

Lets LIVE in Oxford

3/6

A Study of the Road Plan



Oxford Civic Society

April 1970

Please write your comments on the road plan below,
and return to the Hon. Secretary, Oxford Civic Society,
46 Hamilton Road, Oxford.

Your name

Your address

.

Your comments

Let's LIVE in Oxford

A Study of the Proposed Road Plan

Written by members of the

OXFORD CIVIC SOCIETY

OXFORD

1970

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Secretary: G. L'E. Turner, 46 Hamilton Road, Oxford

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FOREWORD

This booklet has been written by a working party of the Oxford Civic Society. Its object is to achieve two things: to provide the townspeople of Oxford with a simple, readable account of the essentials of the road plan which the City Council favours, and about which a decision will be made after the Public Inquiry to be held on 16 June this year; and to express the comments and criticisms of ordinary citizens of Oxford who have studied the Consultants' recommendations. It may be that these views are not shared by all Oxford people. This does not matter, because the more discussion that is stimulated, and the more interest awakened by our ideas, the better it will be for the city that we live in and love. What we fear is that a decision may be taken this year which will decide the future of Oxford for the next century, without most of the townspeople having any real idea what is to happen. Opposition to the road plan may well be confined to small groups concerned with a particular area, or a particular interest. For them, a modification of the plan may seem a victory. But we should *all* look at the effect of the plan *on the whole of our city*. This is a responsibility that none of us can abdicate.

Perhaps when you have read the following chapters you will want to express your views on the road plan. If so, we suggest that:

- a) You write to Oxford's Member of Parliament:

EVAN LUARD, M.P.
THE HOUSE OF COMMONS
WESTMINSTER
LONDON SW1

- b) You tear off and return to the Secretary of the Oxford Civic Society the coloured slip at the front of this booklet. The Society can then use your comments in its case at the Public Inquiry in June.

Chapter 1

The Damage to Oxford

An urban environment is the habitat of society, and must have qualities which are agreeable, not ones which make it unbearable. Places with charm, or as G.M. Hopkins said, *Inscape*, form oases of order, decency and continuity in the mass, and they become foci which are recognizable in the bewilderment and anarchy of a civilization besotted with the motor car. Often, such places which delight, and which are sanctuaries of sanity and beacons of hope, are swept away by the crudities of contemporary town planning which, by its very techniques, is two-dimensional, and quite incapable of realizing those hairbreadth *nuances* of structure, of material, of enclosure and of *scale* which can breathe the stuff of poetry into townscape.

It is a cause for alarm that it is precisely these charming and unassuming enclaves which are frequently in the greatest danger. There has been much concern recently about the amount of destruction of fine buildings of all periods, but almost daily, changes are being made which are essentially ruinous to the quality of the environment. It is not just the buildings of excellence which contribute to an agreeable townscape, but unassuming little terraces, trees, cast-iron details and many other subtle and unspectacular aspects which contribute to an overall entity. It is the erosion of these small elements, not distinguished enough to be defended by the pundits or other representatives of Established Taste, which is responsible more than any other factors—apart from wholesale destruction, known euphemistically as ‘redevelopment’—for the decline of the pleasures of living in Oxford.

In a short time an enormous number of arrows, bollards, lines, stripes, lettering, lights, signs and other paraphernalia associated with traffic has appeared all over Oxford, contributing to the destruction of the visual qualities of the city. Another matter which is cause for alarm is the destruction of old lamps. Many were unobtrusively fixed to buildings, but recently many have been replaced by the last word in sheer ugliness. Not content with erecting these on their own, the authorities plaster them with signs.

The type of environment which is considered suitable by the officials of the authority is open to considerable criticism. The vast speedways of

Blackbird Leys and the anarchic layout are not conducive to visual enjoyment, while Rose Hill, perhaps the finest site in Oxford, has been ruined. You would imagine that the view over the city where the ‘eye travels down to Oxford’s towers’ would have been appreciated and exploited, but such pious hopes turn out to be in vain.

So far, however, the biggest area to be selected for sacrifice has been St Ebbe’s. Cities and towns are subtle things: they need to be treated with care and gentleness. Wholesale flattening is no answer to the problems of decay or obsolescence.

It used to be fashionable among dentists to remove all or most of a person’s teeth and to replace them with artificial ones. Planning today is in the same state as the dental profession used to be. Fortunately for our mouths, a policy of repair and conservation of teeth has replaced the cruder methods of yesteryear. Unfortunately for our city, policies of ‘comprehensive redevelopment’ have prevailed which mean total obliteration of an area, backed by compulsory purchase and all the other bureaucratic machinery which we are told is for our own good. Yet there is a strong current which is moving towards rehabilitation, replacement and repair, for the qualities that make towns pleasant cannot be created overnight. Enlightenment, however, has scarcely dawned where Oxford is concerned.

St Ebbe’s has been destroyed. For years it has lain broken and derelict, part of the city’s heart, part of its ancient settlement pattern, part of its history, its memory and its life. Now it is empty and hideous, as the result of a misguided official policy. Now a road layout which has no resemblance to any overall plan for the area has been built. It will be impossible to plan the place as a unit, because the roads have been planned first and the spaces in between will be filled in afterwards. This is no way to plan.

The Council intends to demolish the 17th-century houses in Charles Street, among the last pieces of old St Ebbe’s. Yet in the Observation of the Oxford City Council on Objections no. 53 and no. 124 to the Development Plan Review, the City Council ‘acknowledges the truth of all the objectors say about the historic significance of the buildings...’ and further, the Council stated that it ‘would have taken vigorous steps... to preserve the buildings’ if a service road had not been planned to go over the site. In other words, the Council accepted the historic value of the buildings, and expressed willingness to consider their retention. Now, *no road is to be built across the site*. Yet the Council is still intent on demolishing them because it wants to extend the area for commercial development.

Official recognition of the need for conservation has come late, and yet this Council of Oxford does not appear to be aware that conservation is now officially respectable. Much of the damage has already been done, and the juggernaut of destruction has gone far to eliminate the pleasant qualities of much of Oxford. Even now, grandiose plans by commercial interests and by municipal empire-builders are about to be implemented, and these will successfully knock the life and soul out of an area where humanity was once the dominant *motif*.

The roads lobby is extremely powerful. Far too often, considerations of the requirements of the private motor car are put before everything else, with the result that factors such as those of amenity, charm, scale and humanity are ignored. Official taste lags well behind in the wake of the destruction, so that it is only where a sufficient number of 'experts' is called in to testify to the qualities of an area that there is any hope of saving it. Political considerations play their part, of course. A perfectly sound residential area may be acquired and demolished by a local authority to satisfy the requirements of party dogma. Roads may be ploughed through a residential area in order to prove how 'progressive' is the group charged with transport problems. Arguments about quality of the environment, amenity and conservation generally fail to carry the same weight as those concerned with finance, transport, speed of movement, and other factors which are supposedly measurable. Thinking and passing judgment are ruled by the statistician, whose analyses can carry more votes at official level than any argument based on sympathy for the unmeasurable.

Now, ironically in European Conservation Year, we are faced with perhaps the greatest threat ever to Oxford, a threat which is already being implemented. A huge, traffic-generating complex is being built at Westgate, and cars are to penetrate the heart of the city to park all day in vast, expensive parks nearby. St Ebbe's, as I have said, has lain desolate for years. Large areas of former revenue-producing property will be occupied by wasteful, non-producing car parks. An 'inner relief' road is proposed which will slice its way through the fabric of the city. Now there are few things as immutable as modern roads, and very little can be done about them *once they are there*. Artists' impressions of flowers and happy couples cavorting among the pilotti of the roads are false. Anyone who has actually seen the horror of Hammersmith flyover or some of the other urban motorways will know the deserts they create. Their scale is *totally overbearing, and utterly inhuman*.

