

CHANGING OXFORD

Fifty years of Oxford Civic Society 1969–2019

Liz Woolley



OXFORD
CIVIC SOCIETY
AN INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR OXFORD
SINCE 1969

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Broad Street by William Bird, one of the many greetings cards produced and sold by the Society.

Other designs included scenes by local artists and photographers such as Katherine Shock, Richard M Simmons, John Ashdown and Ben Pritchard.

Introduction and welcome

In 2019 Oxford Civic Society is celebrating five decades as an independent voice for Oxford. It is an important milestone for us and an opportunity to take stock of what we have achieved and where we need to direct our energies in the future. So we were delighted when local historian Liz Woolley accepted an invitation to produce this study of our first half century in the context of a changing Oxford. We are enormously grateful to Liz for giving us this detailed insight into our past and assessment of what we have achieved. Her work will underpin other activities in this anniversary year.

Oxford Civic Society is dedicated to the continuous improvement of Oxford as a wonderful city in which to live, work, study and relax. Appreciating our past, enjoying the present and pursuing a vision for the future are at the heart of what we do.

The Society was formed in 1969 by a handful of citizens worried about the erosion of the historic city's character and about large-scale road plans which threatened to destroy considerable areas of existing housing and change forever open green spaces such as Christ Church Meadow and Hinksey Park. Right from the beginning the Society was non-political and non-profit making, open to anyone interested in Oxford and its surroundings.

OXFORD CIVIC SOCIETY

The Oxford Civic Society is non-political and non-profit making, and is open to all interested in Oxford and its surroundings.

AIMS

- 1 To encourage citizens to express their views on their city.
- 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.

ACTIVITIES

Proposed activities include public meetings, lectures, a newsletter, reports on particular issues, and the vigorous representation of views.

SUBSCRIPTION

A minimum of 5/- payable on joining and in January each year. National Giro number : 24 513 0004. Standing order forms available

HONORARY SECRETARY

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

I wish to join the Oxford Civic Society and enclose my subscription of

Name

Address

Telephone

Interests:

Fifty years later, our annual membership rate has increased slightly (from 5 shillings to £10) but our aims and activities, as outlined in our first publication (*left*) remain largely unchanged. We are still very much a citizens' membership group concerned with the quality of Oxford's built environment and its impact on people's daily lives. Our priorities are to protect Oxford's heritage, to appreciate today's city and to shape its future. Planning, travel and environment are central to what we do.

Thanks in large part to the Society's early campaigning, no 'inner relief road' was built across Christ Church Meadow and the idea of the 'tin hat by-pass' north of Oxford was abandoned. Important historic buildings such as the cottages on Turn Again Lane in St Ebbe's and the former Liaison Restaurant in Castle Street, were saved from demolition.

Persistent pressure and well-argued advice from us persuaded Oxford City Council to adopt Park & Ride schemes (only the second city in the country to do so)

and later helped to ensure implementation of a traffic management scheme which brought in the pedestrianisation of several major city-centre streets, better provision for cyclists, parking restrictions in the centre and in the suburbs, and significant reductions in pollution and noise. We have positively influenced the City Council's adoption of a high buildings policy, which controls additions to Oxford's famous skyline, and the protection of the city's green views.

We support the Oxfordshire Blue Plaques scheme and run OxClean, the highly successful annual spring clean of the city, in which hundreds of residents, employees and school pupils participate. We actively encourage an awareness and understanding of Oxford's heritage, and issues affecting it, through a year-round programme of talks, walks and visits and through our thrice-yearly newsletter *Visions* and other publications.

"Oxford Civic Society is sensible and forward-looking and I know that a conversation with them is always going to be constructive. They are – after Historic England – my top consultee."

Colin Cook, Lord Mayor of Oxford and Chair of Oxford City Council's West Area Planning Committee, 2018

The Civic Society is known and trusted by policy-makers, by other amenity groups and by Oxford residents, as a reasonable and well-informed organisation which listens and which is worth listening to. The fact that we remain completely independent, we receive no grants and have, amongst our members, people of enormous international, national and local experience and knowledge, means that we have gained our reputation by well-reasoned and steady influence.

In the five decades since the Society was formed Oxford's population has risen from around 105,000 to almost 155,000, over a third of whom are from non-British ethnic backgrounds and 34,000 of whom are students at our

two universities. The city's economy is no longer largely dependent on the car industry but on the rapidly-expanding sectors of health, education, research, technology, all-year-round tourism, hospitality and publishing. Almost seven million visitors come to Oxford every year and 46,000 workers commute into the city every day, as lack of affordable housing means that more and more people live in surrounding villages and towns. Average house prices in Oxford are now 17.3 times average earnings, with a mean house price of over £523,000.

All of these factors present enormous challenges and the Society is turning its attention very much to the future development of Oxford as a regional hub, with all the attendant issues of housing, transport and employment for the people of the county and beyond.

A lot of our work has been behind the scenes and we aim, through this 50th anniversary publication, to make our activities and successes better known. We hope also to inspire more people and organisations to become members, as we take on the sometimes daunting but always exciting task of helping to shape Oxford's future.

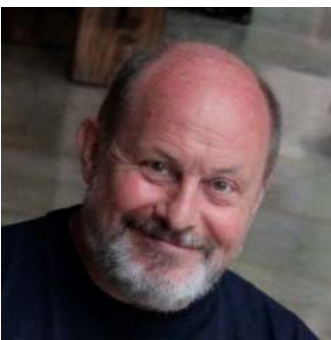
We hope that you enjoy this study and that you'll want to join us!

Sir Clive Booth, President of Oxford Civic Society and Ian Green, Chairman



Sir Clive Booth was Director of Oxford Polytechnic, later Oxford Brookes University, from 1986 to 1997. He joined the Society in 1997 and was elected Vice Chairman in 2014 and President in 2017. He has been particularly active in organising the Society's Planning Group and is a member of the Programme Group.

He has lived in Oxford for 33 years.



Ian Green is an urban and regional development planner, working in English local and national government as well as overseas, mostly in the Asia-Pacific region. A long-time member of the Society, he joined the Executive Committee in 2014 and became Chairman in 2017. He has been particularly active in the Oxfordshire Futures and Oxford Central West Groups as well as contributing to the Programme and Transport Groups.

He has been an Oxford resident since 1972.

1 Post-War Oxford and the founding of the Civic Society

“Oxford is Oxford; and despite anything that the old and the new industrial revolutions have been able to do, it has maintained its individuality more truly than any other city in England. That is why people feel more personally about Oxford than about Birmingham or Manchester, which also have universities. Nor are these feelings confined to the citizens and members of the University. Oxford is felt to be a public figure; and the right to hold an opinion about it is claimed by people who have never even visited the place. Such an interest can only be produced by something that is very much alive ... It is this kind of aliveness ... that the town planner must make it his business to cultivate.”

So wrote Thomas Sharp in the introduction to his 1948 book *Oxford Replanned*, a report on the planning and development of Oxford, the production of which had been the ‘onerous’ task set for him by the City Council three years earlier.

Sharp’s view of Oxford, with its lack of housing for workers within the city, its shortage of theatres, concert halls, cinemas and other cultural venues, its paucity of city-centre shops and provision for tourists and other visitors (particularly of good hotels), was a gloomy one. Moreover, as James Stevens Curl, founding member of the Society, later commented, Sharp combined a pioneering and outstandingly sensitive analysis of the city’s historic townscape (a term Sharp helped to popularise) with a breathtakingly ruthless attitude to anything he considered outworn or standing in the way of progress and the greater good.

“...all the mistakes that could have been made have been made. Nothing has been well done. Indeed nothing has been done well in Oxford for a hundred years.”

Thomas Sharp, *Oxford Replanned*, 1948

Sharp made 51 main recommendations, based on the belief that the character of Oxford was a matter of national as well as of local concern. He advocated that in the interests of both the city’s social well-being and its historic character, the Morris and Pressed Steel works should be removed to another part of the country altogether and new, small factories brought in to employ those workers who did not migrate away from Oxford with the car factories. The city’s population

should not grow at all; preferably it should decline and there should be no building on new land within the city, or in the countryside immediately around (except for rural purposes). The ring road should be completed, the radial road system improved and new inner relief roads built. Buses and large vehicles must be banned from the centre. The then two railway stations should be rebuilt as one, with an adjacent bus station.

The previously mooted ‘twin city’ idea, which envisaged the development of Cowley as a self-sufficient town separate from Oxford, should be dropped, but the gas works and the electricity works (then sited in St Ebbe’s and in Osney respectively), should be relocated to Cowley. The Covered Market, the Town Hall and other civic buildings should be demolished and rebuilt in a new civic centre to the west of Carfax, containing a library, art gallery, health centre, youth centre and other facilities. Careful attention should be given to building heights in the city centre. The two-up-two-down early 19th-century terraced cottages of St Ebbe’s and Jericho should be swept away and three-storey blocks of flats built in their place. Riverside areas must be improved and a system of connected public open spaces developed between neighbourhoods, running from the city centre out into the open country.

Sharp himself acknowledged that “Some of the suggestions I make will rouse bitter opposition in some quarters” and his plans were certainly greeted with a degree of hostility, though many readers recognised the need to improve the traffic issues which were apparent even then.



Sharp's illustration of the proposed new Christ Church Square, looking north towards Tom Tower.

Ultimately Sharp's overall plan was rejected, though some of his ideas – that the height of buildings in the city centre should be limited, for example – have since been adopted as official policy, and his suggestion that the railway and bus stations should be co-located is one which the Society still advocates today.

Other proposals, including the clearance of St Ebbe's, were carried out, partly in anticipation of the building of the inner relief road system, an idea first put forward by the City Council in 1941 and given renewed impetus by Sharp's report. For reasons which are still unclear, Oxford escaped bombing during the Second World War and yet it seems still to have got caught up in the national post-War desire for renewal and regeneration. (Sharp himself had, in the 1940s, written post-War development plans for Durham, Exeter, Salisbury and Chichester.) Hence, as James Stevens Curl said, "All was not well in Oxford during the 1960s ... Expensive roads were mooted; large numbers of properties were being pulled down and even more were under threat of demolition; urban blight was reaching terrible proportions; and despite expensive planning machinery, the damage to the fabric of Oxford was daily getting worse. Hideous plastic fasciae were appearing, inappropriate alterations and new buildings were damaging the appearance of the city, and, despite the Civic Amenities Act of 1967, it was clear that most developments were not enhancing character but rather eroding it."

Stevens Curl was an architect, historian and town planner. In 1968 Mark Barrington-Ward, editor of Oxford's daily newspaper the *Oxford Mail*, commissioned him to write a series of articles on the 'Erosion of Oxford' under the pseudonym of Adytum (meaning 'inner shrine'). The back bar of the King's Arms was a favourite lunch-time venue and there Stevens Curl met Gerard l'Estrange Turner, an expert in historic microscopes and assistant curator at the Museum of the History of Science on nearby Broad Street. The two men discussed – among other things – the state that Oxford had got into and soon Turner suggested the formation of a new group or society to try to bring home to people the fact that, as he put it, "We are all being menaced by piecemeal planning, wholesale destruction, ruinously expensive road plans and demolitions, traffic, noise and pollution".

Stevens Curl and Turner were distressed at what they saw as the failure of planning in the city – such as the wholesale clearance of St Ebbe's and the creation of an unrelated jumble of buildings at the centre of Blackbird Leys – and at the erosion of the city's character by the systematic destruction of small but essential elements in the historic townscape. They felt strongly that many planning decisions were being made for administrative convenience or commercial greed, while ordinary citizens were being excluded from the processes by which those far-reaching decisions were being made. There was also a worrying adherence to,

indeed championing of, the post-war belief that 'the car is king' and that every private citizen had the right to drive into the centre of Oxford and to park wherever they liked at whatever time of day or night.

