

ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

Minutes of the Annual Town Meeting of Banbury Electors held on Monday, 09 March 2020 at 6.30 pm in the Town Hall, Banbury.

Present: John Colegrave (Town Mayor and Chairman of the Meeting)
A number of Banbury electors.

Officers: Mark Recchia (Town Clerk)
Mike Hall (Recreation & Amenities Manager)

Also in attendance: Tony Brummell (Cherwell District Council).

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**

Apologies were received from a number of Town Councillors who were also Banbury electors.

3 **Minutes of the last Meeting**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on the 11 March 2019 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 Vice-Chairman, Councillor Nick Harrison on behalf of the Chairman, Councillor Tony Ilott

"Mr Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am pleased to present 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.

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, the application is 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. In total, between January 2019 and January 2020, this council has considered 394 planning applications compared to the 340 of the previous year.

Major applications were

- 18/01614/ 83 houses for Bellway on Southam Road.
- New OCC primary school on same site
- 850 dwellings as next substantial phase to Bankside development – nearing completion on all the original phases
- Next significant development alongside M40 for dbSymmetry 19/00771/F
- Revised proposals for new waste transfer and recovery facility by Grundons at Thorpe Mead
- Details of CQ2 to ensure swift delivery of this town centre re-generation scheme

- Numerous proposals for town centre living accommodation by the formation of high quality homes above existing ground floor shops, offices, etc.

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 creation of a desirable, and attractive place to live, work, visit, and invest.

Mr 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 particular our new and experienced planning officer Bob Duxbury whose deep knowledge has been a most valuable asset.

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

b) Report of the General Services Committee presented by the Vice-Chairman, Councillor Nick Harrison on behalf of the Chairman, Councillor Colin Clarke

“Mr 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.

2019 was a busy year and we achieved a great deal. We are looking to achieve even more in 2020 and in the longer future.

This committee’s responsibilities include the upkeep of our parks and play areas, maintenance of our cemeteries, and the running of six allotment sites (four of which are managed by allotment associations).

One new event last year was the Teddy Bear’s Picnic. It was a simple idea. Families were invited to take snacks and teddy bears to People’s Park and we provided music, games and a small funfair. The response was amazing. The park was packed with happy adults and smiling children just relaxing and having fun. The picnic was the last of a series of events that celebrated the 100th anniversary of the opening of the park.

Other work to commemorate the centenary included the building of a new pillar at the Bath Road entrance, more-attractive notice boards, and tree planting. Another new event in People’s Park was Film Friday. We hired a big screen and showed two movies. First house was for the younger audience with the late film for adults –and again people turned out in large numbers.

The General Services Committee is the Council’s ‘green’ committee.

It oversees

- over fifty play and teenage areas,
- ninety open spaces,
- twelve neighbourhood parks, including the historic People’s Park and Spiceball Country Park.

We also have five sportsgrounds – Horton View, Easington Rec, Moorfields, Hanwell Fields and Merton Street (Cattlemarket).

In addition, we maintain St Mary’s Churchyard. We have parks and open spaces totalling in excess of 90 hectares – more than 220 acres – equivalent to approximately 140 football pitches.

We also maintain around 10,000 trees, and 8,662 linear metres of hedgerows. That's around five and a half miles.

So, what have we done in the last year and what are we going to do in the future. Last year we spent more than £230,000 updating 15 of our parks and play areas – in particular a full makeover at Howard Road. In addition, we've spent around £18,000 on essential running repairs at many of the town's play areas.

In the coming year we will fund improvements to multi-use games areas at Stanbridge and Hill View parks and at Ferriston play area. That spending is separate from the funding for the much anticipated café and toilets in People's Park. Members of the public asked for these facilities – and we listened and are providing what they wanted.

Building work on the toilet building began last month. In fact, it is a multi-purpose construction. There will be ladies, gents and disabled toilets, an office for park staff, and a covered demonstration area where school children and community groups can be involved in garden activities such as making bird boxes and creating hanging baskets.

The new buildings will be of sustainable timber construction and will complement the town council's recent decision 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 will be a recycled material which is ecologically approved and fire-resistant. The buildings will also use energy-saving technology for heating and hot water. The toilets, rest room and demonstration area are scheduled to be opened by the end of June. The café will be completed later in the year.

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

In June last year we celebrated the opening of the new skate ramp in Spiceball Park. It's a terrific facility and people who know about these things describe it as one of the best in the country. It is certainly well used and was £100,000 well spent.

Our two cemeteries are a credit to the town. They are maintained in immaculate condition and are true places of rest. Last year we completed the purchase of extra burial land next to Hardwick Hill cemetery. The new land will be sufficient for burials in Banbury for the next 70 years.