An inner relief road would accomplish a great deal of erosion as well as the immediate destruction. The proximity of such a road would destroy the peace of those living nearby, and reduce the desirability of properties, which would then gradually become uncared for and shabby. The deterioration of the environment in the vicinity of the relief road would be immediate and widespread. Standards in public transport would undoubtedly fall, and fares would rise. Accidents would increase. There would be more noise and more fumes from the exhausts. The road also replaces *revenue-producing properties with non-revenue-producing and expensive roads*.

Erosion proceeds at a frightening rate, and the results are plain for all to see. Do we want the hell of a traffic dominated city, much as great areas of London have become? Do we want to live in a sewer for car fumes? Do we want to create the conditions where more noise, more accidents and more destruction are inevitable? Do we want the oases where life is still possible to be replaced by windy limbos where the car is king? Do we want empty wastelands of carparking in place of communities? Do we want commercial citadels where not a living creature stirs when the shops have shut? Do we want our open spaces spoiled and blighted for ever?

Cities which destroy their heritages are memoryless shells. People need recognizable objects from their past to cling to and with which to identify. Modern roads in towns mean destruction. So much will be lost by allowing an inner road to be built. We have only ourselves to blame if, after seeing what has happened to American cities, and what has happened to parts of London, we let it destroy Oxford too.

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Chapter 2

Oxford Road Plan 1970

The last five years of the sixties have seen the most determined effort yet made to end the famous 'Road' stalemate in Oxford. In 1966 the City Council carried out a survey of land use and transportation in the whole of Oxford and surrounding areas, advised by Messrs Scott Wilson Kirkpatrick & Partners. On the basis of this and other research, the same firm of consultants, together with Messrs Hugh Wilson & Lewis Womersley, compared various road and traffic schemes. In December 1968 their report, *Oxford Central Area Study*, was published. In commissioning this study, the Council followed the advice of the Minister of Housing and Local Government, who in 1966, at the first Review of the Development Plan, 'was not prepared to give effect to the proposals for principal traffic routes'. In other words, decision on the much-disputed line of the inner relief road, which has always been regarded as essential to Oxford's future, was yet again postponed.

In March 1969 the Council approved in principle the Consultants' preferred road and traffic system, known as Scheme D. The Scheme then had to be fitted into the city's Development Plan. This was done in the form of Amendment 2, 1970, consisting of two documents, a *Written Statement* and a *Written Analysis*, and three maps. The *Central Area Study* was incorporated as an appendix. On 16 June 1970 a Public Enquiry will be held into the proposals contained in Amendment 2. Following this, the Minister will make his decision as to whether or not the Consultants' Scheme D road plan, with its accompanying traffic and parking system, shall be carried out.

It is most unlikely that decision will again be deferred. A plan which will take twenty years to carry out, which is estimated to cost at the very least £31,000,000 (1968 prices), and which will completely change the face of the city, will this year either be put into effect or rejected. Oxford, like many other cities today, is facing major surgery. Before an operation can be performed, the consent of the patient is required by law. Do the people of Oxford really understand what is being planned for their city? *Full knowledge of what is involved by all residents is the only satisfactory basis for a decision in favour of the Road Plan.*

What has the Council done to ensure that the people of Oxford are aware

of the proposals embodied in Amendment 2? The *Central Area Study*, produced by the Consultants, has been on sale for the last year, priced £3. It is a massive document, limited by its scope and price to a strictly professional rather than a popular market. The *Oxford Mail*, at the time the *Study* was published, printed a summary of its proposals, but the Council did not avail itself of an excellent opportunity to use this summary as the basis of a popular booklet. There has been a most serious failure of communication here between the Council and the electorate.

Once one has overcome a natural reluctance to attack so formidable a document, the *Central Area Study* is found to be a most interesting report. It analyses the environmental problems of Oxford very fairly, and provides a wide variety of alternative solutions. Seven road schemes, designated A to G, are considered, and three associated public transport schemes, X, Y and Z. (These are discussed in chapter 6 below.)

Schemes A and B involve no further road building other than that to which the authorities are committed, which is: the Northern and Southern Bypass improvements; the Cumnor Hill and Abingdon Bypasses; Peartree Roundabout; and, in the city, the Marston Ferry Link Road. The difference between A and B is that the latter involves tighter restriction of the private car, notably the closing of Magdalen Bridge. Scheme B is rejected by the Consultants because it requires so drastic a reduction in the use of private transport: 'The magnitude of overall restraint is equivalent to reducing the proportion of travel by private car throughout the Study Area from 73% in 1966 to 63% in 1991 despite a doubling in car ownership over the same period.' Two other comments on Scheme B are worth quoting:

'In total economic terms we have demonstrated that this system is the most expensive of all those tested.'

'In our view it would so reduce the attractiveness of Oxford and its central area as to be inconsistent with the continuing prosperity of the city.'

The 'total economic terms' of the planners, as is now being increasingly realized, do not take into account the effect on people and communities of the unrestricted use of the car (see chapter 8 below). It is open to question whether 'the continuing prosperity' of Oxford will be most truly promoted by placing the historic university area in a setting of urban motorways and multi-storey car parks which may themselves prove inadequate to the unrestrained demands of car traffic as soon as they are completed.

Schemes C, D and E are road schemes, designed to accommodate the predicted growth of traffic in the city, which require high capital investment. All three incorporate a spine road running north/south along the railway to join the outer bypasses; a Botley Road bypass; and road building to which the city is already committed, including the Marston Ferry Link. They differ only in the location of the south relief road.

Scheme C routes the south road from St Ebbe's under St Aldate's, in a cutting across Christ Church Meadow, over the diverted river Cherwell and so to the bottom of Headington Hill.

Scheme D takes the road through Grandpont and Hinksey Park, to cross the Abingdon Road south of Folly Bridge, continuing past the site of Eastwyke Farm, over the river Thames, and so to a junction with Marston Road near South Park.

Scheme E places the road considerably further south, to cross the river Thames 200 yards from the existing Donnington Bridge, then linking it to the Eastern Bypass near the Territorial Army Centre.

Schemes F and G are those which involve the building of roads, but with low capital investment.

Scheme F is substantially the same in route as Scheme D, but the roads are designed on a cheaper scale, so that a greater degree of traffic restraint is incorporated.

Scheme G is Scheme D without the extension of the spine road between St Margaret's Road and the Northern Bypass, and between Grandpont and the Southern Bypass.

The Consultants recommend Scheme D, if the money is available, because it produces the greatest possible reduction of traffic flow in the university streets. If, however, lower capital investment only is available, Scheme G is their second choice. The preferred public transport scheme is Scheme X: therefore the two complete transportation systems recommended by the Consultants are known as D_0X_0 and G_1X_1 . The 0 and 1 indicate the degree of traffic restraint required by the scheme.

The City Council's position is made quite clear in the *Written Analysis* to Amendment 2. Though the Amendment only covers the period to 1981, by which time only Stage 1 of any scheme can be completed—and Stage 1 covers only the south relief road—the Council has committed itself, subject to the result of the Public Inquiry and the Minister's decision, to the whole of Scheme D. 'The City Council does not consider that the long term future

of the city should be based on the permanent acceptance of the degree of traffic restraint and consequent interference with the normal mode of travel of the citizens implied in Scheme G.'

