayor in closing, I would like to thank my Vice-Chairman, Councillor Nick Harrison, for his support all members of the Planning Committee, the staff of the town council for all their hard work, help and advice, and in preparing the report placed before the committee."

It was proposed, and was agreed, to receive and note the report.

b) Report of the General Services Committee presented by the Chairman, Councillor Colin Clarke

"Madam Mayor, Ladies & Gentlemen,

I am pleased to present this annual report of the General Services Committee, which manages all day-to-day services and facilities provided by the town council. 2018 was a good year and we can look back with satisfaction and look forward with anticipation. Our annual events are something that townspeople of all ages look forward to and support in huge numbers. The events are going from strength to strength and it seems that whatever we touch turns to gold.

A new event in 2018 – the Friday night Music Festival – was a massive success. The Market Place was packed with music fans from early until late. It was loud, it was good and the people wanted more. And they will get more. We are organising the music festival again for 2019 and

after last year's success, I'm sure it will be even busier this year. In 2018, we brought back Town Mayor's Sunday after a few year's absence and this too was a resounding success. Our other events – the Banbury and District Show, Taste of Spring mini food fair, Armed Forces Day, the August Food Fair with the Flower and Produce Show, Battle of Britain Day, and the Christmas Lights Festival – were, as always, extremely well supported. Remembrance Day was very special this year – recognising the 100th anniversary of the end of World War One. It didn't stop raining on Canal Day but an amazing number of people ignored the weather and turned out to visit the markets and see the narrowboats. We are waiting to see what happens with the Castle Quay 2 extension before we can confirm that Canal Day will go ahead this year. For 2019, we are organising a very special event. In July we will celebrate the 100th anniversary of People's Park. The park was opened in 1919 to celebrate peace at the end of World War One. Much of the land was given to the town by businessman George Ball who declared in his will that the park should be a place of recreation for all classes of the public. Our centenary celebrations will – as he wished – be for everyone.

The General Services committee is the council's 'green' committee.

It oversees

- More than 120 Parks, Open Spaces, Recreation & Sports Grounds
- 2 Cemeteries
- 6 Allotment sites (4 of which are self-managed with 2 directly controlled by the town council)
- 66 Play Areas, Recreational facilities and Outdoor Gyms
- 234 litter and dog bins
- 6 senior football pitches, 2 cricket wickets, 1 bowls green, junior football pitches, and 5 sports pavilions

This council looks after parks and open spaces totalling in excess of 90 hectares – more than 220 acres – equivalent to approximately 180 football pitches. We also look after around 10,000 trees, and 8,662 linear metres of hedging. For the older (my) generation, that's five and a half miles. So, what have we done in the last year and what are we going to do in the future. I will outline the main projects for the coming year. They include a café and toilets in People's Park. Members of the public have asked for these facilities and this anniversary year is the perfect time to go ahead with the first 'major' improvements to the park for many years. Other projects this year will include the refurbishment of play areas at a number of sites including Howard Road plus improvements at St Louis Meadow. We are reviewing our grounds maintenance contract – particularly at the possibility of bringing some parts of the contract 'in house' by employing people to maintain our cemeteries and some parks. This will give us more control over the work done in selected and important areas. One considerable achievement this year is that after many months of negotiating we are about to sign on the dotted line to purchase extra burial land next to the Hardwick Hill cemetery. The new land will be sufficient for burials in Banbury for the next 70 years. Additional burial land has been a concern of this council for some time and I'm pleased we have finally got this sorted. We have just taken over from the developers the sports facilities off Merton Street – a football pitch and changing facilities. Work is continuing in St Mary's Churchyard. Last year we carried out a great deal of wall restoration there and this year we are looking to open up the views and undertake comprehensive re-landscaping. The first phase of improving footpaths in People's Park has been completed and the second phase will go ahead this year. New paving around the war memorial was installed in time for Remembrance Sunday last year and that, with the improvements to the railings, has made the memorial something to be proud of.

