

This report is public.	
‘A Banbury for the Future’ Report	
Committee	Executive
Date of Committee	3 March 2025
Portfolio Holder presenting the report	Portfolio Holder for Finance, Regeneration and Property, Councillor Lesley McLean
Date Portfolio Holder agreed report	20 February 2025
Report of	Corporate Director Communities, Ian Boll

Purpose of report

This report updates the Executive on the progress of ‘A Banbury for the Future’ project; the community engagement with residents, businesses and delivery partners and the emerging Banbury area action plan.

‘A Banbury for the Future’ project was established in 2023 when the previous Executive approved the appointment of consultants to carry out an extensive vision engagement exercise on the future of the town centre and its environs.

Engagement on the vision for Banbury has been completed, with the vision engagement findings compiled into a draft report. The Council has engaged with partners over the last year in developing a draft action plan from the engagement findings.

On 4 November 2024 the Executive agreed to adopt an area-based approach with the objective to strengthen community and stakeholder engagement into major growth sites across the district in support of delivering more holistic and sustainably planned developments, aligned to Council priorities.

As part of this area-based approach a new Area Action Plan is currently under development bringing together several existing action plans into one new document, including the engagement findings from the consultants draft report. This new, updated Action Plan will form part of the Area Framework of documents which will be reviewed and prioritised by the new Area Oversight Group for Banbury.

This report seeks authority from the Executive to publish the draft engagement findings.

1. Recommendations

The Executive resolves:

- 1.1 To authorise the publication of the draft Banbury vision engagement report.

- 1.2 To engage further with the community and partners through the Banbury Area Oversight Group and subgroups, with a view to developing the new Banbury Area Action Plan.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Council is committed to the recovery and revitalisation of Banbury town centre, allocating a budget from its reserves for a two-year vision engagement project: 'A Banbury for the Future' engagement project. The project is moving forward within the new Banbury Area Framework and Area Oversight Group structure, currently under development.
- 2.2 The largest ever community engagement on the Banbury town centre was completed in early 2024 comprising an extensive communications and engagement exercise. Over 2,700 individuals, organisations, businesses and other stakeholders completed an online survey. Workshops and focus groups were held to gather further understanding of the issues and opportunities. The engagement results have been analysed and published on the Council's website.
- 2.3 Further engagement was suspended in the period before and after the 2024 local and national elections while a new Council administration was appointed. An area-based approach to regeneration, growth and development has been agreed with the Council's Executive, which aligns to the Council's priorities, with the implementation of an Area Oversight Group for Banbury.
- 2.4 The Council is relocating its offices to Castle Quay, in Banbury, bringing people into the town centre. It is instigating plans to increase momentum with partners with the objective of strengthening community engagement with stakeholders in support of delivering more holistic and sustainable areas.
- 2.5 The engagement findings provide a guide and resource to help create a lasting vision for Banbury, produced together for the town, to ensure it is a shared vision supported by the community. The emerging vision values in the engagement findings, will underpin the vision for Banbury and provide the basis for the new Area Action Plan. They are distilled from the analysis of the vast amount of data from the Banbury vision survey and workshop feedback.
- 2.6 The vision engagement has been an opportunity for the Council to convene a conversation with partners and stakeholders on the future of Banbury, based on the needs and demands as perceived by those that use its assets and services and live, work or visit the area. It is the start of a programme to deliver positive and lasting change through strengthened partnership working and create strong links to community leadership.
- 2.7 The engagement exercise demonstrated the success of a targeted and extensive communications and media campaign to reach a wide audience. The findings will inform the vision and area-based approach as the Council continues to work with partners and stakeholders. The people of Banbury want to see change.