Scheme G should be completed by 1986, and Scheme D by 1991. The Council proposes to go ahead with long-term measures designed to put the whole plan into effect, in order to 'avoid uncertainty'. It 'will resist any proposals for permanent development which would obstruct or hamper the construction or use of the later stages'. The Council has, in fact, decided to end the road deadlock, once and for all.

Chapter 3

Oxford's Choice—Homes or Cars

Since action, even perhaps the wrong action, is attractive after decades of dithering, one is tempted to applaud the Council's decisiveness in acting on the Consultants' proposals. It may be that, if all Oxford ratepayers understood what is planned to happen in Oxford in the next twenty years, the majority really would want the Road Plan implemented. But there is considerable evidence that people do *not* know what Scheme D involves.

What are the facts? If the scheme is completed, there will be eight miles of urban motorway within the city limits. Since they run through built-up areas, these major roads will destroy, with their noise and air pollution, the peace and attractiveness of a very large number of homes in Oxford. The areas which will be most affected are, starting from the north: Wolvercote Green; Summertown, where the Rogers Street link joins the spine road, and in the vicinity of Marston Ferry Road; Kingston Road and St Margaret's Road, where the next link runs; Jericho and New Hinksey; all the property in south Oxford near Hinksey Park; Iffley and Cowley Roads, where the junctions with the south relief road are sited; Morrell Avenue and the St Clements area. Both ends of the Marston Ferry Link will be seriously affected, and it is estimated that both Marston Ferry Road and Cherwell Drive will carry 10,000 to 16,000 vehicles per day. The flow of traffic will increase very greatly in Walton Street and Kingston Road, and Marston Road is to be upgraded to a principal traffic route. A point worth noting is the

considerable number of schools which will be affected by noise because of the proximity of the new main roads. Examples of this are the Cherwell School, St Nicholas Primary and Old Marston County Schools, the East Oxford group of schools in Union Street, Northern House School, the Oxford High School for Girls and St Edward's School. All this is in addition to the actual destruction of property required by the road schemes. In the case of Scheme D, this involves 174 houses and 19 businesses. In the chapter on environment in the *Central Area Study*, there are hints of what the threat is. Hinksey Park will be 'dominated visually by the road'. Tree planting will be needed in Grandpont to 'help to alleviate the noise nuisance'. Sloping cuttings for the sunken sections of the road will cause 'a wider gash', while retaining walls, though magnifying the noise, 'reduce the effective break in the urban fabric'.

It is by no means certain that *any* urban road system can cope with unrestricted use of the car. By the time Scheme D is completed, one of two things will probably have happened. Either it will be already inadequate to the volume of car traffic, in which case restraints will have to be imposed anyway. Or the whole idea of car restraint will have been accepted nationally, so that Oxford's road system will be out of date. But for this problem, at least, large areas of the city will have been irretrievably destroyed as places to live. Once you have driven a road through a community, you 'cannot give it vital growth again'.

What are the expected benefits? Scheme D is preferred because it makes the most effective overall reductions on traffic flow in High Street, Magdalen Bridge, St Aldate's, St Giles and Broad Street. It also improves the conditions in the Cowley Road shopping centre, making it possible for a shopping precinct to be established. The spine road should greatly reduce traffic in the southern sections of Woodstock and Banbury Roads, in the area known as north Oxford, though the benefits to Summertown are doubtful (see chapter 5). Car owners will be able to bring their cars into the city freely to shop, and, once the multi-storey car parks are built, commuters will be able to drive to work and park—at a price. The hoped-for commercial benefit to Oxford is the main reason why the Council are supporting the scheme. They are convinced that 'The City is the natural centre for a much larger population', and equally convinced that the car is the key to its prosperity. The *Central Area Study* emphasizes the 'lack of acceptance by the public of restraint on the use of the private car, and forced use of public transport'.

To this commercial prosperity are to be sacrificed what the *Central Area Study* calls the 'areas of decay' in Jericho, St Ebbe's, St Clements and Grandpont. Though some lip-service is paid to the idea of maintaining a community in Jericho, redevelopment seems likely, even there, to gain the upper hand. Elsewhere, what has happened to St Ebbe's seems to be the model for the rest: houses destroyed to make room for car parks, commercial and office development, and, at best, blocks of flats. Oxford city is to be a place to shop in, to work in, but no longer to live in.

All this is still in the future—a long way in the future, for it will be at least ten years before any benefit, or even change, is experienced from the building of roads and car parks. In the *Written Analysis* of Amendment 2 we are told: 'Up to the time when the new primary roads and car-parks are completed, the Council intends to produce as much of the environmental improvement as possible by the use of traffic management measures. These are the subject of the Council's *Traffic and Transport Plan*.' An attempt to secure this document from the Information Centre led to the discovery that it has not yet been written. In fact the City Council, having cheerfully committed Oxford to a road plan which cannot be fully implemented for twenty years, has as yet formulated no definite measures for the control of the city's critical traffic congestion apart from the disc parking plan, which was conceived before the Consultants carried out their survey. The object of this plan is to get the commuters' cars off the roads into the existing car parks, and replace them with the short-stay vehicles of shoppers and visitors. As the numbers of both commuters and shoppers increase, the most likely result of disc parking is that all the side streets immediately surrounding the zone will become clogged with parked cars. Disc parking on its own creates as many problems as it solves. An overall plan of parking restraint for the whole city is needed.

There are many people who will argue that, because our city is so congested and chaotic, the adoption of any scheme that the experts produce with the object of alleviating it is worth supporting. This is both illogical and dangerous. Thirty years ago an inner relief road might have presented a solution, though only a temporary one, to the traffic problem of Oxford. Today such a solution is merely a palliative, and an outmoded one at that. In the United States, ten years ahead of us in experience, urban motorways have been tried and found wanting. The traffic expands to fill them, and they make living conditions intolerable. In this country, too, opinion is

swinging towards restriction rather than accommodation of cars in towns. Leicester has rejected more central motorways in favour of a Park and Ride scheme for commuters; a system of modern interchange garages is planned, where the commuter can move in comfort from his car to a bus. Stevenage Council, faced with the choice between backing a road-building programme or a greatly expanded public transport system, has opted for the latter.

Oxford City Council asked the Consultants for a road plan, and has set its face against any restriction of the car. Naturally the Consultants followed the line of the brief, and offered as their preferred solution a system of new roads. We question the basic premise on which the Council and the Consultants have acted. Urban motorways are impossible because they will destroy our city as a place to live in. Therefore another solution must be found and implemented.

Chapter 4

Multi-deck Car Parks

The total transportation scheme D_0X_0 , which represents the road Scheme D, together with public transport Scheme X (see chapter 6) and the least possible restraint of traffic, requires the construction of a number of multi-deck car parks in the city centre. Should Scheme G be accepted instead of Scheme D, the restraint on traffic would be greater, and the number of cars to be accommodated correspondingly less. The table below gives the location of the central area car parks and the numbers of cars for which they would be intended in 1991.

CENTRAL MULTI-DECK CAR PARKS

Location	CAR NUMBERS		COSTS UNDER SCHEME D	
	Scheme G	Scheme D	Cost of construction at £500 per car space	Total cost with land at £760 per car space
ST CLEMENTS AND COWLEY ROAD	500	1,500	£750,000	£1,140,000
ST EBBE'S	2,500	4,000	£2,000,000	£3,040,000
GLOUCESTER GREEN	1,500	2,500	£1,250,000	£1,900,000
WALTON CRESCENT	400	1,000	£500,000	£760,000
ST ALDATE'S	200	600	£300,000	£456,000
TOTALS	5,100	9,600	£4,800,000	£7,296,000

A university car park in Merton Field, to hold 1000 cars under Scheme D and 500 under Scheme G, is also planned. The Consultants assume a cost, including value of the land, of £760 per car space. They say that Scheme D_0X_0 requires the provision of 12,500 spaces in public garages, and that the cost of the provision of public parking space is estimated to be £9.5 million.