The by now nationally-famous Oxford inner relief road saga had been rumbling on for almost 30 years, and Stevens Curl and Turner were outraged at the acceptance by many – including the long-established Oxford Preservation Trust and the *Oxford Mail* – of these destructive and traffic-attracting proposals. No attempt had been made by the City Council to manage traffic in such a way that the construction of huge roads and inner city car parks would be unnecessary; no effort had gone into providing an efficient and workable public transport system where all modes of transport would be integrated.

The long drawn-out argument over the best position for Oxford's inner relief road had caused great unease and led to serious 'planning blight' in parts of the city, where rows of empty houses in streets like Bullingdon Road in East Oxford were boarded up and desolate, awaiting possible demolition if and when the road scheme was accepted.

In October 1969, Gerard Turner was interviewed by the *Oxford Mail*'s 'Anthony Wood' and explained how the centre of Oxford suffered an imbalance between the 'university' and 'shopping' areas and how this caused traffic problems. He set out proposals for the formation



James Stevens Curl in 1977
(Photo courtesy of James Stevens Curl)

James Stevens Curl studied architecture at the Oxford School of Architecture and town planning at the Department of Land Use Studies, Oxford. He later went on to complete a doctorate at the University of London. He had long had a particular interest in historic buildings and conservation, and it was his concern for these issues which prompted him, with Gerard and Helen Turner, to found Oxford Civic Society in November 1969. At the time he was working in the office of the Oxford Architects Partnership.

He was the Civic Society's first Chairman for three years, working closely with Thomas Braun on the question of street lighting and aesthetics. He moved away to live and work in Glasgow but maintained links with Oxford and continued to visit the city.

He was commissioned by Richard Blackwell of the Oxford Illustrated Press to produce a study of "how the fabric of humbler buildings had deteriorated through

blight, official policies, demolitions, and gradual changes". *The Erosion of Oxford* was published in 1977 and has proved to be of lasting importance and influence: its 30th anniversary was celebrated in February 2007 with a one-day symposium at the University of Oxford, organised by the Civic Society, at which he gave the keynote address.

Stevens Curl has gone on to author dozens of books and hundreds of papers on architectural history and taste, as well as working as a researcher, lecturer and consultant. He believes that the messages contained in *The Erosion of Oxford* are as important today as they were when it was first published and indeed they are expounded upon in his book, *Making Dystopia: the Strange Rise and Survival of Architectural Barbarism*, published in 2018.

He now lives in County Down in Northern Ireland.



Oxford Mail, 4 March 1977
(Courtesy of the Oxford Mail)



The Oxford Mail, 16 March 1962, announcing the latest iteration of the 'Meadow Road' proposal. The argument about whether to choose an inner relief road going north of the Thames, across Christ Church Meadow, or south of the Thames, by Eastwyke Farm, continued for nearly 30 years, reflecting changing ideas at national and local level about traffic management and about what public opinion would accept.

(Courtesy of the Oxford Mail)

of a Civic Society, to "act as a general watchdog ... sniffing out undesirable changes before they are made and barking the alarm, and working for the removal of existing blemishes". The article prompted a positive response in the *Oxford Mail's* letters page from a group of concerned citizens (see page 9).

"... the university is less than a square mile in area. So cars should be unnecessary. University types should bicycle."

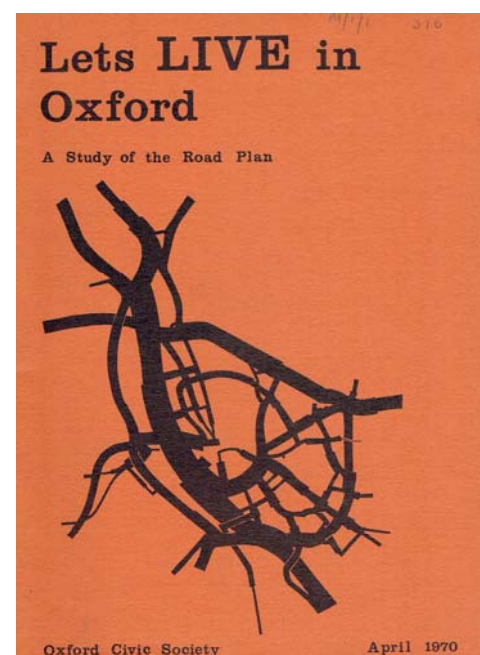
Gerard Turner interviewed in the *Oxford Mail*, 16 October 1969

Encouraged by this, Stevens Curl and Turner, together with Turner's wife Helen (a journalist, who would later become Secretary to the Oxford Preservation Trust), invited anyone interested in Oxford's future development to an inaugural meeting at the Friends' Meeting House on St Giles on 27 November 1969 (see page 9).

Forty people attended and after some lively debate on the merits of having a new amenity society in the city, it was decided that on balance this would complement the Oxford Preservation Trust and support other groups such as the Oxford Consumers'

Council (with which Helen Turner was already heavily involved). The new Oxford Civic Society was duly inaugurated, with James Stevens Curl as its first Chairman, Gerard Turner as Secretary and Thomas Braun, a Merton College academic, as Treasurer.

The newly-formed Society got quickly to work. Within less than five months it had published *Let's LIVE in Oxford*, a booklet which provided a simple, readable account of the essentials of the latest road plan favoured by the City Council. This plan would take the new inner relief road through Grandpont and Hinksey Park, to cross the Abingdon Road south of Folly Bridge, continuing past the site of Eastwyke Farm, crossing the Thames on a new bridge and thence to a junction with Marston Road near South Park. It would result in eight miles of 'urban motorway' within the city limits and the destruction of at least 174 houses and 19 businesses, as well as considerably increased noise and pollution for large numbers of houses, schools and workplaces. Standards in public transport would, the Society argued, undoubtedly fall, and fares would rise. Accidents would increase.



WHAT AN OXFORD CIVIC SOCIETY SHOULD DO

WE WERE delighted to see Gerard Turner's admirable suggestions for the formation of an Oxford Civic Society (Anthony Wood, Thursday).

The points he made are of enormous importance to us all, and it is abundantly clear that Mr. Turner is as concerned for the future of the physical environment as are so many of us today.

While other societies and groups exist, there seems to be no body as yet which has as its first consideration the quality of the townscape around us, in Oxford.

We would suggest in support of Mr. Turner's ideas the following aims of the new society:

1: To encourage the citizens of Oxford to express their views on their city, and to have their views taken notice of instead of the usual apparent breakdown in communications between local government and people.

2: To carry the opinions of the citizens on town planning and other matters concerning the physical environment to the authorities and to make sure these opinions are noted.

3: To conserve the best in our environment and to make sure it is not eroded by the juggernaut of impersonal piecemeal local government planning whether by highway considerations or by any other.

4: To ensure that new developments are suited to the needs of people and not to administrative convenience.

5: To ensure that new developments are suited to the needs of people and not to the purely selfish motives of commercial developers who reap their rewards while causing the community as a whole untold damage in terms of increased traffic and other detrimental factors.

6: To ensure that Oxford may once again be a fine place in which to live, not only for the present generations, but for future ones as well.

Many of us are very dissatisfied with planning, with new buildings, with road policies, with car parking policies, with the bus station, with the railway station, with the lack of amenities for visitors and residents, and with the methods of communication between the local authority and the public.

The new society would aim to give a co-ordinated voice to all those who want to do something but do not know how or feel it is a waste of time. We could have the power to order our environment. Let us make sure we use it.

All those who feel interested in the project should support it, and correspondence will be welcomed at the address given here.

JAMES STEVENS CURL,
ROY WILKINSON, JOHN R.
COOK, HOWARD BOD-
WAY, JOHN HAZEL,
JUDITH MARVIN, MICHAEL
JOHN DREW, IAN HUB-
BERT, RAYMOND W. I.
BOWDEN, PETER E.
CRIPPS, GEOFFREY RAN-
DELL, GEOFFREY BEARD,
JOHN BARTLEY.

19 Lakeside,
Oxford.

OXFORD CIVIC SOCIETY PUBLIC MEETING TO INTRODUCE THE SOCIETY

THURSDAY 27 NOVEMBER

8:00 P.M.

FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE

43, ST. GILES'

ALL INTERESTED IN OXFORD PLEASE
COME!

1969

OXFORD MAIL, Wednesday, November 12, 1969

Civic Society meeting

FURTHER TO the correspondence in the Oxford Mail concerning the formation of an Oxford Civic Society, we have been delighted with the interest and enthusiasm generated by our letters and by the original article in the Anthony Wood column.

We have been encouraged so much that we now announce there will be a meeting on Thursday, November 27, at 8 p.m., in the

Meeting House of the Society of Friends at 43 St. Giles, Oxford.

We hope that all those who are interested in the aims of the proposed society as set out in the letter to the Oxford Mail on October 21 will be able to come along. Views and suggestions will be very welcome.

G. L'E. TURNER.
JAMES STEVENS CURL.
46 Hamilton Road, Oxford.

Oxford Mail, 21 October 1969

Some of the original publicity and comments on the formation of the Society, 1969

A decision on the scheme was due to be made after a Public Inquiry in mid-June 1970. The main aim of the Civic Society's publication was to raise awareness in order to avoid a decision being taken which would dictate the future of Oxford for the next century, without most townspeople having any real idea of what was to happen. Above all, the Society's booklet argued that *social costs*, seemingly totally ignored by the Council, should be added to the capital sum involved in, as James Stevens Curl put it, "destroying communities and replacing them with monuments to the private motor car and to municipal wrong-headedness." People count, argued the Society and their communities and social structures should not be disrupted for such specious reasons.

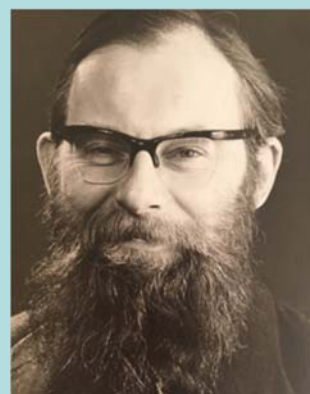
The Society warned that by the time the scheme was completed, the whole idea of car restraint – which had been advocated by Buchanan's 1963 government report, *Traffic in Towns* – would have been accepted nationally. Hence Oxford's new road system would already be out of date and lots of destruction would have occurred for no benefit.

Helen and Gerard Turner

Helen Turner (née Robinson), whom James Stevens Curl has described as “the driving force behind the early Oxford Civic Society”, devoted her considerable energies to improving the communities in which she lived. She was a champion of the consumer, becoming Chairman of the Oxford Consumer Group in 1964, and a journalist at *The Oxford Times*, where she was Features Editor and a regular columnist. She, her husband Gerard, and James Stevens Curl, were the three co-founders of the Society and she did a great deal of work to build it up in its formative years. She completed a remarkable double by moving in 1982 to be, for eight years, a very active Secretary of the Oxford Preservation Trust, of which she remained a trustee for life. Her most outstanding achievement there was to raise £250,000 to repair Magdalen Bridge properly in stone after the local authorities said they had no money to do so.

Helen and Gerard moved to Oxford when he was appointed assistant curator at the Museum of the History of Science in 1964. Gerard became Professor of the History of Science and a leading expert and prolific author on scientific instruments, and in particular on the history of the microscope. His studies of the museum’s collection of optical instruments established him as an authority in a hitherto neglected field and his investigations took him to collections all over the world. On co-founding the Civic Society in response to concerns about the apparently unchecked degradation of the built environment, he said “One should stick one’s nose into anything. Or one’s beard, as the case may be.”

Helen died in 2004 aged 74, Gerard in 2012, aged 86.