Implications & Impact Assessments

Implications	Commentary																																							
Finance	<p>'A Banbury for the Future' project is funded from Council reserves. Some funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund has been used to deliver the vision engagement.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th colspan="2">2023/24</th> <th colspan="2">2024/25</th> <th></th> </tr> <tr> <th></th> <th>Original Budget £000</th> <th>Outturn £000</th> <th>Original Budget £000</th> <th>Forecast Outturn £000</th> <th>Total £000</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Reserves</td> <td>125</td> <td>185</td> <td>125</td> <td>85</td> <td>270</td> </tr> <tr> <td>UKSPF</td> <td>0</td> <td>79</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>79</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Base Budget</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>0</td> <td>36</td> <td>36</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td>125</td> <td>264</td> <td>125</td> <td>121</td> <td>385</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>					2023/24		2024/25				Original Budget £000	Outturn £000	Original Budget £000	Forecast Outturn £000	Total £000	Reserves	125	185	125	85	270	UKSPF	0	79	0	0	79	Base Budget	0	0	0	36	36	Total	125	264	125	121	385
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<p>The Banbury Area Oversight Group will be set up and required to operate within the current ongoing budgets available – there is currently no additional reserves funding allocated to this in 2025/26.</p>																																								
<p>The new area action plan will include projects which are currently funded as well as other potential new projects where funding will need to be sought or identified in the future before they can begin. (Funded and unfunded projects will clearly be specified.)</p>																																								
<p>Michael Furness, Assistant Director of Finance (S151 Officer), 21 February 2025</p>																																								
Legal	<p>There are no legal issues associated with the publication of the draft vision engagement findings report. Denzil Turberville, Head of Legal, 21 February 2025.</p>																																							
Risk Management	<p>There are no major risks associated with the publication of the Banbury vision engagement report. Any risks identified in the future will be captured in operational / project risk registers. Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance Team Leader, 10 February 2025</p>																																							
Impact Assessments	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary																																				
Equality Impact		X		<p>There are no equalities implications as a direct consequence from this report. Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance Team Leader, 10 February 2025</p>																																				
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is				Not applicable																																				

delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?				
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?				Not applicable
Climate & Environmental Impact				Not applicable
ICT & Digital Impact				Not applicable
Data Impact				Not applicable
Procurement & subsidy				Not applicable
Council Priorities	<p>An enterprising economy with strong and vibrant local centres</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement area frameworks to support a coordinated approach to development and engagement • Work with partners to understand and unlock complex infrastructure issues that are preventing planned development and support growth from successful delivery <p>Supporting environmental sustainability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the green economy • Work with partners to improve air quality <p>Healthy, resilient, and engaged communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify community needs and produce shared solutions • Work with partners to identify community assets to strengthen safe and resilient communities • Working with partners to bring investment into the district to sustain communities <p>Housing that meets your needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete and deliver our Local Plan to provide sustainable development which improves the local environment for residents, providing necessary infrastructure • Provide for affordable housing to meet the district's needs • Encourage a higher standard of design in new developments 			
Human Resources	Not applicable			
Property	Not applicable			

Consultation & Engagement	Not applicable
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Supporting Information