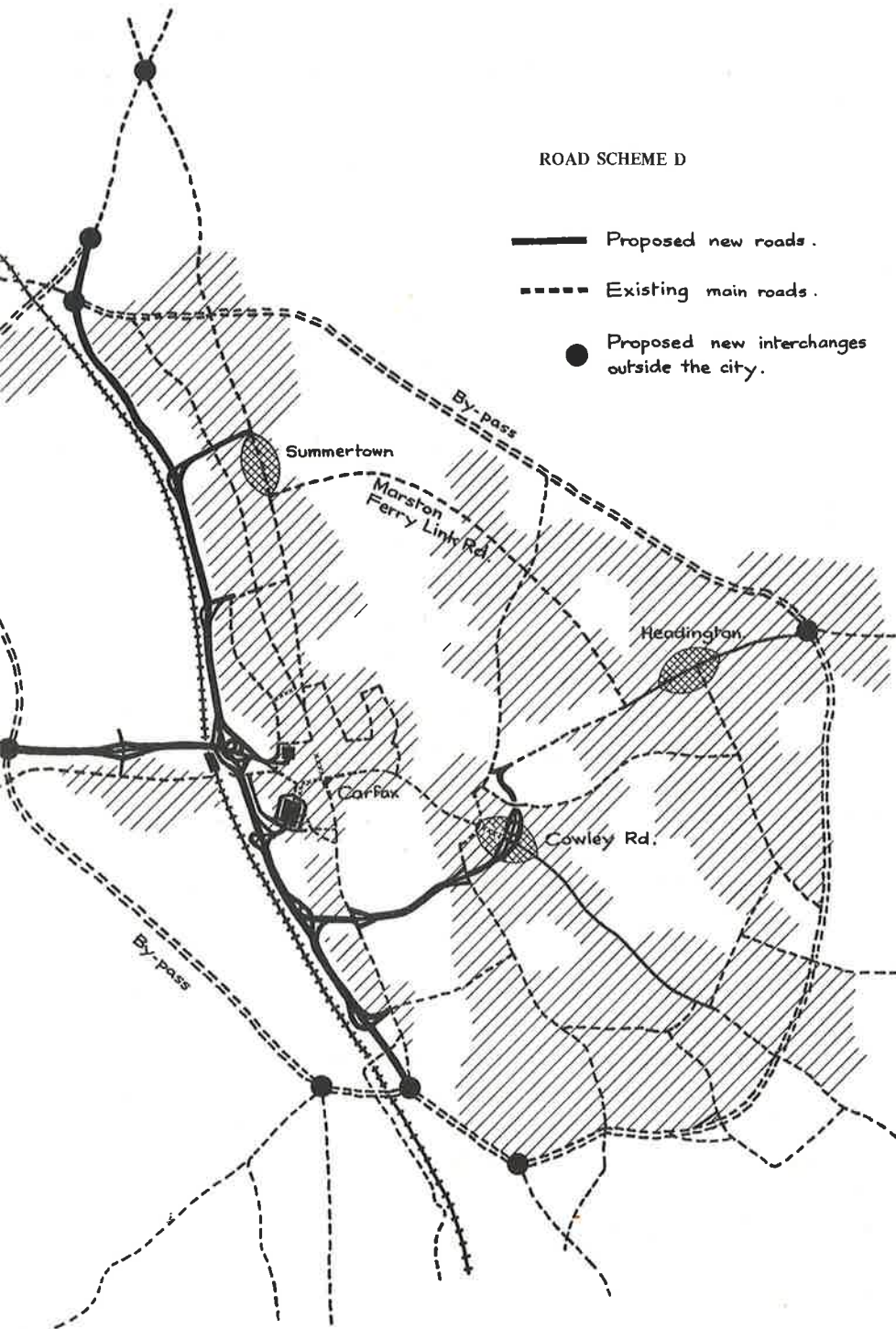
Oxford has not yet seen much of multi-deck car parks. Cowley Centre has one for 500 cars, and is, by Oxford standards, quite a dominating structure. The proposal is that the St Ebbe's car park should hold 4000 cars. Since the space allowance per car is 320 square feet, and the structure cannot rise above six storeys because of city regulations, it will cover an area twice that to be occupied by the new library and Westgate Centre, that is, 8 acres. It is not, therefore, difficult to accept the Consultants' statement that 'large car parks can be visually intrusive and dominate a particular view or an entire skyline'. This vast building will be the introduction to Oxford for visitors arriving by train. It will look like the Queen Elizabeth in dry dock. And it is only one, though admittedly the largest, of six similar buildings.

The Consultants stress that all central area parking should be in the hands of the City Council, and make the assumption 'that public parking would be largely self-supporting'. Nowhere, however, is it stated what parking charges will have to be in order to make these vast multi-deck car parks self-supporting: this is a matter of the utmost concern to shoppers, and even more to commuters. Should the City Council find itself unable to carry out the construction of these multi-deck parks, which means that the work is put into the hands of a private developer, both their appearance and the charges imposed might well prove less acceptable still.

It has been estimated that the cost per car space of erecting a multi-deck car park in a city centre is £500 (Leicester City's estimate). The St Ebbe's car park alone would therefore cost £2,000,000 to build. The Council's traffic survey in 1966 produced a figure of vehicle occupancy in the city which varied between 1.3 and 1.7 persons per car. In other words, most cars on our roads have only one person in them. It is then proposed that these overlarge metal containers should occupy 320 square feet of expensive space in the central area, provided at the cost of £2 million for only one of six parks. All six parks will cost practically £5 million to construct. The total cost with land of all the central parks will be £9.5 million.