(1960s photos courtesy of Jane Bigos)



Thomas Braun (left) with his brother Christopher in 1984

(Courtesy of Merton College)

Thomas Braun left Nazi Germany with his family in 1938 with the aid of English Quakers. He won a scholarship to Balliol College but, as a conscientious objector, spent two years with the Friends’ Ambulance Unit before coming to Oxford to read classics. He was appointed Fellow and tutor in ancient history at Merton in 1963 and remained at the college for the rest of his life.

Tony Joyce, former Chairman of the Society, remembers Braun as a fellow Quaker and “An absolutely delightful man, one of perhaps the last of the old school of stimulating, unmarried, incredibly well-read classics dons, devoted to the university and the historic city. He had three personal libraries: one Doric, one Ionic and one Corinthian!”

Braun became a member of the Civic Society at its inception, and its first Treasurer. Early on he and Chairman James Stevens Curl became very concerned about the university’s plans to build a new housing development in Wytham, three miles north-west of Oxford. This would have seriously damaged the historic character of the village and gone against the original wishes of the ffennell family who had donated the Wytham estate to the university. Braun led a successful campaign to prevent the development. Later he was involved in the Society’s designs for street lamps for the city centre and Old Headington.

"It would 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."

Oxford Civic Society, *Let's LIVE in Oxford*, 1970

Let's LIVE in Oxford put the fledgling Civic Society on the map. It questioned the whole basis of the road scheme and insisted that another solution to Oxford's traffic problems must be found and implemented. It cogently argued for the restriction of the motor car, while urging that one of the most beautiful and famous cities in Europe had to be saved from the inevitable destruction entailed in building urban motorways, which were, in any case, already considered an outmoded solution to traffic congestion in cities. It proposed the building of high-density residential property

close to the city centre – for example in St Ebbe's – from which residents could walk to work, thus reducing reliance on the car.

Protests against the inner relief road were the trigger for the formation of the Society, but the road plans were only a manifestation of the environmentally unsustainable state which Oxford was in, due particularly to quite appalling traffic congestion in and around the city centre. As later Chairman Tony Joyce has argued, such conditions would almost certainly have brought about the foundation of a Civic Society anyhow.

Nevertheless, the Society's early years were dominated by the on-going fight against successive versions of the inner relief road scheme. In June 1970, in the middle of the Public Inquiry into the latest proposals, members delivered a petition containing over 3,200 signatures to the Town Hall, calling for the City Council to reconsider its decision and to experiment instead with traffic management and bus services to solve the city's traffic problems.

The Civic Society, represented for free by barrister Mr K J Farrow, gave evidence to the Public Inquiry. It argued, as in its recent publication *Let's LIVE in Oxford*, that all plans for traffic-attracting, destructive inner relief roads should be rejected, and instead a positive alternative scheme to restrict commuter traffic at the city boundaries should be considered. The Society's great coup was to have Leslie Smith, General Manager of Leicester City Transport, as its chief witness. Leicester was just beginning to experiment with such a scheme – to be known as 'Park & Ride'.

The new idea began to attract positive discussion and the Civic Society built on this by inviting Leslie Smith back to Oxford a few months later to speak on 'Public transport in the modern city' at its one-day conference entitled *The Future of Oxford*. The conference was sponsored by Blackwell's Bookshop and held at the Oxford Polytechnic (now Oxford Brookes University); other speakers gave talks on subjects including 'Can we kill the car?' and 'Multi-storey car parks: the Swedish experience'.

The Civic Society's persistence eventually paid off. One of James Stevens Curl's early recruits to the



Gerard Turner (right) delivering a petition against the inner relief road scheme, with Oxford Civic Society founding committee member Eric Swain (centre) and Mrs Swain (left). The petition, signed by 3,264 people, argued that eight miles of urban motorway would break up communities in east, south and west Oxford; that new roads would cause pollution throughout the city and a six-fold increase in traffic to Headington; and that the road schemes and associated car parks would waste money and space that could be put to better use.

Oxford Mail, 30 June 1970

Oxford's road to ruin

OXFORD is in the throes of another marathon inquiry into roads. It is the third in ten years but the first in which the undergraduates have taken an interest. "Oxfash" is undergraduate shorthand for the establishment of councillors, planners, shopkeepers, and dons whom they see as intent on destroying the life of the city to make way for cars. To the undergraduates they appear unconcerned about the way streets all over the city are being sterilised by danger, noise, and fumes, ignorant of the lives of those who get about by bus and bicycle and unable to imagine that there are alternatives to the further proliferation of cars.

The Oxford inner relief road saga had been attracting national attention for many years. In 1954 there had even been intervention by government at Westminster, when Duncan Sandys, the then Minister of Housing and Local Government (and founder of the Civic Trust), secured approval at Cabinet level for his own route proposal.

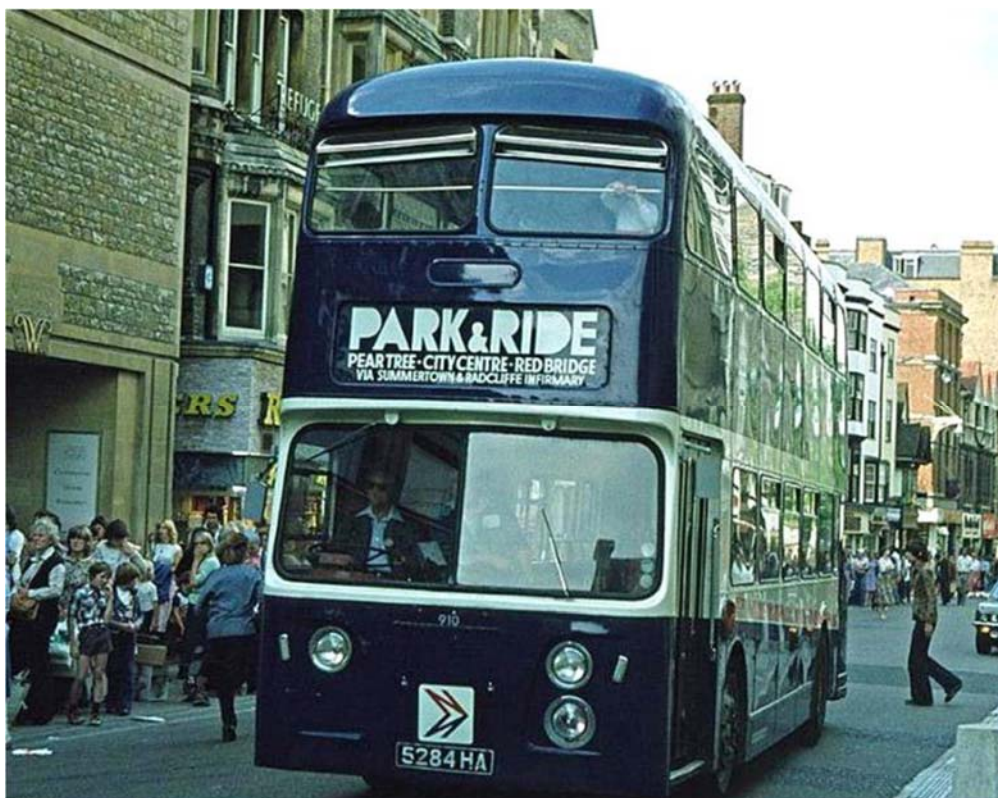
The tale at the time was that the Cabinet agenda read:

- "1. Oxford roads;
2. Seizure of the Suez Canal."

For the Cabinet to be involved demonstrated the national importance then attached to Oxford, not least by ministers and top civil servants who had been educated here.

(Cutting courtesy of The Guardian)

Society had been Albert Ramsay (after whom Ramsay House in St Ebbe's is named), an architect who became a leading Labour councillor. A small number of Labour councillors, notably Olive Gibbs and Edmund Gibbs, had been opposed to the road scheme for years, but Ramsay helped to convert other colleagues such that in 1971 the Labour opposition on the City Council decided to reject all inner relief roads. This was particularly due to the realisation of the damage that the roads would do in east and south Oxford, but Labour's change of mind also reflected changing public opinion.



An early example of a Park & Ride bus running between car parks at Pear Tree in the north and Redbridge in the south, via the city centre.

(Photo from the Society's archive, courtesy of Stephen Howell)

Transport thinking

Awareness of these developments led the Oxford Civic Society to take the unprecedented step of asking Mr Leslie Smith, Leicester's bus manager, to give evidence for them at the inquiry in order to draw attention to the new thinking about transport. Mr Smith has a reputation for being one of the most go-ahead public transport operators in the country. Leicester's municipally owned buses are helped through heavy traffic by TV and radio-telephones and will be the first in Britain to be able to make traffic lights stay green as they approach.

(Courtesy of The Manchester Guardian, 10 July 1970)

In 1972 Labour won control of the Council and, in defiance of the experts of Whitehall and later of Oxfordshire County Council, pioneered the 'Balanced Transport Policy'. This is still the basis of the city's current traffic management arrangements. The policy implemented road closures to get cars out of the historic centre, notably Radcliffe Square and New College Lane; introduced Park & Ride and dedicated bus lanes on some radial roads; controlled and limited parking in the city centre with on-street parking charges set high enough to keep demand down; and put in place residents' parking zones to stop suburban streets being used as car parks. The emphasis now was on a reliance on public transport and on providing for the movement of people rather than of cars.

Gradually Park & Ride, an idea introduced to Oxford by the Civic Society, came to be accepted nationally and locally as a success. The only part of the inner relief road to be built was an extension to Oxpens, through St Ebbe's to St Aldate's, which allowed the City Council to go ahead, in 1972, with building the original Westgate shopping centre and the multi-storey car park, accessible from the new road. By this time Oxford Civic Society was firmly established, with a membership of almost 200 and well-placed to take on the challenge of helping to shape the city's future.



2 Planning for the future of Oxford and its region

“The erosion of Oxford is no accident. It is a disease of the times and is happening because the structures of our civilisation ... are being challenged, if not destroyed. Only an inner will to change can stop the erosion, for the mood of the times is dangerous not only to institutions but to their physical expressions as well.”

James Stevens Curl, *The Erosion of Oxford*, 1977

Just before Christmas 1971 the Civic Society produced its second publication, *Summertown: towards an integrated community*, by Victor Berry, the Secretary of the Society's Planning Committee. Several of the points made in *Let's LIVE in Oxford* were developed. In particular Berry examined the existing community structure of Oxford and looked closely at one of those communities, Summertown. His aim was to consider what policies might lead to the consolidation of community activities, within an overall development plan for the city.

The clearance of the parish of St Ebbe's in the 1960s, and the fact that it had subsequently, as James Stevens Curl put it, “lain broken and derelict, empty and hideous as the result of a misguided official policy” had caused great disquiet, including amongst those who had founded and joined the Civic Society. In *Summertown: towards an integrated community* Victor Berry acknowledged that local authorities *were* now beginning to realise that it was less disruptive in social terms to restructure a community, rather than attempt to re-establish it on another site (even if the new site was in a more desirable setting). When the issue arose of what to do about the then rather run-down area of Jericho, the example of St Ebbe's, many of whose residents had been relocated to the new development of Blackbird Leys, four miles away and outside the ring road, persuaded the City Council to adopt a policy of gradual renewal and rehabilitation, rather than of wholesale flattening and comprehensive redevelopment.