We have reviewed our grounds maintenance contract – and we are bringing some parts of the contract 'in house' by directly employing staff to maintain our cemeteries, People's Park and St Mary's Churchyard. Other parks and open spaces are being maintained under a new contract with local company 4th Corner Landscaping. This will give us more control over the work done in selected and important areas especially cemeteries.

In a joint venture with the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust the Council is involved in a wildlife makeover project that has transformed the River Cherwell in Spiceball Park. Work is continuing and has been extended to Hanwell Brook Wetland Area, Bridge Street Park and the Mineral Railway. The project began in October 2015 and has opened up the riverside, improved natural habitats for fish, birds and river plants, and created a relaxing space where people can enjoy being close to nature.

Last year, new woodland trails were laid out and these are proving popular with members of the public. We went ahead with the regular events including Sunflower Workshops, and Hanging Basket Workshops – for pupils at the town's primary schools. Sadly, because of persistent heavy rain in the days leading up to, and on the day of the event, Planting in the Park – when pupils compete to see which school can plant the best flower bed – had to be cancelled.

The General Services Committee is responsible for the town's allotments which are in great demand and there are waiting lists for all sites.

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. 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 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 the Chairman Councillor Mallon

"Mr Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen.

The Resources Committee has met six times since the last Annual Town Meeting and has discussed a very wide range of matters.

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.

Let's have a look at what we do.

Money is important and council tax is always a major issue. Banbury Town Council has an enviable record of low taxation while providing excellent services.

This council has its priorities right and is proud that it can provide those services without raising its tax demand. Since 2010, the only thing that's gone up is the quality of our services. I can confirm, for the 10th year running, that the town's portion of the council tax bill for 2020/2021 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.

This council's finances are helped by the number of new houses that boost tax revenue – but it still means, as I've said before, that for less than the price of a cup of coffee per family per week, we provide cemeteries, parks and 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 improve our services without asking residents to pay more.

So what have we done in the past year – and what can we look forward to.

The café and toilets in People's Park are going ahead and work on the toilets has already started. Work on the café/coffee shop will follow in the near future.

It's not just People's Park that benefits from investments. Last year we spent £230,000 on play area refurbishments at Howard Road, St Louis Meadow and a number of other sites.

In the coming year we will fund improvements of play and multi-use games areas at Stanbridge, Hill View, and Ferriston play areas, and continue our ongoing programme of footpath repairs in People's Park.

The purchase of extra land at Hardwick Hill to extend the existing cemetery has been completed and we now have enough burial space for the next 70 years.

What else are we doing for our residents?

Our annual grants scheme helps tremendously with the amount of work that the town's good causes – mostly run by volunteers – can do. The grants mean that many small good causes can be helped and the grants will benefit a greater number of people who, for various reasons, need assistance with their everyday lives. Charities and good causes in Banbury can apply for grants of up to £500. The grants can also be used for climate change initiatives.

I must mention our annual events. We are organising 16 between April and November. They play an important part in creating wealth and trade in the town by encouraging visitors to come to here and spend money. They will continue and the coming year includes two extra events – one to commemorate VE Day and the other will be a Motown music night in the Market Place. Our annual events provide wonderful free days out for residents, but from our point of view they are not just a chance to have fun. The events have another important purpose. They bring people into the town centre and those visitors boost trade by spending money in the shops, pubs and restaurants. The hope is that they like what they see and they make Banbury a regular destination for shopping and/or leisure purposes.

The events are something that people of all ages look forward to and support in huge numbers. The established events such as the Banbury and District Show, Food Fairs, and the Christmas Lights Switch-On go from strength to strength – and our new events always capture the imagination of the public.

The Friday night Music Festival was a massive success with the Market Place packed with music fans from early until late. Our other events – Town Mayor's Sunday, Armed Forces Day, Flower and Produce Show, Battle of Britain Day, and Remembrance Sunday were, as always, extremely well supported. Canal Day didn't happen in 2019 because of building work on the canal side and it won't happen this year – but it will be back – bigger and better than ever.

In addition, we put everything we can into other initiatives that promote Banbury – the old town and the 'new.' We look after the town's public buildings and last year the outside of the town hall was cleaned. The work has made this magnificent Grade Two listed building a truly outstanding focal point that we can be proud of.

The town hall is experiencing growing demand as a hire venue – and is producing valuable income for the council and therefore, for the town.

This council works well with other organisations. We will continue to support the Save the Horton action group and in November 2019 we passed a resolution deploring the permanent downgrading of the Horton's maternity unit. We also criticised the Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group's public consultation and evidence-gathering exercises. This council recognises that the real-life birthing experiences of local mothers cannot keep being overlooked and we will do all we can to ensure their voices are heard.

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.