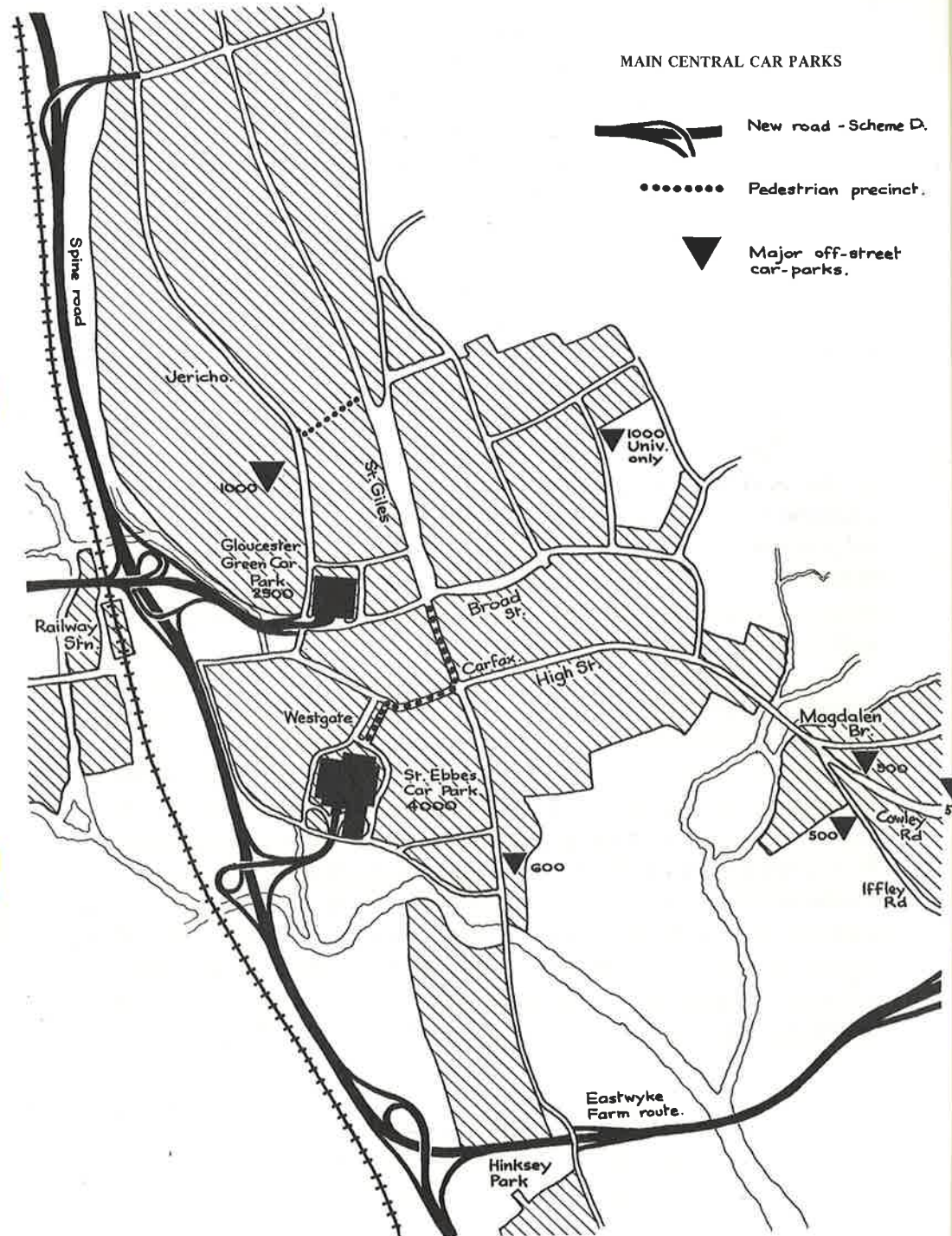
ROAD SCHEME D

- Proposed new roads.
- - - Existing main roads.
- Proposed new interchanges outside the city.



MAIN CENTRAL CAR PARKS

- New road - Scheme D.
- Pedestrian precinct.
- ▼ Major off-street car-parks.



It is clearly necessary (see chapter 7) that Oxford's shopping area should be provided with some car parks. The Westgate Centre, indeed, has parking provided as a linked part of its structure. But the number and the scale of the multi-deck car parks planned under the scheme favoured by the City Council does not make sense either aesthetically or, to a layman, financially. Even the Consultants admit that these buildings are obtrusive and do not merge easily into a townscape. In a modern city this might not be a matter of the first concern; in Oxford it is of vital importance. The proper place for such structures in Oxford is not in or near the centre, but at the periphery. Seacourt Tower, in Botley Road, is a building of this type, and though, even in its present site, it has been criticised for its ugliness, it is far better there than in the middle of the town. From the financial point of view, land in the city centre could surely be put to much more profitable use than the storage of cars. For maximum profit, office or commercial development would bring in rates at the highest level. **But, Oxford as a community would benefit most from the building of high-density residential property, as successive Councils have promised would be done in St Ebbe's.** This would have the additional advantage of reducing the number of cars coming to the city centre, since people living in such property could walk to work.

The accommodation of tourist coaches is a problem to which the City Council has long turned a completely blind eye. At present these cumbersome vehicles double bank in Catte Street and St Aldate's, to the inconvenience of everyone. A proper coach park for the fourth most popular tourist resort in England is surely only a reasonable courtesy to offer to visitors. Even if many Oxford people wish the tourists would stay at home, there is nothing we can do to stop them coming. It would therefore be sensible to give them proper accommodation, and to offer them at least a snack bar and a souvenir shop at the coach park, so that some of the money they are so ready to spend comes to us. The *Study* does not deal with the matter of a coach park, an odd fact in view of its lavish plans for accommodating the private car.

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Chapter 5

The Threat to the Suburbs

Before we give attention to the fate of the arterial suburban centres—Cowley Road, Headington, Summertown and Botley—we must discover who is responsible for what.

The Consultants were commissioned first to study and then to make proposals for the central area. In that case, who is looking after the outer area? We are vitally concerned to know this, since it is in the outer area that the vast majority of our townspeople live.

What do we find if we search the pages of the *Study*? At the outset, the Consultants tell us that they were directed by the City Council 'to determine appropriate environmental standards for the central area... and to decide on the road and traffic system that would be most suitable for achieving these standards'. The Consultants admit that 'in planning terms it is not practicable to separate the central area from the outer area'; they 'therefore make recommendations for a total transportation plan for Oxford in relation to the data on the outer area and outlying districts supplied... by the City Officers'.

Note that the Consultants' objective is merely to form a transportation plan. Note, too, the role of the city officers. Further, the Consultants remind us that it is the City Engineer who 'co-ordinated his parallel investigations and studies of the outer area... to achieve the requisite interlinking with the present and future schemes for the central area'. Not a word of anxiety or care for environmental standards. Perhaps they believe that a beautiful environment, like a wild flower in the hedgerow, is left to God and the sunshine.

So when we examine the prospects for the outer area, we are inspecting the performance of our city officers, and of our councillors, to whom the officers are responsible, and finally of ourselves, to whom the councillors should be answerable.

We must ask ourselves, as townspeople does it look as if we shall get a fair deal?

An attempt to learn the fate of the arterial suburban areas under the implementation of road Scheme D is a sad and dizzying experience. It is

impossible for the layman to discover whether or not the *Study* is full of the contradictions it seems to possess as he pursues his way through its text and tables, maps and diagrams. It is a Kafka-esque world of nightmare. Always there is that appalling dread that the really vital information is omitted or not quite stated.

An instant example: table 31 shows, under the Scheme D prediction, that Cowley Road shopping centre will have no traffic. It is to be a pedestrian area, an expansive car-free place. This is a wonderful cheering achievement calling for great applause. But wait! Look at the map (fig. 41) and we find immediately east of the proposed motorway interchange a traffic flow exceeding 23,000 vehicles, a traffic intensity of motorway level! And all this along a continuation of the shopping street right past the front of Cowley Road Hospital. What is there to applaud in this?

Road Scheme D demands the demolition of 174 houses and 19 business premises along its route, say the Consultants, but they do not tell how many more houses and shops and other premises will be smashed down to provide the car park recommended in the Union Street/Prince's Street area. That car park is merely their recommendation. Fortunately for them it lies beyond the central area, so it is not their concern. That is something for which our Council and City Engineer have yet to summon the courage to tell us.

But who cares anyway? They are only regarded as run-down properties.

Let us look at another area. Poor old Headington, say the Consultants, our efforts bring you no relief, no comfort. Headington must approach its fate manfully: more cars, more buses, more vans, more vast trucks thundering through its centre. The *Study* reveals that *someone* is proposing a *new road* from Headley Way to the Ring Road Roundabout. Could that mean a traffic engineer's dream of an urban dual carriageway? Just think how he will be able to spread himself. Just imagine his blissful afternoons spent in public shopping sprees, hunting through the pages of street furniture catalogues: new traffic lights, super sodium street lamps, controlled crossing apparatus, asphaltic paint (yellow, black and white), crash barriers, pedestrian fencing. He knows his duty: streamline the route, carefully remove every rough edge that which check the faster, smoother flow of traffic. From his point of view it must be a damnable nuisance that there is a shopping centre astride his route. It will be full of pedestrians and they are hideously unpredictable creatures full of human whims.