This more reasoned approach, and the success of *Summertown: towards an integrated community*, encouraged the Civic Society in its efforts to persuade the City Council to produce local plans for communities in Oxford. The conviction that development should try to ensure that communities thrive, rather than decay, has run through a great deal of the Society's work. Moreover, the idea that Oxford's development should be co-ordinated, rather than carried out piecemeal, and that it should be seen not simply as an urban planning issue, but in the context of the development of the city's surrounding region as a whole, has been crucial. As Mark Barrington-Ward, former President of the Society, said in 2010: “The future of Oxford cannot be considered in isolation. It is now at the centre of what must be regarded economically and planned for as a city region ... covering also Bicester, Witney, Wantage, Grove, Didcot and the industrial estate at Milton Park (Abingdon) and the science centres at Culham and Harwell.”

A key piece of national legislation was the Local Government Act which came into force in 1974 and which reformed local government and restructured local authorities. Areas previously in Berkshire, including around 120 towns and villages, became part of Oxfordshire. A new *Structure Plan for Oxfordshire* followed in 1976, on which the Society submitted detailed comments to the Department of the Environment. Minimal growth throughout the county would be preferable, helped by the establishment of small-scale industries in the smaller towns to meet the needs of local populations; there should be a limit on housing in Oxford other than that required to meet the needs of the present population, and it was vitally important to retain the Green Belt. The City Council's Balanced Transport Policy, which rejected costly and environmentally-damaging road-building, was the way forward, with reasonable car restraint, bus lanes and Park & Ride, the opening up of local railways and halts, the provision of a bus and rail interchange, and car sharing. Oxford had adequate shopping facilities and needed no further huge



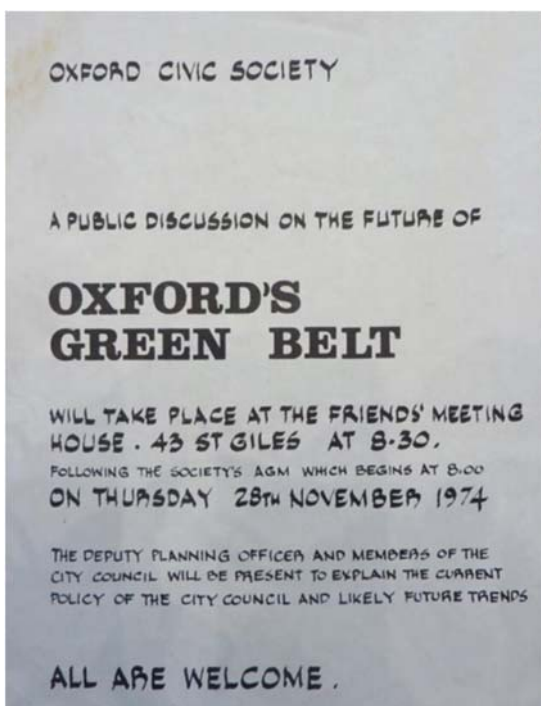
Victor Berry joined the Civic Society at its inception. He later recalled, "A friend, Albert Ramsay, and I went along to the inaugural meeting of the Society and were truly inspired by the likes of Helen and Gerard Turner, James Stevens Curl, Dame Penelope Jessel, John Barrow and many others. Albert soon came to the view that one way to make sure that changes were made was to join the City Council. He did just that, becoming an outstanding Labour Councillor and Chairman of the Planning Committee and the driving force behind the City Council's 'Balanced Transport Policy'".

Victor chose instead to join the Civic Society; as a practising architect he was a very valuable member of the original team which fought the proposals for inner relief roads through the

city and which wrote the Society's first publication *Let's LIVE in Oxford*. The following year he published his own study of *Summertown: towards an integrated community*. For the next 25 years, as his professional commitments permitted, he served the Planning Group as a member, with further periods as its Secretary, making a vital contribution to the Society and to the city. Those who had the pleasure of working with him remember his quiet charm and effectiveness. He died in 2013.

stores, but rather the encouragement of small speciality and repair shops. There should be an increase in recreational areas, parks and allotments, especially in newly-developed areas. As a result of these comments the Society was asked to give evidence to the Examination in Public of the growth levels proposed for Oxford and Kidlington, with particular reference to housing need and provision and the implications for the area then covered by Green Belt policy.

The preservation of the Green Belt had been an early concern for the Society. It had been established in the 1950s as a vital instrument in protecting the city's special character by containing urban sprawl and establishing a defined boundary between town and country (even though the inner boundary remained interim until 1997 because of disputes over how tightly it should be drawn). In the summer of 1971 James Stevens Curl represented the Society at the Public Inquiry into the Pear Tree Farm development to the north of Oxford, putting forward the view that the Green Belt must be preserved.



Ten years later the Society concurred entirely with the Oxford Draft District Plan's case for preserving the landscape setting of Oxford. In 1984 Society representatives gave evidence to the Oxford Local Plan inquiry, noting the difficulty in reconciling policies concerning the provision of housing, employment and shopping facilities with the desire to preserve Oxford's green setting, but warning that suitable sites for housing and shops should not erode the Green Belt.

By 2014 the Society's view of the role the Green Belt had evolved: as Peter Thompson, then Chairman, explained: "All planning, whether policy-making or taking decisions on individual development proposals, is required to consider the consequences of the actions, under the headings of environmental, social and economic effects. So the negative

consequences of Green Belt policies cannot be ignored:

- increased pressure to build on non-Green Belt land, rural and urban;
- separation of residential areas from workplaces, increasing commuting, traffic, congestion and consequent environmental and economic effects;
- increased demand for road-building;
- exacerbation of housing problems - availability and affordability."

The Society still takes the view that Green Belts in general and Oxford's Green Belt in particular have been successful, but not entirely so and how the Oxford Green Belt will measure up for the challenges of the future needs careful consideration.

"As far as hypermarkets are concerned, we seem to be fighting a hydra. No sooner is one application cut down than others rear their heads."

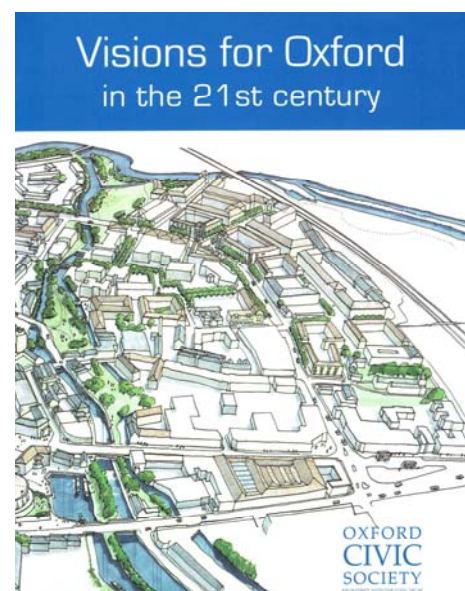
Oxford Civic Society Chairman
Penelope Jessel, 1981

From its earliest days the Society was concerned about where and how people should do their shopping. Victor Berry was vehemently against putting an out-of-town shopping centre at Pear Tree, as this would he said, "kill Summertown". Penelope Jessel, Chairman and later President of the Society, deplored the disappearance from the city centre of useful small shops serving day-to-day needs and their replacement by building societies and estate agents. In 1980 the Society produced a

short report on *Oxford and shopping needs*, arguing particularly against the proposal to site a large Asda supermarket on the LMS station site, adjacent to the railway station. "It is the aspect of the promotion of the drive-in, car-borne, bulk-buying, durable-seeking shopper that should cause us most alarm. Quite apart from the arguments of the sheer folly of making shopping reliant on cars to the detriment of the vital neighbourhood shops and the encouragement of energy consumption." Eventually, however, a branch of the supermarket chain Solo (later Somerfield) was allowed at Wheatley and that paved the way for other superstores on the outskirts of the city.

In 1992 the Society made detailed comments on the City Council's latest Local Plan (1991-2001). Generally it was in sympathy with most of the proposals and considered the document to be well-prepared and presented. But the Society stressed that residential, rather than office accommodation, should be given higher priority in the few remaining central major development areas, and that specific planning briefs should be drawn up for these areas for the guidance of developers. Several reviews of the Oxford Local Plan followed and the Society always made it its business to study these and to comment in detail. In 1999 the Society set up a special committee to comment on the latest review and submitted 14 pages of specific modifications to the Local Plan, on the topics of environment, housing, tourism, recreation, shopping and commerce, the city centre, higher and further education, community services and transport. These were sent to every member of the City Council Local Plan Review Group and to community groups all over Oxford.

During 2002 and 2003 a lot of the Society's Planning Committee's time was taken up with the new Draft Local Plan and in 2003 the Society published a major report, *Visions for Oxford in the 21st Century*, in which 40 contributors, each chosen for their knowledge, expertise and far-sightedness, presented ideas on how the future development of Oxford





*Penelope Jessel (far left) on a Civic Society walk in 1976.
(Courtesy of the Oxford Mail,
26 January 1976)*

Penelope Jessel was the Chairman of the Civic Society from 1974 to 1988 and later its first President. The daughter of Oxford bookseller and publisher Sir Basil Blackwell, she read Greats at Somerville College. Her husband Bobbie Jessel died in 1954, leaving her a widow at only 34, with two small sons. She trained to become an adult education lecturer in social administration and social work, notably at Plater College in Oxford, and later worked for the Liberal Party on women's issues and international affairs.

Jessel was also a passionate campaigner on conservation issues, and it was this which led to her deep involvement with the Society. On its 10th anniversary in 1979, she said proudly: "The Civic Society had been considered at its birth as a brash and bawling infant, the necessity for whose existence was called into question. Such doubts are now over. The Society has established its role on the Oxford scene. The last ten years have proved so."

Rachel Powell, former Planning Secretary, recalled that "Various sites were a constant irritation to her. The iron railings of St Michael at the Northgate were one, for they were always covered with ill-written notices and posters. Litter was another pet hate and she was always to the fore in Litter Week, once challenging the City Council to see who could collect the most litter in an afternoon – the Council won! She also had her unexpected affection for pleasing oddities in the city like the decorated façade of Denton's bicycle shop in Summertown." When the application by Sciox for a science park near North Hinksey was turned down, Sciox decided not to appeal and the Vale of the White Horse District Council wrote to congratulate Jessel on "her robust defence of this part of the Green Belt".

Penelope Jessel was made a Dame in 1987 to mark the centenary of the Women's Liberal Federation, of which she had been President from 1970 to 1972. She was appointed as the first President of the Civic Society in 1992 and remained so until her death in 1996, aged 76.

and its region might be guided and channelled in the coming decades. The report prompted a good deal of discussion and boosted recognition of the Civic Society as an authoritative voice in matters of strategic planning. By the following year the Society was actively involved with three major tiers of planning control at the levels of the city's Local Plan, the county's Structure Plan and the South East Regional Plan.

In 2009 the City Council, with the support of the two universities, announced a policy of 'managed economic growth' defined as commercial development appropriately located in Oxford to take advantage of the city's existing strengths, such as spin-out companies, rather than growth that could be located in any UK city. The key question, as Mark Barrington-Ward, former President of the Society, said, is how far this should be taken at a time when Oxford already had far more jobs than homes. Large new housing developments *were* being mooted: in 2011 the Society contributed, for example, to consultations on the Barton Area Action Plan. This had stirred real controversy regarding the treatment of the A40 dual carriageway, which threatened to sever the proposed new 1,200-home

"When it comes to town planning, successes soon come to be taken for granted, while failures continue to be held against planners for years."

Mark Barrington-Ward, former President of the Society, 2010

development from the city. The Society's idea of an urban boulevard (proposed by Transport Group member Graham Smith) was never implemented but it did catch the imagination of planners not only in Oxford but also in other cities which need to build beyond their ring roads. In the same year the Planning Group also looked at the Sites and Housing Development Plan, which allocated potential uses for nearly 200 identified sites. As Chairman Peter Thompson noted, both of these proposals involved Society volunteers in the detailed analysis of large volumes of documentation, and the arguing of properly-considered responses. Both plans were eventually adopted after protracted public examinations.