3. Background

- 3.1 'A Banbury for the Future' project was established to set a sustainable vision for Banbury town centre and its environs. The Council engaged consultants to initiate an engagement exercise with residents, businesses, and visitors. The objective was to find out what people liked, what they thought could be improved and what things they thought Banbury needed to make it a better place in the future. This was incorporated into an online survey and series of engagement workshops. There was significant interest and the largest response to a survey on the future of Banbury to date.
- 3.2 The survey results and feedback from the workshops has been analysed by the consultants with the workshop reports contained in Appendix 1. The analysis was published in March 2024, with a copy of the survey analysis contained in Appendix 2. The engagement findings were used to progress the vision project with a draft report prepared in April 2024. A copy of the draft vision engagement findings report is contained in Appendix 3. In the pre-election period and following the 2024 elections, the vision engagement project was paused to focus on developing an area-based approach, which was agreed by Executive in November 2024.
- 3.3 Consultation on a Banbury Public Realm Strategy took place as part of a district-wide framework exercise in early 2024. The Banbury Public Realm Strategy Framework was approved by the Executive in December 2024 and forms part of the Cherwell Local Plan 2042 (Reg 19) consultation evidence. (a copy can be requested if required for additional information). The Banbury Public Realm Strategy includes recommendations for improving the Market Place. The consultation provided further information on Banbury town centre relevant to the 'A Banbury for the Future' project. Proposals and emerging ideas are progressing with a view to installing seating and planting to enhance the Market Place.
- 3.4 Engagement with key partners has taken place through the Cherwell Local Strategic Partnership, Banbury Business Improvement District, Banbury Quays Consortium (Banbury Museum, the Mills Arts Centre, Tooley's Boatyard, Castle Quay, Banbury Town Council), Banbury Civic Society, rail and train operators and Oxfordshire Community Rail Partnership. This continues while the area-based approach is developed. Partnerships are being established to foster collaboration and commitment to delivering change, for example through a railway station partnership and a cultural strategy led by the Banbury Quays Consortium.
- 3.5 A group comprising delivery partners from the Banbury Business Improvement District, Chamber of Commerce, property agents, Oxfordshire County and Banbury Town Councils met with the project team to discuss next steps and immediate actions. The Area Lead continues to engage with officers and elected Members

collaborating and coordinating activity to focus on the establishment of the Banbury Area Oversight Group (AOG) together with the first draft of the new Banbury Action Plan.

- 3.6 Infrastructure schemes and improvements are progressing in Banbury such as the construction of a new bus and active travel link to the railway station via Tramway Road and the design of a bus service improvement scheme in Cherwell Street. These schemes are included in the new Banbury area action plan.
- 3.7 A vacant premises survey has been undertaken with support from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and includes Banbury. It identifies business premises that could be brought back into use and evidence to support the vision engagement. (A copy of the vacant premises survey can be requested if required for additional information)
- 3.8 The Council has also been exploring opportunities for Banbury with Homes England including the Canalside site. Meanwhile, the Council's property team are considering options for its assets in Banbury.

4. Details

- 4.1 The success of 'A Banbury for the Future' vision engagement survey provides a strong foundation and evidence to guide future partnerships and delivery linked directly with the implementation of the Area Approach. The Council is working with Banbury Town Council and Oxfordshire County Council, private sector, voluntary and community sector, partners and stakeholders to create a vision for the town.
- 4.2 Key stakeholders include the Banbury Business Improvement District (BID), Banbury Chamber of Commerce, Banbury Quays Consortium, transport operators, representatives from the voluntary sector and community groups. Community groups and organisations engaged to date include Banbury Community Action Group, Age Friendly Banbury, local schools and the college, Banbury Civic Society, Banbury Quays Consortium, faith groups, churches and mosque.
- 4.3 The survey launched in November 2023 with a targeted campaign and media publicity to ensure it represented a wide and diverse range of views. It also included a section containing questions on the town's cultural offer to inform the preparation of a cultural strategy for Banbury. When it closed in January 2024, more than 2,700 surveys were completed, taking on average some 45 minutes to complete. Further information was collected from 150 people taking part in dedicated workshops and focus groups.
- 4.4 Six workshops were held with focus groups covering young people, businesses, transport, arts and culture and civic groups. The Business Improvement District supported a workshop for smaller town centre businesses held in Parsons Street. Engagement with large businesses included a business workshop supported by the Chamber of Commerce and hosted by Karcher.
- 4.5 A cultural workshop in the Mill Arts Centre was attended by a wide range of participants from the arts and culture sector including Banbury Museum, the Mill Arts Centre, local theatre and drama groups, Parish Church and Mosque. The final

workshop was a public event in the Town Hall attended by councillors, civic groups, residents and businesses.

- 4.6 The engagement exercise demonstrated the success of a targeted and extensive communications and media campaign to reach a wide audience. The findings will inform the vision and area-based approach as the Council continues to work with partners and stakeholders.