In straight terms, the traffic flow through Headington will approach the

20,000 mark. The Consultants, however, tell us that the appropriate traffic flow should be 3000. In other words **Headington is condemned to a traffic penetration 600% greater than it should be.** And this is to be the lamentable state of affairs after £31 million has been spent on traffic improvement in Oxford. What benefit does the townsman get out of this?

An unknown factor in Headington is the amount of traffic that will be generated by the new hospital. Is it in connection with traffic between the new hospital and the hospital complex in Old Road that a traffic flow is shown running north-south through the Brookside /Valentia Road area? One of the predictions for traffic on this route rise as high as 14,000 vehicles. The Study Area Traffic Flow Maps for Schemes C, D, E, F and G all show this link, as do the Staging Schemes.

Here is an element that seems to belong to the complicated arithmetic that proves Scheme D to be the best of all possible solutions, yet nothing appears on the Development Plan prepared by the city officers. No doubt it is another of life's little mysteries. We would have thought that the local councillors would be eager to know what this portends. Or perhaps it is something that has been accidentally overlooked in the City Engineer's department.

What about Summertown? No prospect of relief in the near future. Traffic intensities will increase as 1981 comes and goes. Only at the point in time when the spine road with its spurs comes into operation will there be a reduction of traffic along Banbury Road. Quite respectable reductions are predicted—flows will be cut to one third of their present levels. **But, believe it or not,** over the length of the shopping centre—from South Parade to Marston Ferry Road—the flow is left at virtually its present level. Traffic movement between the spine road spur and the Marston Ferry Road grinds through the shopping centre. One hunts in vain through the *Study* for a recommended environmental flow for Summertown, but it cannot be found. One would have thought that it should be 3000 vehicles as recommended for the shopping centre at Headington.

Looking closer, the people living in the enclave bounded by Woodstock Road, South Parade, Banbury Road and Moreton Road are locked on a vast traffic island. **They will live in conditions of siege.** Once again the traffic engineer will bring out the tricky paraphernalia of pedestrian crossings, etc. to get the besieged children away to their schools, the elderly and disabled on their errands and pleasures. We do well to ponder how unsatisfactory these crossings are. In his zeal the engineer brings his traffic up to these

crossings at maximum speed. No wonder the driver resents stopping when a wretched pedestrian starts on his way across the road, for the driver is conditioned to go, go, go. It's so easy for him to indulge his aggression and threaten the pedestrian. It already happens at so many crossings; inevitably it must increase.

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Chapter 6

The Modal Split— or Schemes for Public Transport

A large part of the Consultants' *Study* is concerned with the problems of transportation. The Consultants themselves predict that by 1991 the average number of 'person trips' in Oxford will have reached over 600,000 per day—an increase of more than 40% on the 1966 figure. Of these trips the number made in private cars (if no effort were made to ease the situation) would be more than four fifths of the total. Such predictions are of course enormously difficult to make with any accuracy. But since it is clear that *some* large increase will certainly occur, and since we have no other estimate (or guess) to put in the place of these figures, then we have really no choice but to let them stand, at least for the purposes of argument. One has to have some figure on which to base further calculations even if its own basis is more than a little shaky.

The Consultants' first conclusion is that: 'The problem therefore [presumably the problem of producing a decent environmental standard particularly for the central area] becomes the division of this total travel between public and private transport...'. Few people would argue with this, although a better term than 'modal split' (with its overtones of medieval heresy) might have been used to describe it. The alternative of 'reducing the proposed level of activity in the central area' may indeed have some supporters but in an age of progress and commercialization such as ours they might find it hard to get a hearing. The real argument starts when one considers the various schemes which have been put forward to ensure that the split occurs at a level that still makes Oxford (both the centre and the periphery) a pleasant and desirable place to live in.

When the Consultants talk of public transport they are largely concerned with buses. They propose three possible alternative transport schemes labelled X, Y and Z, the first two of which are entirely bus-orientated. They go on to discuss the feasibility of each scheme by predicting the volume of passenger traffic that it may be expected to carry. Scheme X includes, in addition to the conventional bus routes already in existence, a set of peripheral routes. One joins north with east Oxford. It runs along the Marston Ferry Road (to be completed, hopefully, within the next five years) and goes on to Risinghurst and Sandhills. The other complex of peripheral routes runs in a semi-circle along the whole of the Southern Bypass from Botley via North and South Hinksey to Littlemore, then northwards through the Cowley industrial complex to Headington. This scheme is regarded as 'an extension of the current bus networks...' and 'the country bus service routings have been retained but the frequency has been adjusted to meet the projected demands'. Scheme Y represents a further extension. As well as everything in Scheme X, it also includes a number of limited-stop express routes. Scheme Z is an extension of Scheme Y, which also employs 'the existing Oxford-Bletchley railway line and the existing Cowley Works branch line. Interchange stations connecting to local bus services... would be located at Littlemore and Wolvercote'.

Scheme X, since it involves the building of no new roads other than those already agreed upon, is compatible with any of the road plans from A to G. Schemes Y and Z, on the other hand, have their limited-stop routes running on roads that will exist only if Schemes D or (with some modifications) C or G are adopted. In other words, these last two schemes lack flexibility. But that apparently is not all that they lack. It is stated in chapter 9 of the *Study* that a rail service such as that described in Scheme Z would not attract a sufficient volume of traffic to warrant its introduction and that 'Scheme Z was dropped from further consideration'.

Not everyone would agree that the idea of using the railway should be dropped so readily. In the first place, the railway has at the moment one distinct advantage over any proposed new roads—*because it's there*. As well as the surely obvious consideration that the more forms of public transport available the better in the long term, it would seem particularly important that during the short term (which in this overall scheme can mean up to ten years) any existing way of avoiding chaos in the central area is to be seriously considered. A rail link would be the quickest of ways of getting people from

say Kidlington to Cowley, and stations with car parks at Littlemore and Wolvercote would go some way towards keeping commuter cars out of the city centre.

It was estimated by the Consultants that Scheme Y will cost about half a million pounds per annum more than Scheme X by 1991, if no traffic restraints are practised. We are therefore told that 'The choice between X and Y turns largely upon whether the improvement in environment justifies the additional cost of the operation'. The difference between the schemes represents the provision of limited-stop express buses. Half a million a year for the provision of this service might seem to many to be an excessive estimate, and one could only assume that considerable losses would be incurred because they are not fully used. The important clause is obviously that to do with traffic restraint, and it is at these restraints that we must look more closely.

Chapter 9 of the *Study* starts with the sobering statement that 'within a practical range of frequency of service... the level of public transport usage was only marginally affected by the three public transport schemes'. In other words, the urge of the private motorist (particularly of the commuter) to take his car into the centre of the city is so strong that despite the choking and stifling of the environment that he is producing he will go on doing so. In order to persuade him to leave his car at home (or in a peripheral car park) and to go into the centre by public transport a number of measures might be applied by the local authority.

The Consultants list several possible means by which the motorist might be persuaded to make greater use of the bus service. The first is to increase the attractiveness of such a transport system. However, they come to the surprisingly gloomy opinion that 'even the total abolition of fares would have a relatively small effect on modal split'. We must therefore conclude that only positive disincentives to the private car in the city centre stand any chance of maintaining, let alone improving, its environmental aspect. The first possibility is that of road pricing: a direct charge is made for the use of road space. This involves a 'black box' in every car that registers the cost of using a given road at a given time. The roads cost different amounts and some sort of device ensures that the box knows which road it is being driven down. With masterly understatement the Consultants conclude that road pricing '... is not a method available for immediate use...'.