Major changes in national planning legislation were afoot and the Civic Society was highly alert to how these might play out in Oxford and Oxfordshire. In 2010 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) replaced Regional Development Agencies. LEPs were expected to be business-led, to involve local authorities across most of the county, and potentially to have access to the newly-announced national Regional Growth Fund. Society Chairman Peter Thompson warned that although LEPs might open up funding streams, "The priorities of big business are not necessarily co-incident with the interests of the 'big society' of which we are all members". In particular, the market, left to itself, would not provide the affordable housing that is so badly needed. As Mark Barrington-Ward has said, Oxford's experience demonstrates only too clearly the limitations of a national housing policy which is aimed at creating a property-owning democracy but under which many of those involved – house-owners safely established on the housing ladder, landowners, developers, mortgage lenders and estate agents – have an interest in seeing house prices rise.

"The greatest change for Oxford is that 50 years ago both the Council and the University were vehemently opposed to the growth of the city, which was being driven by the motor industry. Now we have an official body called the 'Oxfordshire Growth Board'!"

Mark Barrington-Ward, former President of the Society, 2018

In 2012 the Government threw out most of the documentation detailing the way in which the planning system worked in the UK and replaced it with a much more simplistic and supposedly accessible set of rules – the National Planning Policy Framework, or NPPF. The idea was to stimulate economic recovery and the building of thousands of new homes. The Civic Society was dismayed at the principles underlying the proposals: "In our view developers' reluctance to invest has little to do with concerns over the planning system or shortage of sites. Rather, their caution appears to stem from the lack of buyers, in itself a reflection of the caution of mortgage lenders. The supposed justification for the reform has led to widespread scepticism as to its purpose".

2017 saw Oxford's housing crisis worsen, with no sign of the social and economic consequences of astronomic house prices abating. The proliferation of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) – often unwelcome in local neighbourhoods – was one obvious consequence. The following year, in the wake of a White Paper which identified the national housing

market as 'broken', major revisions to the NPPF were proposed, ostensibly to 'fix' the problem.

Do we want [Oxford] to grow and change, or to resist both? Can we sustain growth in our congested area without compromising the very qualities that make Oxford so special?

Visions (the Oxford Civic Society newsletter), March 2013

A public consultation exercise was undertaken, to which the Society's newly-formed Housing Group responded that the proposals focused almost exclusively on housing numbers, whereas the key issue, particularly in Oxford, is affordability. "Tinkering with the planning system will not address this problem, whose root causes

lie in fiscal policy and the economics of land use". Subsequently new guidelines for calculating housing need were proposed by the government which the Housing Group described as "a missed opportunity to take effective action to address the real crisis in housing".

Shortage of housing was only one of several inter-connected challenges pre-occupying the Society, all of which relate as much – if not more – to national factors and policies, as to local circumstances. These include the changing economy, climate change and energy security. In 2013, with Oxford poised to benefit from a 'City Deal' from national government, the Society collaborated with URBED, one of the country's most innovative urban design consultancies, to organise a series of four *Oxford Futures* debates. These brought together senior local government officers and councillors from the city and county, academics and interested Society members to debate whether and how Central Oxfordshire should grow, and what kind of city we want Oxford to be in the future. The resulting report, *Oxford Futures: Achieving smarter growth in Central Oxfordshire*, sought to sharpen the debate about the city and region's future by demonstrating the need for properly coordinated planning and transport policies across the whole of Central Oxfordshire, challenging all six local authorities in the county to work jointly towards 'smarter growth'.

The document set out eight proposals for action by those who hold Central Oxfordshire's future in their hands, including local planners, councillors, landowners, developers and business and university leaders. These proposals included setting up an Oxford Futures Commission; developing a spatial growth plan; establishing a Quality Review Panel; engaging the public through a Development Forum; training and developing key decision makers;

Joan Wheare, who was described by the *Oxford Mail* as a "rebel with many causes ... Oxford's 'urban guerrilla'", was a very long-standing member of the Civic Society. She had studied at the Oxford Society of Home Students, which later became St Anne's College. Her husband, Sir Kenneth Wheare, was Rector of Exeter College and later Vice Chancellor of the University.

During her time on the Society's committee, Lady Wheare stimulated members into a number of high-profile campaigns. She pressed for the building of the ice rink at Oxpens and the cleaning up of Friar's Entry, then a very run-down alleyway. Members were encouraged to help with 'Free grub if you scrub'. These working parties were the forerunners of the Society's more recent and hugely successful OxClean campaign.

Wheare also fought to keep open St Frideswide's Church in West Oxford, to save some of the old college barges which once lined the banks of Christ Church Meadow, and to prevent the Head of the River pub at Folly Bridge being replaced by a modern hotel. Well into her 90s she was still regularly phoning the Society's Chairman to suggest issues requiring the Society's attention.

Joan Wheare was described as "a great catalyst who pushed people into taking action which they otherwise would not have bothered to" – the epitome, perhaps, of Oxford Civic Society. She died at her home in Wolvercote in 2013, aged 98.



Joan Wheare (left) with Lady Bullock, symbolically reading Kenneth Clarke's Civilisation at the gates of the Clarendon Building during a protest concerning democracy within Oxford University, 1970.

(Courtesy of the Oxford Mail, 7 November 2013)

establishing design competitions for key sites; modelling the impact of transport options; and mobilising and coordinating investment. These actions would, the document argued, contribute to carrying forward in practice four identified principles, which tie in closely with the Society's own aims and beliefs: to develop in the right place and reduce car use; to create balanced and healthier communities; to build distinctive places of high quality; and to minimise environmental impact.

The report was well received and the Society's growing influence was recognised when it was invited to join the steering group of the Oxford Strategic Partnership (OSP) soon afterwards. The author of the report, Nicholas Falk, and his colleagues won the prestigious 2014 Wolfson Economics Prize which called for visionary proposals for 21st-century garden cities. Members of the Society had helped in the preparation of the final submission which cited the Oxford region as a case study.

The Society maintained momentum by setting up a new Oxford Futures group and a dedicated website to bring into one place all its activities and publications. In June 2015 the group convened a symposium at Wolfson College to disseminate the Oxford Futures principles to members of the county's business community. This well-attended event was held in collaboration with the OSP and the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership.

As interest in Oxford Futures increased and participation in its discussions widened beyond the confines of Oxford city, its name was changed to *Oxfordshire Futures* in September 2016.

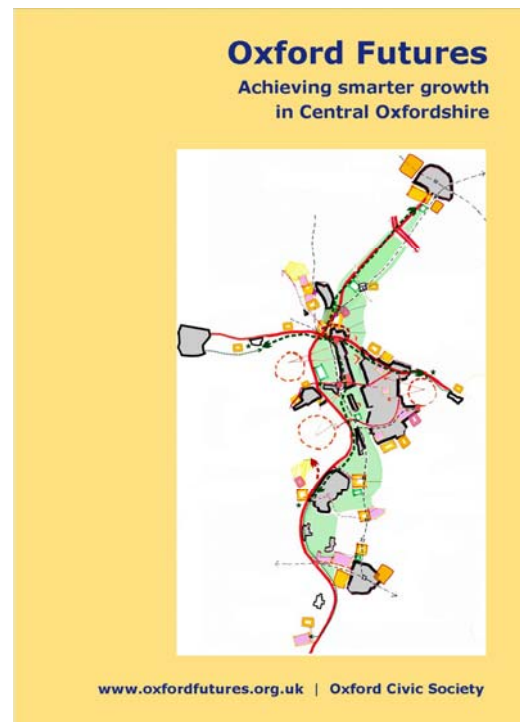
One of the key concerns for Society and in particular for its Oxfordshire Futures group has been the lack of co-ordination in strategic planning, despite the statutory duty to co-operate imposed on local authorities by the 2012 National Planning Policy Framework. This has been due in part to historic political and ideological differences between the City and County Councils. As Chairman Peter Thompson told *The Oxford Times* in August 2016: "What we are

Developing the knowledge economy in Central Oxfordshire offers a great prize. Prosperity, good jobs, new housing and transport links could be ours. But it also poses great challenges, including the protection and enhancement of our heritage assets. But these challenges can be overcome. We can learn from others.

Oxford Civic Society, *Oxford Futures: A call to action on the development of Central Oxfordshire*, March 2014

really concerned about is the crying need for proper co-ordination of planning across the five different authorities and the county as transport authority, but the will is not there ... we have still got them producing their own draft local plans which fail to show any real co-ordination". He warned that our region was seen as the weak point of the Cambridge-London-Oxford triangle of technological innovation and expertise, which is perceived as a key component of the future national economy. "Currently, the Oxford region falls significantly behind Cambridge in its economic performance, despite several advantages."

At the instigation of its then President, Sir Hugo Brunner, the Society had sent a delegation to Cambridge in the spring of 2016 to consider what had been working there and what could or could not be applied in





The Civic Society group visiting a high-density housing development in Cambridge, spring 2016. Members of the Society have also visited towns in Holland, Germany and France that share many of the characteristics of Oxford, including Utrecht, Freiburg and Grenoble (with which Oxford is twinned), in order to study alternative solutions to similar problems.

(Photo from the Society's archive)

along with housing design excellence. Most importantly it would be a great opportunity to engage the public in debate about the factors driving growth, what scale and pace of growth are necessary, and how its distribution could be managed to avoid ruining Oxfordshire's rural character.

In 2017 the Society continued to work hard to support consultations on the Oxford Local Plan and submitted comments on all 100 preferred options. The following year Oxford City Council asked the Society if it would support the Council's acceptance of the Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal, a £215 million funding package for housing and infrastructure costs, one of whose conditions is the preparation of a Joint Statutory Spatial Plan (now known as *Oxfordshire 2050*). As the deal appears to meet several objectives for which the Society has been campaigning for some years, it was happy to do so. Encouragingly, the Society has since been invited to be involved in the design of the public consultation process.

The Society is also represented on the Oxford Strategic Partnership (OSP), founded in 2003 to bring together senior representatives from the public, business, community and voluntary

"We're very lucky to have Oxford Civic Society; it's like a local Town and Country Planning Association. It makes a hugely valuable and pro-active contribution to strategic planning and policy-making, and the City Council now sees it as one of the first ports of call when it comes to these issues."

Bob Price, former Leader of Oxford City Council, 2018

Oxford. The group concluded that Cambridge's success has much to teach us – about the role of local government, the contribution of the university and the dedication of key individuals committed to finding a shared vision. A short report, *Growing Oxford and its county: lessons from Cambridge*, summarised the findings.

2017 saw Oxfordshire's local authorities working more in partnership, a development which the Society welcomed and continued to encourage. In particular it persisted in supporting the joint preparation of a county-wide spatial plan, an innovation it had recommended three years earlier in the *Oxford Futures* report. Such a plan could, the Society asserted, ensure proper coordination of housing and transport planning, so homes get built where good transport facilities are available, or can feasibly be provided,

sectors. The OSP helps to provide direction for the city's future, respond to local priorities and engage more effectively with local concerns. This partnership for the city promotes collaboration and openness and provides opportunities to access funding and share resources more easily. The current focus of OSP is on economic development, growth and regeneration, stronger communities, low carbon Oxford and safer communities.

Now in 2019, it is even more evident that the City of Oxford's administrative area does not match its area of economic influence or journey to work patterns. Spatial plans to accommodate Oxford's employment

and housing demand are those of the neighbouring districts. In addition Oxford's relationship to London's westward expansion is already emerging as a development planning issue and the proposal to build an east-west Expressway puts more emphasis on the need for Oxford city-region planning. The county's current unprecedented level of employment and population growth really require a city-region perspective to the development of Oxford's role. The Society is constantly pressing for this perspective to be taken through its relationship with the Oxfordshire Growth Board and support for the Joint Statutory Spatial Plan, *Oxfordshire 2050*.