We are also very proud of our relationships with Cherwell District Council and Oxfordshire County Council, which have seen the three authorities working together on important projects.

This brings me to Climate Change.

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

This council agreed to host a meeting to discover what climate change work is already being done by other tiers of local government and what they have planned for the future. The meeting will involve Oxfordshire County Council, Cherwell District Council and ourselves and will enable this council to commit to ways of tackling climate change without duplicating what is already underway.

This council is conscious of the need for action – but we have to be practical if we want to be effective. Everyone has to be involved and we will consult with members of the public and businesses to plan our way forward. This council has been criticised for not going down the Citizens Assembly route and some people have wrongly assumed that the public will not be involved. Input from the people is essential and we will get public opinion quicker and more effectively than a Citizens Assembly. Oxford City organised a Citizen's Assembly. It took them nine months to get it up and running at a cost of thousands of pounds and it involved just 42 citizens of Oxford. We will involve far more than 42 residents of Banbury.

The Oxford results, in my opinion, were fairly predictable. But we can learn from the Oxford exercise. There are points we can take from it. To control climate change, councils, local businesses and residents must work together. And this council will organise that togetherness and achieve a cleaner future. That will begin, as agreed in January, and continue in the new municipal year in May after the council elections.

Just a word at this point on what Banbury Town Council is already doing. This council owns and maintains more than 10,000 trees, over five miles of hedgerows, and 220 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 been planting – and will continue to plant – many more new trees in the coming years. Our new grounds maintenance contractors already have this in hand.

What we are doing is quite significant - but we are not complacent. More needs to be done – and this council is committed to doing it. Having said that, the future looks good. Banbury is 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 services that townspeople need and depend on.

I would remind members of the public that all town councillors represent the people of Banbury in a voluntary capacity. Our councillors bring experience from many different walks of life and they give up their valuable time free of charge. A large proportion of a town councillor's work takes place away from the town hall, and much of that work is undertaken representing the town council on various bodies in the town.

Our Annual Report for 2019/20 will be published in the coming months.

Mister Mayor, I would like to conclude by thanking members of the committees and all councillors for their work during the year – and we must not forget the invaluable work of our officers and staff.

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

6 Questions from Electors

Councillor Cherry asked a question about the situation at Mold Crescent, where an underground spring was causing drainage issues for adjacent properties. Tony Brummell had attended the meeting for this issue, given his experience in land drainage matters. He explained that the porous nature of the ground in the area had led to springs developing for many years in wet conditions. This was a natural phenomena and the run off water was finding its way into the surface water drainage system. The town council could not stop this flow, but steps could be taken to manage it. The Highway Authority (OCC) and Thames Water could both assist in facilitating this but would look to the town council to fund it. The Leader of the Council commented that the situation had been exacerbated by the building of the new Care Home. It was noted that the matter would be discussed further at the General Services Committee in due course.

Councillor Dhesi asked about recent works which had seen a number of Cherry Trees removed within People's Park. The Recreation & Amenities Manager responded, advising that this was planned works following the planting of a new Cherry Tree Avenue, which required the removal of some of the older trees that had reached the end of their natural lifespans and were now impeding growth of the new avenue.

Councillor Dhesi also raised a question regarding the impending closure of a café on Horton View. The owners were no longer able to afford the rental for the property, and had asked whether the Council could find them another venue, perhaps within the Horton View Sports Ground facility. The Leader of the Council responded that this café was a commercial venture and matters of property rental were between the landlord and the tenant. There was already another café operating nearby, Robin's Nest at Stanbridge House. The Horton View Sports Ground was a sporting hub and the site was already leased to Bowls and Tennis Clubs, who had the right to quiet enjoyment of that site.

Peter Monk (Banbury Civic Society) then asked a number of questions:

- a) Footpath between Oxford Road and St Louis Meadow Park, adjacent Sainsbury – who was responsible for its upkeep and particularly for maintaining the trees and shrubs alongside? The Leader of the Council advised that this path was a public bridleway owned by OCC. The Recreation & Amenities Manager added that it was his understanding that the land on either side of the path was owned by Sainsburys.
- b) Would the Town Council look at gap filling in tree and hedge lines around playing fields and recreation grounds? The Leader of the Council advised that gapping up was something that the Council would do as part of its maintenance regimes, where funds allowed. He also undertook to raise this at the Oxfordshire County Council Locality meeting.
- c) Public Art Trail – the Civic Society were aware of a number of items of public art that had been or were being installed as part of house building in the area. Could these be tied together into some form of trail, perhaps using resources available through the Museum and the reminiscing group? The Leader of the Council commented that this was a good idea and that he was pleased to note the Civic Society's interest in helping with such a project.

The Meeting ended at 7.20pm.