By contrast, the control of parking is. The only aspect to be considered here is the effect that peripheral car parks would exert on an apparently stretched bus service. For the sake of environment we believe that the shopper should be allowed to park for only two-hour periods in the city centre and that the commuter should be encouraged to leave his car on the outskirts. Clearly he will be disinclined to do so if there is no fast, cheap and frequent form of public transport to get him to work. In the jargon of the *Study*, the modal split must depend upon the provision of adequate public transport facilities. In layman's terms, don't expect a man to go by bus if there aren't any or if there aren't enough.

Although the City of Oxford Motor Services Limited showed a preference for Scheme X (especially with restraints on private transport) over Scheme Y, one hopes that this is not because they feel incapable of providing regular limited-stop services from the periphery to the centre. Indeed, as we know, they have plans to run just such a service from Kidlington to the station. The company themselves have pointed out that their present load factors could be increased by 15% without causing discomfort. Services in excess of this would (from the company's point of view) have to pay for themselves, but in principle the company seems to welcome the opportunity to expand its operations on cost-effective routes. A case could be made for subsidising routes which are not economical but which would fulfil the vital social function of keeping the city centre free from a choking glut of private cars. This is hardly a popular view. Any view that suggests that an intangible though very real improvement in environment can only be achieved by spending a far more tangible amount of money will find resistance in many quarters. But then it is not a popular view (when stated outright) that we should allow Oxford to become identical to a hundred uniformly indifferent English towns of a comparable size.

Whatever road scheme is adopted, some restraint is scheduled for the commuting motorist. Without such restraints *no* road scheme is workable. What is important is that we take our opportunity and ensure adequate backup from the transport authorities. This is particularly true on routes into the centre from peripheral areas.

Will we get an adequate service: will the bus company accept the opportunity that will be offered to them whatever plan is finally accepted? One

can only hope that they will. At the moment they face a deficit as big as a reasonable win on the football pools. They are undertaking a massive re-organization of services and not everyone is happy with the proposed result. But to condemn them out of hand and to pre-judge the quality of bus services over the next ten years would be both premature and unfair. Public transport has a vital role to play if Oxford is going to be worth living in ten or twenty years hence, and those in charge must surely be realizing the fact and preparing to respond to it.

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Chapter 7

Restriction as a Solution to Oxford Traffic Problems

Restriction is not an easy subject to tackle because it is difficult not to get emotionally involved in the issues, whether one is a planner, motorist, sociologist, or pedestrian. The London and Home Counties Traffic Advisory Committee considered the matter in 1951, but merely did all it could to avoid giving offence to any kind of motoring interest. Where it felt itself to be on a good wicket then it could hit hard, as in advising that 'restrictions on horse-drawn vehicles and other slow-moving traffic should be extended'!

The pedestrian, who has no pressure-group to represent his views, does not get a fair deal. It is not just the easing of traffic jams that is needed, but the re-creation of centres for civilized life. It should surely be the first aim of urban reconstruction to resolve this pedestrian-vehicle conflict once and for all. The present situation is one that no designer in his senses, starting from first principles, would dream of instituting, any more than he would dream of putting a footway along a railway track.

One way of doing this is to achieve vertical separation of pedestrians and vehicles, but this only solves one problem and still leaves the motors jostling and jamming in the streets. This idea is by no means new. The city of Chester is a fine example of this with its historic covered rows at first-floor level, but this has not stopped Chester from having a traffic problem. Another way of achieving separation is to apply restrictions to traffic, and it is with this topic that this article is primarily concerned.

Restrictions which have the effect of limiting traffic volumes have been

in operation for many years—parking prohibitions, waiting restrictions, loading and unloading controls. Their purpose, however, is the limited one of keeping traffic moving. There is already a current of opinion in favour of deliberate reduction of traffic to bring order and safety to the streets, and we believe that it is a proposition which must be carefully explored if we are to look forward to a viable community structure in the next twenty years. Surely we do not have to be visionaries to realize that in the next decade change is going to take place socially, politically and economically of which we have no conception at the present time.

There is a clear case for candid examination of the possibilities of deliberate control whereby 'motorless zones' would be created, as Oxford is in fact planning to do now with Queen Street and Cornmarket Street. But we think the aim should be to clear out as much motor traffic as possible from the whole of the central urban area, which is that area of Oxford within the outer bypasses.

The proposition has several difficulties. The problem in Oxford is largely generated by commuter traffic, and it has been hoped that the disc parking scheme will encourage commuters to park further out from the city centre. It is necessary to point out that this is merely shifting a problem 100 yards down the road. So the first difficulty is commuter traffic.

Secondly, it would be necessary to relax 'motorless restrictions' at times to allow buildings to be serviced. Thirdly, means would have to be devised to allow public service vehicles to approach the city centre. Fourthly, roads could not be physically closed as access must be provided at all times for police vehicles, ambulances, and fire engines. On the basis of these considerations, we think that there is only one possible solution to Oxford's problem.

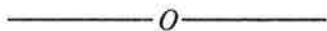
A scheme must be formulated whereby commuter traffic is effectively restricted at the city boundaries. Peripheral car parks could be constructed just off the outer bypasses, from which frequent, comfortable buses could transport commuters into the centre. This, although still a new concept, is no longer a revolutionary one, and under the name of 'Park and Ride' has a considerable body of support at government level. It is very significant that the role of public transport is seen as crucial in the planning of the new city of Milton Keynes. Leicester's *Traffic and Transport Policy* discusses the extension of what it describes as a compromise between private and public transport. It envisages the building of interchange car parks, the site for the

first of which has already been approved. The Leicester report suggests that the construction of these interchange parks should be phased with the provision of short-term car parks for shoppers in the city centre. The prosperity of any town centre is tied to the provision of short-term parking within easy reach of the shops. It is gradually being realized that this can only be successfully achieved if the commuter is persuaded *not* to bring his car into the city centre.

The two main problems of implementing this scheme are the need to segregate the long-term parker from the short-term, and the extension and re-organization of public transport. That these are not insuperable difficulties is proved by the fact that other cities are committed to tackling them, Leicester and Stevenage being only two examples. It will be a pity if Oxford, the traditional home of lost causes, supports what is destined to be, perhaps, the biggest lost cause of all, the accommodation of the car in towns.

Nor need it be feared that such measures would interfere with the commercial prosperity of the city. The exclusion of the car from shopping areas is another concept earning support. Here one of the pioneers is the Norwich City Planning Officer. Figures published in his book, *The Creation of a Foot Street*, show that shopping streets limited to the use of pedestrians actually do an improved trade.

We believe that the restriction of the car in Oxford is the only possible way of preserving the city as a community and as a tourist centre. It will cost money, but certainly no more money than the proposed system of new roads. Its implementation would save one of the most famous and beautiful cities in Europe from the sure destruction which is entailed in the building of urban motorways.



Chapter 8

How to keep Communities Viable

‘They knocked some houses down today,
To give the motor car room to play.’

Not many people would call Oxford city a community. Most people prefer to say that they live in north, south, east and west Oxford, or in one of the villages. Whether we like the Maud Commission proposals or not, some of the research they did was of excellent value. Three quarters of a national sample of electors were conscious of living in a small local community, a ‘home area’, which was much smaller than the territory of most local authorities. People were more concerned about problems affecting their home area than they were of the total load of responsibility which the authority carried.