Work being carried out along the riverside in Spiceball Park is continuing. In a joint venture with the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust the council has participated in a project that can best be called a wildlife makeover. The work began in October 2015 and has opened up the riverside area, improved natural habitats for fish, birds and river plants, and created a relaxing space where people can enjoy being close to nature. The trust has now appointed Judith Verdon as the full-time leader of the project. Jude has been part of the makeover from the start, but has combined Banbury with other projects elsewhere. She will now be able to concentrate solely on Spiceball.

Banbury benefited from fantastic floral displays in the streets and in its parks and open spaces – and the town looked superb throughout the year. We went ahead with the regular events including Sunflower Workshops, Hanging Basket Workshops, and Planting Day in the Park – all for pupils at the town's primary schools – and which were all managed expertly by town council staff. They will continue in 2019. The provision of attractive, safe parks and open spaces remains a high priority. The Council's Park Ranger team continues to work with volunteers at the Community Garden in People's Park. The rangers also work with local schools, developing pupils' gardening techniques by way of gardening clubs, including the design and planting of hanging baskets. The rangers also help pupils with environmental schemes within school grounds. My committee is also responsible for the town's allotments which are still in great demand and there are waiting lists for all sites. We continue to have a substantial number of snow wardens on our books – though more are always wanted – and 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. My colleagues will continue to strive to achieve all that is best for the town.

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 conscientiously carry out their duties for the benefit of the town."

It was proposed, and was agreed, to receive and note the report.

c) Report of the Resources Committee presented by Cllr Colin Clarke on behalf of Councillor Mallon

"Madam Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen.

As chairman of the Resources Committee and leader of the town council, it gives me much pleasure to present this report.

The Resources Committee has met six times since the last Annual Town Meeting and has discussed a very wide range of matters. It is impossible to list them all so I will simply highlight some matters of note.

The committee is responsible for:

- Finance
- Property
- Policy
- Personnel matters

We all know that many local authorities around the country are this year increasing their council tax demands – but I am happy to tell you that Banbury Town Council is not one of them.

The town council's portion of the total council tax bill will stay at £122.12 for Band D properties. It means the town's council tax levy hasn't increased since 2010 while services during the same period have been very much improved. Thanks to wise policy-making in previous years we can continue to improve our services without asking our residents to pay more. I think this is a remarkable achievement. Let us take a closer look at this year's budget. You will have heard Cllr Clarke refer to some of these items when he spoke a few moments ago. I will expand on some of the things he said. He mentioned that 2019 will see People's Park celebrate its 100th anniversary and that we are planning big improvements there. I can tell you that we have set £235,000 aside to create the café and provide the toilet facilities – and we are spending another £50,000 on the second phase of improving the park's footpaths. We are also spending £125,000 on play area refurbishments at sites including Howard Road and we are making improvements at St Louis Meadow. We have agreed to purchase extra land in Hardwick to extend the existing cemetery. The new land will provide burial space for townspeople for the next 70 years and the purchase should be completed within the next few months. In addition, burial charges for town residents aged under-16 have been scrapped. To encourage sport, we are halving the cost of hiring cricket pitches for T20 matches and we have taken over the management of sports pitches off Merton Street which will provide further income for the council.

We can do these things because we are now reaping the rewards of good policy decisions made in the past.” Look at it this way. Our council tax precept works out at £2.35 per week. So for the price of a cup of coffee every week – and that’s per household, not per person – we provide cemeteries, parks, childrens’ play areas, the town’s free annual events, sports pitches, allotments, bus shelters, dog waste bins and we support crime prevention initiatives. To me, that is excellent value for money. Looking ahead, we will continue to make the town a better place in which to live, work and play and a more attractive place to visit.

It is our duty to look after the town’s public buildings and in 2018 we employed contractors to clean the stonework of the town hall. The work has made this magnificent Grade Two listed building a truly outstanding focal point that we can be proud of. It is anticipated that the clean-up will boost the town hall as a hiring venue – for weddings and civil ceremonies, for business meetings and conferences, exhibitions, commercial marketing and sales – and for individuals and families who want to celebrate specific occasions. Councillors can play their part by spreading the word and letting their contacts know that discounts are available for multiple bookings, and for town charities and organisations. The town hall is a commercially viable proposition as a hire venue – and is producing valuable income for the council. This year’s budget shows we can do what people expect us to do which is provide value-for-money services for all. Our annual grants scheme helps tremendously with the amount of work that the town’s good causes – mostly run by volunteers – can do and our new initiative to restrict the grant amount to £500 is working well. It means smaller good causes can be helped and the grants, therefore, will continue to benefit a greater number of people who, for various reasons, need assistance with their everyday lives. There are still challenges.