"Like grit in an oyster we may have been an irritant at the start, but something of value could now emerge."

Ian Green, Chairman of the Society, 2017



Members of the Planning and Transport Groups on a study tour of the Netherlands in 2016.

(Photo courtesy of Peter Thompson)

3 Managing traffic and improving public transport

"The atmosphere of philosophic, of collegiate calm, which is the traditional characteristic of a university town, has been obliterated by a kind of free-for-all in which works' buses and public buses, 5-ton trucks, chains of motor-car bodies, 60-foot lorries, vans, motor coaches and private cars thunder between vibrating college buildings. The University has become the scene of a titanic traffic battle because the High Street is still the only channel of communication between various parts of the city and the country."

Thomas Sharp, *Oxford Replanned*, 1948

"Places with charm ... form oases of order, decency and continuity ... and they become foci which are recognisable in the bewilderment and anarchy of a civilisation besotted with the motor car."

Oxford Civic Society, *Let's LIVE in Oxford: A Study of the Road Plan*, 1970

Planning goes hand-in-hand with the management of traffic and the establishment and maintenance of integrated public transport systems and these have been key concerns for the Society since its inception. The issue of how to handle the traffic pouring through the city centre was one on which the fledgling Society made perhaps its most important single contribution to the welfare of Oxford.

For much of the 1960s, snarl-ups in the city centre were the norm, with cars belching fumes and queuing bumper to bumper in Cornmarket. Tony Joyce, later the Society's Chairman, recalled that on moving to Oxford in 1968 he was advised that because his workplace – Magdalen College School – was east of the River Cherwell, he and his family would have to live that side, as Magdalen Bridge was frequently so congested as to be impassable. The bridge, which at the time was the only link between the city and the rapidly-expanding residential suburbs of East Oxford, Cowley and Headington, was three-lane. A movable traffic island sat outside the porters' lodge of Magdalen College and early every morning the porter, armed with a large handle, wound the island across the road to give traffic two lanes into the city and one out. Before the afternoon rush hour he would wind it back to give two lanes for traffic heading out eastwards.



Traffic congestion in Cornmarket in 1961

(Photo courtesy of The Oxford Times)

In the summer, there were frequent warnings on the local radio not to go into the centre of Oxford, unless you absolutely had to, as pollution levels were so high. There was no effective traffic control or controlled parking in the centre; instead it was a free-for-all, with buses both ways on Cornmarket and Broad Street packed with circulating cars seeking scarce parking places. Congestion was further aggravated because at Carfax, the historic crossroads where Oxford's first traffic lights

were installed in 1934, east-west traffic crossed the path of north-south traffic, causing long lines of stationary vehicles to form in the High Street, Queen Street, Cornmarket and St Aldate's.

Many people believed that the solution to this traffic chaos was to build a system of new roads to channel cars around, rather than through, the historic core of the city. As outlined in chapter 1, the idea of an inner relief road had first been mooted during the Second World War, but by the end of the 1960s it had still not come to fruition. But there was increasing recognition, at both a national and a local level, that building roads was an expensive way of attracting more cars, not of reducing traffic, noise and air pollution. This idea was grasped firmly by the Society when it was founded, partly to fight against the latest iteration of an inner relief road scheme, in 1969.



Magdalen Bridge in 1965 showing the three-lane traffic management experiment

(Photo courtesy of The Oxford Times)

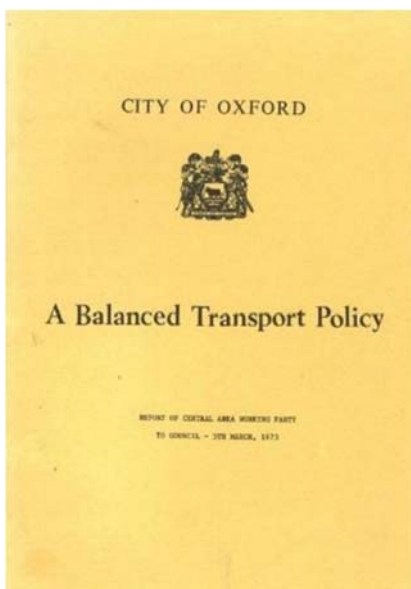
The Society's inaugural publication, *Let's LIVE in Oxford: A Study of the Road Plan*, warned that:

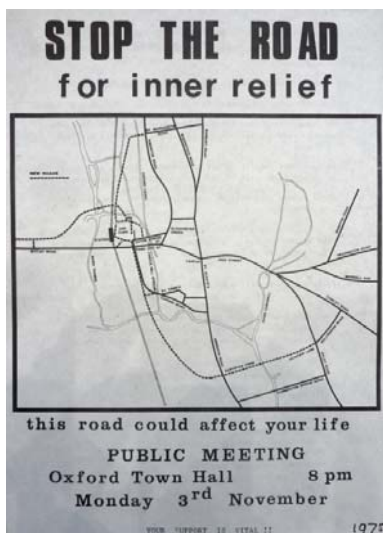
"The roads lobby is extremely powerful ... Now there are few things as immutable as modern roads, and very little can be done about them **once they are there**. Artists' impressions of flowers and happy couples cavorting among the piloti [stilts or piers] of the roads are false. Anyone who has actually 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.**"

The Society advocated alternative means of reducing traffic in the city centre: a Park & Ride scheme, with car parks on the outskirts and buses to take people into the city. Motorists should pay a fee to drive into Oxford, and residents should be charged to park their cars in local off-street car parks. Bus passengers must be able to get anywhere in the city easily, with routes and timetables that were simple to understand, "not puzzles for the enthusiast". The city should experiment with dedicated bus lanes, as was already happening in Reading.

The Society's well-reasoned, positive arguments were supported by the County Council's own traffic statistics which showed that many of the vehicles in the city centre were simply trying to get from one side of Oxford to the other, rather than aiming for a destination within the

city. In 1972 the now Labour-controlled City Council introduced the Balanced Transport Policy, making Oxford one of the first cities to recognise that travel demands have to be adjusted to match the existing road space rather than *vice versa*. Catte Street, Holywell Street, New College Lane and Jowett Walk were closed as through routes and most of the parked cars were taken out of Radcliffe Square. The opening of the Marston Ferry Road in 1971 had already helped to reduce through-centre traffic by providing the first direct link between North Oxford and Headington. Crucially, the growth of traffic in the city centre and on the radial roads was halted, though Oxford's most beautiful street, the High, remained a major traffic route. The Balanced Transport Policy, which had begun as a revolt against official thinking, eventually became accepted locally and nationally as a success story.





The introduction of the policy, and in particular of Park & Ride (first promoted by the fledgling Civic Society), was a big step forward, but the Society's Transport Group continued to oppose plans for an inner relief road (which were not finally shelved until 1976) and to propose innovative and practical alternatives. In 1974 the Society tried (unsuccessfully) to persuade the City of Oxford Education Department and the heads of the larger independent schools in North Oxford and Headington to provide buses for state and independent school pupils to ease morning rush-hour traffic congestion. In October 1979 it collaborated with the Conservation Society and Transport 2000 (of which it had been a member since the early 1970s) to organise a meeting to discuss the negative effects of commercial traffic, *'Are there alternatives to heavier lorries?'*

Around the same time the Society began actively to concern itself with the impact of growing tourism on the city, the challenges of which were acknowledged by the City Council in appointing its first Tourism Officer, Isobel Cosgrove, in 1979. In particular, what to do about the 'day tripper problem' was discussed: *"If they come by car they should obviously be directed to the Park & Ride, but what about those who come in coaches?"* The Society suggested the possibility of minibuses linking the station with Gloucester Green and raised the question of having a coach station adjacent to the railway station, a scheme which the Society has championed ever since. In 2001 Society member Richard Shock set up a survey to demonstrate how many tourist coaches were being parked in St Giles, one of the few quantified studies of this vexed question. As a result of his findings, the Council was persuaded to impose restrictions.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s the Civic Society became increasingly involved in fighting the proposed extension of the M40 motorway from Oxford to the south of Birmingham. Along with groups including the Council for the Protection of Rural England, as it then was, (CPRE) and the Oxford Preservation Trust, as well as many individuals, the Society opposed the proposed route on the grounds of irreversible damage to the environment and to people's lives.

In 1983 the Society's Chairman, Penelope Jessel, gave evidence to the M40 public enquiry, questioning the need for and purpose of the motorway and objecting to it on the grounds of irreversible damage to Otmoor (400 acres of semi-wetland, six miles to the north-east of Oxford, home to many rare species of birds and butterflies); the negative effect on Oxford and its Green Belt; and the inevitable increase in traffic in and around the city. The Society favoured instead CPRE's proposal of improving existing routes.

Eventually the preferred route was altered to avoid Otmoor after a vigorous public protest led by Friends of the Earth, which involved selling 3,500 small squares of a field on the original route to supporters all over the world. The field was renamed 'Alice's Meadow' in reference to Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*, which is said to have been partly inspired by the chessboard-like field pattern of Otmoor. The M40 extension opened in 1991.



Protestors against the planned extension to the M40 make their views known.

(Photo from the Society's archive)

The Civic Society deplores the Secretary of State's decision to build the M40 extension. We are concerned that he sees his job as building roads 'in the right place at the right time' rather than planning and developing all modes of transport.

Oxford Civic Society, motion passed at the 1978 Annual General Meeting

The Society's thinking on roads and transport was distilled in its 1992 paper submitted to the County Council's chosen transport consultancy, Colin Buchanan & Partners. *Traffic in Oxford* proposed practical ways to alleviate pollution, noise, vibration, dirt and congestion (aggravated by an 80% increase in bus traffic following deregulation), by reducing car use and commercial traffic in the city centre and improving public transport. In 1993 Buchanan's report resulted in the adoption of the new Oxford Transport Strategy, which contained around a hundred measures designed to encourage a significant shift towards bus use, while sustaining high levels of walking and cycling. Many of these measures were ones suggested by the Civic Society. Electric buses were intro-

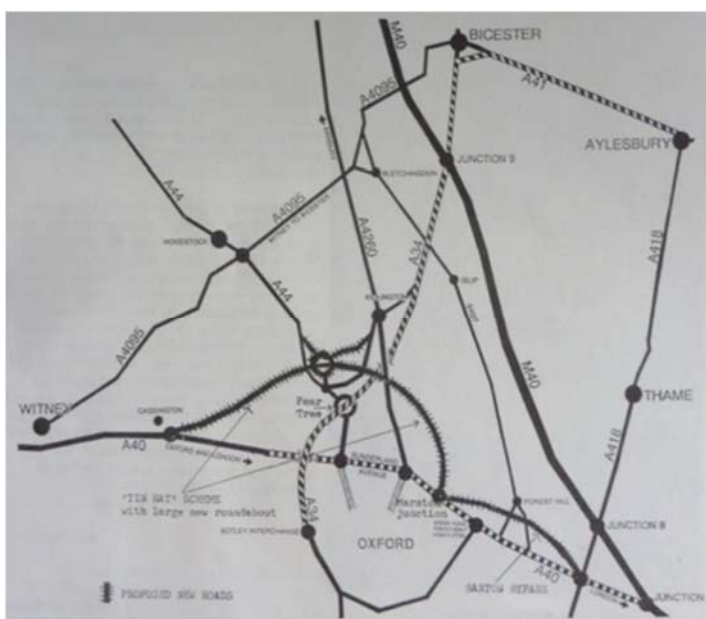
duced into Oxford that year and a new City Circuit electric bus, the country's first battery-powered environmentally-friendly public service vehicle, was officially launched 12 months later. It ran from the railway station to the University Science Area and back every ten minutes, a return trip costing 30p.