Many Oxford city councillors are well aware of this, but it has the wrong impact on their judgment. Instead of realizing that it is important to pay attention to what people feel about their home area when it is to be affected by the road plan, they take the view that their ultimate responsibility is to Oxford city, some nebulous area to which few people feel attached, and therefore cannot understand the ‘total’ implications of a scheme such as the road plan. We think that there is nothing basically wrong with people taking such a view. They are concerned, after all, with the area in which they live; where they go to church; where their children go to school; where they play, eat and sleep; where they know other people. This is what a community is all about.

As a consequence of the road plan, south and east Oxford will be virtually destroyed as communities. In south Oxford, the area south of the proposed road will die because what is really another ‘Berlin wall’ will sever it off from the area to the north, which includes Grandpont, St Ebbe’s, and the city centre. St Ebbe’s itself, a lively, cooperative community at one time, was cruelly decimated in the 1950s, and many people hoped this destruction would be an example to future planners of how not to tackle a problem.

The destruction of St Ebbe’s is part of a sickness with which local authorities are unable to cope. They cannot adequately take into account the views of the people who are affected by grandiose plans. They can only think of

problems in a professional way and if, for example, they have a traffic problem, then a road is the answer. As to what happens to people, they can be rehoused quite easily. But what are the social costs? Unfortunately, they cannot be quantified. They cannot be neatly parcelled up in technical jargon. While planners may see a new roads system as the only possible answer to a traffic problem, it would play havoc with people if it were to invade residential areas, putting up barriers to communication and contact. Planners use their powers to impose their own utopian value-judgments on the public, which almost certainly has different standards. Purely professional interests are thus imposed on people, as if there were a general consensus that they are desirable.

Oxford City Council perpetrate this horrendous myth. The commissioning of a Consultants' report on Oxford traffic indicated that people will value transportation. It is in the nature of housing architects to believe that people will prefer flats to their old houses. Some diabolical calculus predicts that people would like a new road in Oxford even if it means that they will have to be rehoused. But no one bothers to ask the public whether they agree. Has a survey been conducted in Oxford to find out what attitudes are to various important issues affecting their lives and their communities? Do people properly understand the implications of the road plan? It is doubtful if they do, but this should not be a reason for not trying to communicate to them, and for not trying to find out what they feel.

Apathy is generally used as a description of people's attitudes to civic affairs. President Nixon, as befitting a politician, described those who are not vociferous in making their views known as the 'silent majority'. Oxford city councillors often express disappointment in the lack of interest shown by their electors when local meetings are called. But this is symptomatic of apathy felt by people at both local and national levels at the inability of politicians to represent adequately their views. Even when local meetings are called, as was the case in south Oxford recently when a zebra crossing in the Abingdon Road and in Thames Street was discussed, local councillors appear ineffective in carrying the views of local residents to the appropriate authorities and getting anything done about them.

Oxford City thinks that it has only a traffic problem on its hands. One of the main purposes of this chapter is to point out that the human problem is more important and more difficult to resolve. We also believe in offering alternative solutions which take people into account, and the shocking

record of community mismanagement of which Oxford has been and is about to be guilty, is in need of a radical solution.

What is really wanted to overcome the apathy which most people feel and which depresses most local councillors (but does not seem to make them seriously question the 'system') is contained in the sort of proposals for what neighbourhood councils could do. Neighbourhood councils would beset up in the 'home areas' to which people feel they belong. They would represent the wishes of local residents on any question whatsoever that concerned them, to act as a voice of the community on all matters affecting it—whether on local government issues or questions affecting the local offices of national industries or government offices. To give some purpose to this, any planning decision affecting the area must be put to the council.

However, they would need positive powers to do things as well. They would also need financing, which may mean that local councils would have to raise their own local rate. Some sort of block grant system would have the advantage of evening out the disparities between the wealthier and poorer districts. As for some of the things they could do, such as building an old people's hostel or a swimming pool, these could be financed by changing the law and allowing neighbourhoods to borrow money or by government grants. Perhaps rehabilitation of the urban areas in Oxford, like Grandpont, Jericho and St Clements, would proceed more smoothly if they were conducted by neighbourhood councils.

One way in which Oxford city could go 'neighbourhood' is to develop existing and proposed community centres. These groups are already partly financed by the local authority so the machinery already exists in a rudimentary form for financing. Neighbourhoods could also produce their own magazines or take space in the local papers to make announcements.

We all have opinions and attitudes which we are capable of voicing if given the right opportunity. No longer would the ordinary man feel that he has no say in local affairs except on the day when he casts his vote. The establishment of neighbourhood councils is a necessary step in order to preserve and secure our environment in the way we would like it to be, and to ensure that communities remain viable.

'They've taken away the road today,
To give the children room to play.'

APPENDIX: SUBSIDENCE IN EAST OXFORD

The plans for the proposed Eastwyke Farm route include a section in a cutting some 20 feet deep, passing through east Oxford from South Park to Jackdaw Lane. The subsoil on this line is permanently water-saturated, due both to its location in the drainage area between Headington Hill and the river, and to its geological nature. The cutting would run through deep Oxford Clay, overlaid by a shallow band of gravel between Cowley Road and Iffley Road; this, having been deposited along the former river bed, is erratic in line and depth.

The massive earth-moving operations, and the subsequent stability of the road-structure, would require relatively dry ground conditions; therefore much pumping would be necessary to achieve, and drainage to maintain, adequate removal of subsoil water. As a civil engineering operation, this poses no unusual problems, but drastic side-effects are likely.

A deep cutting would obviously change the subsoil drainage patterns over a large area of east Oxford, and would greatly lower the water-table. The fast-draining band of gravel would extend the effects, draining a larger area of Oxford Clay. This clay is slow-draining, and is highly shrinkable, but very variable in consistency.

Thus, large-scale extraction of water from this area would cause extensive ground subsidence, varying in severity according to the consistency and porosity. (A small but rapid subsidence can cause more damage than a large but slow one; even a severe drought can result in serious settlement.)

Statutory regulations today specify special requirements for foundations of buildings on clay, but most property in the area was built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries on foundations which are barely adequate even for the fairly stable ground conditions normal in east Oxford. However, it is likely that any abnormally severe subsidence would cause differential settlement, failure of foundations, and resultant serious cracking of walls, and general damage to property over a large area.

Existing civil engineering techniques would enable the proposed road to be built without these results, but the published plans make it plain that there is no intention of using such techniques, which would involve considerable additional expense. Compensation proposals so far make mention only of property situated in the line of the road. For property damaged as a result of road-construction or use, no compensation has been volunteered.

Owners of property affected in this way have no legal redress, this being one of the few remaining instances in English law of 'Damnum sine injuria esse potest' (damage or loss may be inflicted without any act being done which the law deems an injury). The point has been tried many times (Bradford v. Pickles 1895 A.C. 587; etc), and as recently as November 1969, in a case regarding property damaged by subsidence caused by extraction of water during motorway construction, the decision was:

'The authorities establish that a man may abstract the water which percolates under his land in undefined channels to whatever extent he pleases, notwithstanding that this may result in the abstraction of water percolating under the land of his neighbour and, thereby, cause him injury.'

To individual property owners, damage without redress is clearly unjust and intolerable; still less can a city so desperately short of housing afford to allow a large area of old but basically sound houses to crumble into slums as a result of subsidence.

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- 2 To convey the opinions of citizens on town planning and services to the authorities.
- 3 To cooperate with local amenity societies and community groups.
- 4 To preserve the best in our environment from the menace of piecemeal planning, traffic, noise and pollution.
- 5 To ensure that new developments are suited to the needs of people and not to administrative convenience or commercial greed.

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