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. Our annual events play an important part in encouraging people to come to the town centre – and in addition we will put everything we can into other initiatives that will promote ‘old’ Banbury while embracing the ‘new.’ This budget is the pay-off for many years of good housekeeping and being prudent with taxpayers’ money and we are looking forward to another year of making Banbury a great place in which to live, work and play without breaking the bank.

Banbury Town Council can be pleased with its financial situation. The council’s finances have been helped by the number of new houses that are contributing to the tax coffers but good housekeeping and forward planning in previous years has also kept the tax figure down. Policy decisions we have taken in the past are paying off and, all in all, this council has proved yet again that it can be trusted with taxpayers’ money. Banbury continues to be a debt-free council, and investments in recent years continue to pay dividends, and will continue to do so in the years ahead.

This council will continue to manage the town’s finances in a proper manner and carry on providing the essential services that townspeople need. I would remind members of the public that all town councillors are proud to represent the people of Banbury, and they do so in a voluntary capacity. Our councillors bring experience from many different fields and they are prepared to give up their valuable time free of charge. We continue to encourage and support the crime prevention schemes in and around the town, and the town council was a founder member of the Banbury, now Cherwell Crime Partnership. We also continue to be key partners 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.

In addition to joining with other agencies in formal partnership meetings, we are also very proud of our good working relationships with Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council, which has seen the three authorities working together on important projects of benefit to the town.

A large proportion of the work of a town councillor takes place outside meetings of the town council, and much of that work is undertaken representing the town council on various bodies in the town. We appoint over 25 representatives each year to organisations such as the Citizens Advice Bureau, Banbury Air Training Corps, the Civic Society and the Sunshine Centre. Our Annual Report for 2018/19 will be published in the coming months. Madam Mayor, I would like

to conclude by thanking members of the committees, and all councillors for their work during the year – and not forgetting the invaluable work of our officers and staff.”

It was proposed, and was agreed, to receive and note the report.

6

Questions

Councillor Dhesi asked a question about the situation of the bus stop at Bloxham Road. The Town Clerk explained that the bus company are also unhappy with the current location and that a meeting will be taking place to decide its future location.

Councillor Dhesi asked a further question about the ongoing issue the residents of Leigh Grove have with the location of their grit bin. Councillor Clarke stated that he will have a conversation with the Recreation & Amenities manager about the situation.

Councillor Dhesi asked a final question about the provision of adventure activity play areas including things such as zip lines. Councillor Clarke stated that the provision of new play areas was a very costly process and that only one could be improved each year. It is not currently planned to focus funds on the provision of an adventure activity play area.

Councillor Milne Home asked a question about the poorly maintained footpath at Hill View, he stated that OCC will not adopt the footpath because of its current condition. He suggested that Banbury Town Council either pay for the improvements necessary for adoption by OCC or put pressure on Cherwell District Council to pay for the improvements. The Town Clerk stated that the footpath is not located on our land and that the Town Council chose to adopt a policy of not spending money on land outside of its ownership. Councillor Clarke emphasised the heavy financial cost of even minor improvements to facilities such as footpaths, he then stated he will bring the issue up to Cherwell District Council planning department.

Councillor Mephram asked whether it would be possible to clear away the debris covering the footpath on Oxford Road near Beadnel Close. Councillor Clarke stated that this area was not our land but concurred that the footpath was in a poor state and required a clean-up.

Councillor Beverly asked a number of questions he had received from residents relating to trees, namely issues such as overhang of branches and obstructed satellite TV signal. The Town Clerk referred to the recently adopted tree policy which states that trees will not be reduced due to TV satellite signal and that overhang into one's personal property can be cut back by the person who owns the land. He further iterated that the policy had recently been adopted and that there were no plans in the near future to re-evaluate the Council's tree policy.

The Meeting ended at 7.20pm.