Vision engagement – survey analysis

- 4.7 The survey responses have been analysed, in conjunction with the supporting consultants, Hemmingway Design together with NEW Masterplanning, and a summary of the analysis was published on the Councils website in spring 2024.
- 4.8 The local community responded in high numbers to the survey. 87% of respondents said they were residents, compared to 5% who were visitors. There was high proportion of young people responding. At the end of the survey, young people made up 10% of the respondents. This reflects a priority group for the vision. Contacts with local schools and colleges, led to the online survey launching with young people's workshop.
- 4.9 In terms of businesses 16% of respondents were owners or employees of local businesses.
- 4.10 The survey results show the strengths of the town centre and indicate its resilience. People visit the town centre for a variety of reasons. Favourite places include leisure and entertainment venues, such as The Light and Lock 29. Green and blue spaces including Spaceball and People's Parks, the canal and Grimsbury reservoir, are also high on the list of people's favourite places in Banbury as are, cultural venues such as the Mill Arts Centre and Banbury Museum; independent cafes, restaurants, pubs and bars; heritage assets such as the historic core; Castle Quay shopping centre and retail parks.
- 4.11 The town centre is no longer seen primarily as a shopping centre and its role as a retail destination has diminished (33% of respondents said they did not visit the town centre to shop).
- 4.12 The markets in the town are not seen as attractive to most of the survey respondents (63% disagreed that Banbury is a town with interesting markets and 50% said they did not visit the markets in Banbury).
- 4.13 The analysis shows the evening economy to be doing less well – 90% of respondents are most likely to visit Banbury in the daytime – and suggests it could made more appealing if something could be done to address the perception of being unsafe (52% of respondents said that a safer environment would encourage them to visit more often in the evening, this rises to 65% amongst those that said they do not currently visit in the evening).
- 4.14 It appears evening visits are split between cultural and leisure venues, restaurants and bars along the canal and restaurants and bars in the town centre historic core. 41% of those that visit The Light and/or the Mill Arts Centre do not visit the historic

core in an evening, highlighting a “disconnect” between these two key areas of the town.

4.15 The current programme of events and festivals is popular. The Banbury Canal Festival, Food and Drink Festival and Victorian Christmas Market are the most well attended amongst respondents. However, young people taking part in the survey disagree that Banbury is a town centre with a good range of events and festivals (45% of respondents aged 16 to 24) suggesting there may be an under provision of events and festivals for older teenagers and young adults.

4.16 The survey analysis also highlighted the following common themes.

- **Heritage:** Respondents felt that buildings in the historic core in general need to be looked after better, specifically those on High Street and Market Place.
- **Green spaces:** 59% of respondents agreed the town centre parks and green spaces were good but could be made better with improved play, inclusion of a café and toilets, increased biodiversity, more greenery and planting throughout the town centre, more seating, fewer cars and more trees and greenery in Market Place.
- **Travel:** Over 70% of respondents agreed that the town centre is easy to get to. Most respondents travel to the town centre by car and very few cycle. Young people are more likely to walk to the town centre than other age groups. 56% of local respondents and 59% of visitors, feel there are currently no attractive alternative ways to travel into Banbury, so that they do not have to travel by car. More frequent and cheaper bus and / or rail services would be the main incentives for car users to leave their cars at home.

4.17 **Other themes** in the responses included (in no particular order):

- Reduce traffic and pollution, more pedestrianisation
- Safer walking and cycling routes to discourage car use
- Improved public transport services
- Free parking
- Cleaner streets and better maintained buildings/shopfronts
- More greenery, trees and planting
- Improved public realm including more seating, and opportunities for socialising
- Better maintenance and promotion of historic assets
- Reduced rents and business rates to encourage/enable smaller independent businesses to open in the town centre and reducing the number of vacant retail units.
- Incentives for businesses to open in the town centre rather than on out of town retail parks.
- More activities and facilities for teenagers, young adults and families with young children.
- Improved safety
- Improved market offer and setting
- More events and cultural activity

4.18 Respondents were asked to choose a word that describes the Banbury of the future. Seven themes emerged from the analysis encapsulated by the words: vibrant, safe, clean, green, fun, independent and destination.

