

<b>Name of project/group</b>
Banbury Civic Society's work on Banbury's canal side development area
<b>Type of project</b>
Community empowerment
<b>Location</b>
Banbury, Oxfordshire, South East
<b>What was involved</b>
<p>Following an announcement from Cherwell District Council (CDC) that the canalside area in the centre of Banbury was to be developed, Banbury Civic Society (BCS) feared for the largely neglected, but historic, buildings in the area and the loss of an area of specific character. The Society welcomed development of the area, but was concerned that pressure for housing and fragmented land ownership would lead to a poorly thought-through project.</p> <p>It was decided therefore that BCS would offer a comprehensive public consultation on the planned development. In order to inform and stimulate issues and concerns to Banbury residents a number of events were arranged: a guided coach trip to four regenerating canal towns, a guided walk through the area and a final workshop to collate the comments and suggestions of attendees. The consultation was publicised in the local paper and at various town events, with readers' and visitors' opinions solicited.</p> <p>When the Council's Draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) was published, the Society felt it did not fully reflect the views developed at CDC stakeholders' consultations, but that a simply negative response was inadequate. As a result the five members of the Built Environment Group of the Society produced the response as expected and also a Vision master plan that reflected the opinions expressed at the events, comments sent to the Society and discussions in the Canalside Working Party. The Vision was published on the Society's website (<a href="#">click here to access</a>) and printed copies given to Town and District Councillors, CDC and libraries.</p> <p>The meetings were funded by the Town Council, the coach tour by a nominal charge and the Vision was printed, gratis, by a local conservation architect.</p> <p>The regeneration is currently on hold, but the Society is keeping a watching brief.</p> <p>The Canalside Working Party consisted of a group of volunteers brought together by the Banbury Civic Society. The group consisted of Banbury Civic Society, Acanthus Clews Architects, Exec Member, and an Emeritus Professor of Urban Design, Oxford Brookes University.</p>
<b>Achievements</b>
<p>As its main output the Banbury Civic Society published a Vision that reflected the views of a cross-section of Banbury residents, which was widely complemented by elected Councillors and the public. Without the group there would have been a lost opportunity for community involvement and fewer alternative ideas for councillors to consider.</p>
<b>Future plans</b>
The working group disbanded, but can be reformed at short notice.

## **Lessons Learnt**

- It can be done: It's possible for a local group to run a meaningful consultation and draw together a team of highly skilled volunteers with professional skills.
- Benefits from graphics and dissemination: There are significant benefits to having good graphics in publications and a wide dissemination of results.
- The need to allocate resources to communications: With no funding for communication with the public, and no-one to specifically organise or write press releases or create posters, it would have been helpful to have more funding for this and to recruit a press officer.
- Increase profile and engage: There are benefits to increasing a Society's public profile by generating publicity and continuing to reach out to the public through events and education.

## **Project contact**

<http://banburycivicsociety.org/>

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