In general the Civic Society welcomed the new Oxford Transport Strategy, in particular the pedestrianisation of Cornmarket, restriction of traffic on the High Street and further expansion of Park & Ride. However, there was one recommendation of Buchanan's report to which it, and many others, objected strongly: the so-called 'North of Oxford' or 'tin hat' A40 by-pass (*right*). The Society organised a public meeting about the proposed new road in March 1993. Attendees resolved to call upon all interested parties to oppose any action or decision to create by-passes at North Oxford and at Headington or Barton, as well as an interchange at Marston, until the Government agreed to a Public Inquiry which would report on all three schemes and their environmental impact.

Three months later the Society submitted a letter of strong protest to the Department of Transport, stressing that a six-lane road was a disproportionately large scheme for a 'by-pass' and that such a road, raised on an embankment, would cause widespread visual and noise pollution. It highlighted the inevitable damage to the Green Belt and to the setting of Oxford, in particular to the environs of Marston. The Society insisted that no scheme should



Oxford's first electric bus



*The proposed 'tin hat' by-pass
(Images from the Society's archive)*

be implemented until a planned road network for the whole county was produced, and challenged the Department of Transport to reveal its true intentions with regard to the proposed by-passes, which the Society strongly suspected were part of a much larger planned east-west strategic route. Overall the proposals were extremely unpopular and prompted widespread opposition from the public and from a variety of groups. To the relief of protestors they were withdrawn in March 1994.

While maintaining a critical stance, the Civic Society sought to do everything possible to see other elements of the Oxford Transport Strategy brought to fruition. In the months up to and then overnight on 31 May 1999, frantic activity by engineers and contractors resulted in a major rearrangement of Oxford's city centre traffic system, including the diversion of buses from Cornmarket, the daytime closure of the High Street to general traffic (first trialled in 1981), and conversion of one-way roads west of the city centre to two-way, to create a bus priority route. The changes prompted a lot of controversy but Civic Society Chairman Edwin Townsend Coles was of the opinion that "June 1999 will be remembered [as the time] when the city took a bold leap forward in both traffic management and street design, creating a healthier, safer and better environment for all".

"The High has become in effect the city's, and possibly the world's, finest bus lane, though the reduction in traffic is a major environmental benefit."

Mark Barrington-Ward,
member of the Society's
Planning Group, 2000

In April 2000 the Society organised a conference, *Transport and the Future of Oxford*, to debate the successes and failures of the Oxford Transport Strategy a year after its introduction. Over 100 transport planners, consumers, traffic experts and others representing diverse interests discussed the growth of Oxford and of the region's population; its transport policy; the city centre and continued economic viability; reconciling the demands of car owners, cyclists and pedestrians; improving and integrating public transport; and the concept of Oxford as an exciting place in which to live and work as well as to visit. The broad range of topics recognised the fact that transport impinges on every facet of the life of the city and its surroundings.

Generally it was agreed that the Oxford Transport Strategy had been a success, with general traffic entering the city centre down by 20%; Park & Ride usage up significantly at some sites; an increase of 9% in ordinary bus use (representing 2,000 extra people a day); and a general improvement in air quality (including a 75% fall in carbon monoxide levels in St Aldate's). But a recent study by Rescue Oxford (ROX) showed that shops and other businesses had been hit badly and suggested that shoppers and visitors were boycotting Oxford in favour of towns like Reading and Cheltenham. Others argued, however, that this reduction in trade was part of a wider national trend, a problem which has of course been considerably exacerbated in recent years by the advent of online shopping.

The increase in bus use was encouraging, but there was still more to be done, particularly in improving bus stops and the walking environment around them. In 2008 the Society's Environment Group carried out a detailed survey and published *'The Bus Stops Here': encouraging people to choose the bus as their means of transport*. The report suggested a range of improvements including better labelling of bus stops, more accurate and comprehensive timetables, better shelters, lighting and seating, and improved visibility of approaching buses. Co-operation between the City Council,



the County Council and the bus companies was essential, it stressed, to ensure that all bus stops across the city conformed to a common design and standard. The report was given a positive reception and the Society's Travel Behaviour Group (as it was then called) published a further study of bus connectivity within the city. This was an important consideration in assessing the County Council's new project *Transform Oxford* which aimed to address the concerns of residents, businesses and visitors about the centre of Oxford – in particular the balance between good access and public transport systems and a better pedestrian experience. Further pressure from the Society achieved some reduction in the number of bus shelters in which advertisements were displayed, in the most sensitive central areas and in Frideswide Square.

The Society continued to support such efforts, often by bringing together interested parties and facilitating meaningful dialogue between them, and then holding them to account to ensure that promised actions were followed through.

In June 2008, OX1 (Oxford's City Centre Management Company at the time) balloted city centre business ratepayers on a proposal to establish a Business Improvement District for Oxford city centre. The Society supported the proposal but the ballot of city centre business ratepayers on whether to introduce a one per cent levy to fund extra services - on top of their business rates - was unsuccessful.

In 2011 the Society convened a *Transport Symposium* at St Hilda's College to explore the background to transport planning and the challenges of a transition to a low-carbon economy, and of population and economic growth in the Oxford region. Experts from Bristol joined representatives of the City and County Councils, local bus companies, Network Rail, Oxford's two universities and the Oxford Pedestrians' Association to give their views. A lively discussion included the issue of an integrated train and bus 'transport hub', on which the Society had been campaigning for years.

The Society's Transport Group continues to lobby for a sustainable travel network that works well for everyone, whether on foot, on cycles, in cars or using public transport. It comments on, and influences, strategic plans – the current one being the County Council's Local Transport Plan (LTP5) – as well as advising on local public transport arrangements such as timetables, routes and bus stops. In all cases it looks for opportunities to co-operate with other like-minded groups and to facilitate discussion between decision-makers, to try to ensure social, environmental and sustainable benefits.

"The Civic Society acts as an honest broker and is able to get key people to talk to each other about important issues."

Colin Cook, Lord Mayor of Oxford, 2018

"The car has no inherent entitlement to priority: cities are for people, not cars! We need to loosen our attachment to the car and claim the freedom of the streets."

Peter Thompson,
Chairman of the Society,
2014

4 Fostering dialogue between ‘the people’ and the ‘powers that be’

Two of the Civic Society’s initial aims were to encourage citizens to express their views on their city and to convey residents’ opinions on town planning and services to the authorities. What was needed was 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’)”.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s public consultation was beginning to be taken more seriously in the UK. The Skeffington Report of 1969 was the first attempt to set out a systematic approach to community involvement in planning. Although it was widely criticised as inadequate at the time, an increasing number of planners, designers and urban renewers began to aim to work with communities, rather than in spite of them, from the early 1970s onwards. This was reflected in Oxford by the appointment of the Council’s first Consultation Officer, Linda Wride, in 1971. The Society saw it as one of its key roles to encourage this trend and in its inaugural publication, *Let’s LIVE in Oxford*, proposed the setting up of funded neighbourhood councils in the ‘home areas’ to which residents felt they belonged. These would act as the voice of the community, representing the wishes and views of people on any local questions that concerned them. Importantly, any planning decisions affecting an area should be put to its neighbourhood council.

Despite the new move towards greater transparency, in 1970 the Society accused the City Council of failing to adequately communicate the latest plans for the inner relief road to the electorate. Proposals should be presented in such a way as to make them comprehensible to the layman. James Stevens Curl, co-founder of the Society, was adamant that planning applications must be published in good time for discussion and not decided behind the closed doors of an *in camera* planning committee. At the same time, consultation should be meaningful. In 1976 the Society complained that the tick box questionnaire put out by the County Council to gather comments on its Structure Plan for Oxfordshire gave no opportunity to challenge the very idea of growth, which was basic to the consideration of the whole plan.

By the mid-1990s the Society felt that greater emphasis was now placed on encouraging citizens to express their views on their city yet in 2007 the Chairman Tony Joyce expressed serious reservations about the way in which proposals for 180 new bus shelters, with illuminated advertising, were being introduced. The application was advertised in August, when many people are away, and the decision on the scheme, which would affect almost all areas of the city, was being delegated to City Council staff without input from elected councillors or area committees.

“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.”

The Society describing the consultants’ report on the latest inner relief road proposals, 1970

The Society continued to press for a more open and transparent planning process. Contentious plans for 220 homes on the site of Oxford’s greyhound stadium prompted Tony Joyce, as the Planning Group spokesman, to warn that “The plans aren’t clear enough ... applications need to be as clear as possible so that the public, and organisations, can have a true understanding of what is being built” . The Society’s Chairman Peter Thompson called the layout plans “misleading” and said that what were depicted as open spaces were actually car parks. In 2015 the Society submitted detailed comments on the City Council’s Statement of Community Involvement in Planning (SCIP) which, it said, “appears to be rooted in the statutory requirements for consultation on planning matters. This is understandable and

necessary but ... not actually sufficient". The SCIP, it noted, "is orientated towards consultation", in other words, getting people to agree to proposals already drafted by professionals. Collaboration, on the other hand, is about bringing the community's knowledge into the process to create better proposals and therefore better places.

The Society's concern with public consultation and transparency has gone beyond the planning process; in August 2016, for example, it called for Oxfordshire's councils to publish immediately two commissioned reports on how they could be reorganised. The studies had cost the taxpayer £200,000 but had been kept secret because officials at the five authorities (the county and the four districts) feared that the rival studies could provoke a fresh row if released before an internal agreement on restructuring could be reached. Peter Thompson, then Chairman, told *The Oxford Times*: "This is reprehensible in an era when there is supposed to be transparency in local government".

The Society's objective of facilitating communication between citizens and the authorities was reflected in another of its founding aims: to co-operate with community groups and with other local amenity societies. From the beginning several local amenity groups and residents' associations were affiliated with, and supported by, the Society. In 1978 the Chairman Penelope Jessel told members that one of the Society's most important functions was to coordinate with other groups in order to present a concerted view on matters that affected Oxford. "The Civic Society has always seen that one of its prime tasks is to initiate and further liaison and exchange of ideas between the many local amenity societies with which Oxford is so richly endowed." Better co-operation was enabled by the establishment, in 1978, of a Liaison Group of Amenity Societies of which the Society was a founding member. The group met twice a year and its member societies were able to present a joint view to the City Council and other bodies, which carried more weight than a number of uncoordinated representations. By the mid-1980s the Society was one of 14 members, itself representing at least 15 local neighbourhood groups and around 250 individual citizens.

At the Civic Society's formation in 1969 there had been questions as to whether Oxford needed such a group when it already had the Oxford Preservation Trust (OPT), founded over 40 years earlier in 1927. However, Alderman Frank Pickstock, Secretary of OPT from 1978 to 1982, was in no doubt as to the value of having two complementary societies:

"The Civic Society does not need to be as 'respectable', it can raise and campaign on issues in which OPT, with its body of trustees and its responsibilities for land and property, feels that it cannot actively involve itself, though it welcomes the fact that these are brought to public attention."

The Society, run entirely by volunteers and with no external funding, had, in a way, more freedom of action. Penelope Jessel, Chairman and later President of the Society, and herself a trustee of OPT, noted on Frank Pickstock's retirement that he had been a good friend to the Society. Under his leadership of OPT both organisations had worked out their spheres of activity and worked harmoniously together. Helen Turner, founding member of the Society, took over from Pickstock as Secretary of OPT from 1982 to 1990 and was still on the committee when the current Secretary, Debbie Dance, was appointed in 1998. Dance describes Turner as "a fantastic mentor" and values the supportive co-operation which the two organisations have continued to foster over the last two decades.