Vision engagement – draft findings

4.19 Following the survey analysis, a draft vision engagement findings report was prepared in spring 2024. A copy of the draft engagement findings report is contained in Appendix 2. It summarises key findings from the engagement process, the issues that the local community want to see addressed and the type of town centre they want Banbury to be in six sections.

- Section 1 introduces the report;
- section 2 sets out the emerging vision values;
- Section 3 outlines a people-led vision;
- Section 4 sets out the desire for change;
- Section 5 sets opportunities for change
- Section 6 discussing the next steps.

Emerging vision values

4.20 The emerging vision values created from the survey and workshops will be used as values to underpin the vision for Banbury and are described in more detail in the vision engagement findings report.

- **Vibrant:** This word is often used to describe the town centres people want to see. Other words used in the survey responses included “busy”, “bustling”, “prosperous” and “flourishing”. They represent a Banbury town centre full of activities and people, creating a lively atmosphere with buildings, including shops, that are contributing to the vibrancy. A strong Banbury local market and activities and events are important elements in bringing “life” to the town centre and animating its streets and spaces.
- **Safe:** Safety in Banbury town centre was a recurring theme during the vision engagement. There is a desire to see more people in Banbury town centre, creating a natural sense of security, community and sociability. Young people want Banbury town centre to have spaces where they can socialise with friends, feel safe and welcome.
- **Clean:** Banbury people are proud of their town centre, particularly its heritage. They want to showcase the quality of its streets, spaces and buildings. Making sure those places and buildings are clean and well-maintained is a priority for many people and a starting point for improvement to Banbury town centre.
- **Green:** Other similar words used to describe the Banbury town centre people want to see included “sustainable”, “innovative” and “progressive”. People want to see a forward-looking town centre that demonstrates its commitment to tackling environmental, social and technological challenges. They also want to see a greener town centre, in the true sense of the word, with more trees lining its streets and public spaces.
- **Fun:** Banbury town centre should be a “fun” place that attracts people with a sense of excitement about what they will find when they visit. They want it to be “lively” and “buzzing” and somewhere that is “entertaining” “bright”, “colourful” and “sociable”.
- **Independent:** This theme reflects the desire for Banbury to be an interesting, authentic and diverse town centre which is different from other places and has its own unique identity, that supports and nurtures creativity and distinctive local businesses.

- **Destination:** There is a clear sense from the survey respondents that Banbury town centre needs to become a destination. The key words from workshop participants promote a possible change in mindset to think bigger (words include “city” and “cosmopolitan”). Banbury’s success demonstrates that it has already moved beyond being a “traditional” market town. The report suggests that Banbury needs to think like a larger town, while retaining its distinctive qualities.
- 4.22 The vision engagement findings provide an understanding of how people view the town centre, the challenges it faces but also a desire for change, highlighting the opportunities and demonstrate its potential. The engagement shows that people value Banbury’s “market town” qualities: its walkability, its independent shops, its parks and green spaces and its heritage, particularly the Old Town and canal.
- 4.23 People liked the diversity of Banbury’s communities and the variety of cultural, leisure and recreational opportunities available in the town centre.
- 4.24 People find Banbury town centre easy to get to. Once they are in the town centre, most find it easy to walk around.
- 4.25 There are a variety of reasons for people visiting Banbury and this is a key strength of the town centre.
- 4.26 The survey results highlight some major issues for the vision to address including:
- The quality of shopping provision and impact of retail parks.
 - The quality of Banbury’s regular markets.
 - The treatment of Banbury’s historic streets, spaces and buildings.
 - The frequency and cost of bus services.
 - The quality of cycling and walking routes.
 - Overall perceptions of safety in the town centre.
- 4.27 The engagement findings report identifies 12 key opportunities for change from the survey and workshops. These are:
- Retail parks
 - Shopping local
 - Local markets
 - Food and drink
 - Culture
 - Events and festivals
 - Young people
 - Heritage
 - Walkability
 - Bus and rail
 - Parking
 - Local jobs
- 4.28 Each opportunity is described in more detail with relevant case studies and draft actions in the report.
- 4.29 The report identifies five potential physical “**areas of change**” with priorities for action:
- The Canal

- Old Town and heritage
- Green Space
- Castle Quay
- Walking and cycling

4.30 The final section of the of the report suggests five priority next steps:

- Publishing the vision engagement findings report and providing feedback to survey respondents
- Refining the core “values” of Banbury
- Developing an overarching vision/ strategy / masterplan for the town centre
- Developing a short-term action plan to demonstrate commitment to change
- Identifying an organisational structure to manage and coordinate the delivery of change.

4.31 The vision engagement findings report represents the start of an ongoing process of bringing the community, businesses, partners and stakeholders together to deliver coordinated and comprehensive change in the town centre. Its publication has been delayed due to the restrictions of the pre-election period, and to provide the opportunity for the new Administration to outline its response. The draft report has been shared, on a confidential basis, with an initial group of delivery partners.

Area Action Plan

4.32 To progress ‘A Banbury for the Future’ vision engagement a short-term action plan was prepared. The action plan captured what was already happening as well as emerging projects and plans. These plans will now be merged to form the basis of the emerging Area Action Plan to link with the Banbury AOG, and the area-based approach across the district.

4.33 The Banbury Area Action Plan will include infrastructure projects such as the proposals to improve Tramway Road and Cherwell Street. Construction of the Tramway Road scheme has started and comprises new walking, cycling and bus/taxi infrastructure to improve access to the railway station. The Cherwell Street scheme is being delivered by Oxfordshire County Council using funds secured through the Bus Service Improvement Plan to progressing proposals to improve the capacity and efficiency of the junction with Bridge Street and address some of the issues in this area.

4.34 The emerging vision values provide a framework to evaluate ideas and proposals. They can be used to test and inform the Banbury area action plan. The vision engagement findings have been used to inform emerging projects including, the vacant town centre premises study, Market Place options, cultural strategy, public realm frameworks strategy and the area-based approach across the district.

5. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

5.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: Not publishing the vision engagement findings or delaying the publication may lead to a lack of momentum in delivering the new Banbury Area programme

and may also make further community engagement more challenging as it may be perceived as a lack of commitment to the Banbury area.

6 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 6.1 The vision engagement exercise and the findings it has generated provide an understanding of how people view Banbury, the challenges it faces but also a desire for change, highlighting the opportunities and demonstrating its potential.
- 6.2 There is a clear desire to see Banbury town centre improve. Over 99% of survey respondents want see improvements to the town centre. The engagement process indicates that to deliver this change, Banbury needs a change of mindset. The report highlights some major issues the vision needs to address.
- 6.3 This report seeks the Executive’s approval to publish the draft Banbury vision engagement findings report. The reason for the recommendation is to progress the work on Banbury as set out in the report. It remains important to maintain the focus on continued community engagement; by publishing the draft vision engagement findings report, the Council is reaffirming its commitment to regeneration and growth in Banbury.

Decision Information

Key Decision	No
Subject to Call in	Yes
If not, why not subject to call in	N/A
Ward(s) Affected	Banbury Hardwick, Ruscote, Banbury Cross and Neithrop, Grimsbury and Hightown, Calthorpe and Easington

Document Information

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Banbury vision 2050 workshop reports
Appendix 2	Banbury vision 2050 Survey Analysis, March 2024
Appendix 3	Banbury vision 2050, Engagement findings report, April 2024
Background Papers	None
Reference Papers	None
Report Author	Andrew Bowe, Banbury Area Lead

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Corporate Director Approval (unless Corporate Director or Statutory Officer report)	Corporate Director for Communities, 6 February 2025 Corporate Director for Resources and Transformation, 21 February 2025