Now the Society enjoys positive relations not only with OPT but also with the Oxford Pedestrians Association, the cycling pressure group Cyclox, the Oxford Bus Users' Group and the Oxford business promotion group ROX.

5 Protecting and enhancing buildings and the urban 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."

James Stevens Curl, *The Erosion of Oxford*, 1977

James Stevens Curl's series of articles in the *Oxford Mail* on the *Erosion of Oxford*, written under the pseudonym of 'Adytum', attracted the attention of publisher Richard Blackwell, who commissioned Stevens Curl to write a book on the subject. *The Erosion of Oxford* was published in 1977 and it encapsulates many of the early concerns of the Civic Society.

Stevens Curl warned that "It is the collective effects of many vandalisms, small tragedies in themselves, that add up to the erosion of the city and the squandering of its heritage". From its earliest beginnings the Society saw it as a key element of its mission to help preserve the best of the urban environment and to ensure that new developments were suited to the needs of people, not dictated by administrative convenience or commercial greed. A committee was formed to scrutinise and comment on planning applications, with a view to preventing the loss of historic fabric and ensuring that new buildings, and additions to existing ones, were in keeping with Oxford's unique townscape. The work of the committee also fulfilled another of the Society's aims, namely to make citizens' views better known to the authorities.

The Planning Group, as it is now known, has been in existence ever since, its members meeting every two weeks in the City Council offices to examine dozens of applications and to submit advice and comments to the Council Planning Department on those which they feel require them. Over the last 50 years, many staff of that department have come and gone, but the Society's input to the planning process has been continuous and unbroken, and many feel that this has been one of its greatest contributions to the shaping of Oxford's public realm. When, in 2012, the Council stopped the public being able to examine printed versions of planning applications at its offices, the Planning Group lobbied strenuously for improvements to computer facilities there. This led ultimately to greatly improved provision, enabling greater public participation in the planning process.

The early work of the Planning Committee, under its first Secretary, Victor Berry, was helped by the Civic Amenities Act of 1967. The Act reflected a growing national interest in

The Society's Planning Committee at work in 1998; left to right: David Townsend, Chris Rayson, Kate Miller and Mark Barrington-Ward. By 2002 the group was scrutinising 90 applications a month and writing up to 125 letters of comment a year; by 2018 this had risen to over 200.

(Photo from the Society's archive)



"It's not necessarily the quantity of objections that counts, it's the quality, and the Civic Society Planning Group provides that quality."

Colin Cook, Chair of the City Council's West Area Planning Committee, 2018

conservation and the recognition that even ordinary buildings could contribute positively to the 'group value' in an area. It provided not only for the protection and improvement of buildings of architectural or historic interest, but also for the protection of the overall character of areas of such interest. The Act introduced the concept of Conservation Areas and the City Council designated the first of these, Norham Manor and Park Town, in North Oxford in 1968. Others followed swiftly, and by 1974, when the new Town and Country Amenities Act brought in provisions to further

strengthen the protection of the historic urban environment, there were Conservation Areas in Iffley Village, Old Headington, Headington Quarry, the City and University Central Area, Rawlinson Road in North Oxford and Beauchamp Lane in Cowley.

The new nationwide feeling that heritage was worth valuing was reflected in Oxfordshire by the establishment, in 1970, of the County Museum at Woodstock, followed by the opening of the Museum of Oxford in 1975. The City Council appointed its first Local History Librarian, Malcolm Graham, in 1970 and its first Conservation Officer, John Ashdown, in 1972; it was only the second city in the country, after Chester, to have such a post. Ashdown had previously worked in the Historic Buildings Division of the Greater London Council and although, on arriving in Oxford, he did not join the Civic Society for professional reasons, he was sympathetic to its aims and appreciative of its support. The Council's Senior Planning Officer at the time was Kazimierz Lichtenstein, who was also a supporter of conservation principles, and had instigated the designation of the first - North Oxford - Conservation Area. As Ashdown built a team around him, to include Conservation Officer Edith Gollnast, City Archaeologist Brian Durham and Tree Conservation Officer David Gillett, there was a mood of cautious optimism about Oxford's heritage and built environment.

This was mirrored by an increasing public interest in, and concern for, the positive contribution that even seemingly ordinary buildings and small details could make to the public realm. From the start, the Planning Committee was particularly concerned with planning applications which affected the look of streets. In the summer of 1971 members were invited by St Edmund Hall and their architect to advise on plans for the college's High Street frontage. Since then the committee has submitted a large number of comments about the design of shop fronts and the quality of fascia boards and signboard lettering. In 1983 a delegation from the Society had a meeting with the City Council's Deputy Planning Officer about the planned Clarendon shopping arcade, running from Cornmarket through to Queen Street.



Examples of what members of the Planning Committee considered to be good (left, High Street) and bad (right, Cornmarket) shopfronts. (Photos from the Society's archive)



A variety of attractive shopfronts at the southern end of the Woodstock Road, saved thanks in part to pressure from the Civic Society.

(Photo from the Society's archive)

The group pressed for a more sympathetic design, particularly on the Queen Street entranceway, and amended – and much improved – plans were submitted later that year.

When Somerville College wanted to redevelop its properties at the southern end of the Woodstock Road in 1989, the Society successfully pressed for the retention of the shopfronts there (shown above).

Attractive shopfronts are just one element of a pleasant townscape and in 1996, in anticipation of the pedestrianisation of Queen Street and Cornmarket, the Civic Society and *The Oxford Times* jointly ran a public competition to elicit ideas for the city centre of the future. Fifty-four entries came from professionals and from members of the public aged over and under 18. In the professional category, Michael Carr envisaged Cornmarket elegantly paved with a fountain as a focal point; in the public adult category James Beale converted Broad Street into a garden with trees, flower beds and plenty of seating, while David Clark brought to mind visions of the Paris Louvre with a glass pyramid. Among younger entrants, Abdul Ali and Sembene Maryi placed a café bus in the middle of Cornmarket and one young competitor indicated priorities by changing Balliol College into a McDonalds. Competition entries were displayed at the Westgate Library for two weeks and on Cornmarket on 30 June, when it was closed to vehicular traffic for the day. The displays attracted a good deal of interest and, encouragingly, traders reported increased sales. As a follow-up the City Centre Manager of Cambridge, Lydia Bowman, came to give a public lecture on 'Cambridge pedestrianisation: some ideas for Oxford'.

In 1998 Oxford's City Centre Management Working Party asked the Society to carry out an audit of city centre pavements, recording where remnants of historic pavements still existed,

8, 9 and 10 Turn Again Lane, now owned by the Oxford Preservation Trust.

(Photo courtesy of Michael Phillips)

(Merton Street paving photo courtesy of Oxford City Council)



was produced and presented to Gillespies, the design consultants for improving the city centre. This fed in to the current *Oxford City Centre Street Scene Manual*, a detailed guide to policies, processes and materials.

The Society has also had success in saving important buildings from disappearing from the townscape completely. In 1972 members joined the campaign to save from demolition 8, 9 and 10 Charles Street (now Turn Again Lane, page 33), a row of 17th-century cottages which were the last remnants of old St Ebbe's. The campaign was successful, thanks ultimately to the Oxford Preservation Trust buying the properties and establishing their head office there.



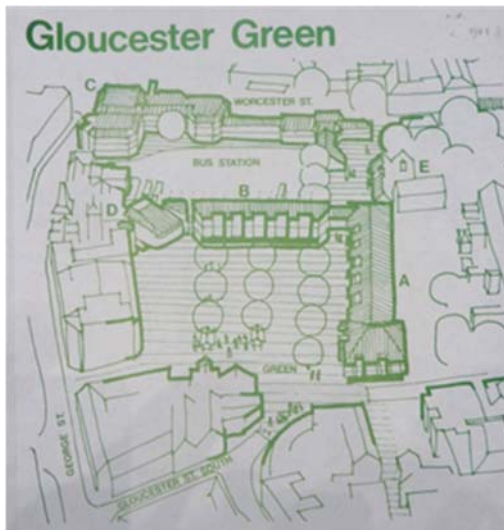
(Left) 29a Castle Street and (right) 66/67 St Giles, spot listed and hence saved from demolition thanks to the Society. (Photos from the Society's archive and Stephanie Jenkins respectively)

In 1977 the Society catalysed the spot listing of 29a Castle Street (the home of the former Liaison Chinese restaurant), a part-17th-century timber-framed building and a rare survival adjacent to the Westgate shopping centre. In 1984, with the support of the Oxford Preservation Trust and the Victorian Group of the Oxfordshire Architectural and Historical Society, the Society got 66/67 St Giles spot listed in order to save it from demolition by the University. The building features the last surviving Gothic Victorian shop front in Oxford.

In 2001 the Society mounted a campaign, led by the then Chairman Tony Joyce, to prevent the demolition of 'Riviera' at 393 Cowley Road, home and workshop of the famous Oxford photographer Henry Taunt. The Oxford Bus Company had vacated the site and sold it for redevelopment. The campaign was successful and the house now boasts a Blue Plaque to Taunt (see chapter 9 for more information on the county's Blue Plaque scheme).

While many of the applications reviewed by the Planning Group have concerned single buildings or have been for relatively small changes, extensions and infill, others have been for major schemes. The redevelopment of Gloucester Green, the site of the former cattle market, was first mooted in 1978 and by 1979 the Society had formed a special Gloucester Green Working Party to scrutinise the plans. Working with the Oxford Preservation Trust, the group opposed plans for a consortium of chain stores and parking for 400 cars on the site. It pressed instead for smaller shops around a green and landscaped square, with residential units above, representing, as Society spokesman Dick Knight said, "a combination of Piccadilly Circus and Trafalgar Square". When new proposals for Gloucester





1983 plans for the Gloucester Green site, published by the City Council.

(Image from the Society's archive)

Green were unveiled in the spring of 1982 the *Oxford Mail* noted that they looked “amazingly like the suggestions which the Oxford Civic Society put forward five years ago”.

The Society's Planning Committee went on to recommend the resiting of the former cattle market settling room – the building in which livestock deals were traditionally settled – to the middle of the square and that a public use should be found for the nearby former Boys' Central School. It also pressed for the relationship between Gloucester Green and the railway station site, also under consideration at the time, to be taken into account.

In the end a public consultation resulted in the adoption of the so-called 'romantic option' for Gloucester Green, with small shops around the edge of an open square above an underground car park, a scheme which the Society had been advocating for years. The settling room was sacrificed but the Boys' School was retained as a tourist information centre (now a restaurant) and to the Society's delight the Wednesday open market was re-located to the square from Oxpens. Built to designs by Kendrick Associates in 1987-1991, Gloucester Green's eclectic post-modern design with its Disneyland touches looks, as former Society President Mark Barrington-Ward said, rather like a stage set, but has proved popular.

Numerous other large developments, some in the city centre and some further out, pre-occupied the committee at different times. In 1996 it was announced that Oxford Prison was to close and its site, the former Oxford Castle (with 12 listed buildings including St George's Tower, a national scheduled monument) was to be opened up as a 'heritage asset'. Edwin Townsend Coles, then Chairman of the Society, was its representative on the Castle Action Group. Negotiations over the site were slow and somewhat tortuous; in 1999 the Society openly accused the land owner, the County Council, of being ready to bargain away an important part of the city's heritage by handing over a lease of the site to a commercial development company and organised a petition demanding “the return of one of Oxford's jewels to us, the people”.



Oxford Prison, now sensitively redeveloped

Photo courtesy of Oxford Castle and Prison

Eventually the Council was persuaded, by the Society and other amenity groups, to commission a conservation study. The emergence in Trevor Osborne of a developer with the vision to see how the constraints imposed by the historic buildings could be turned to advantage, the offer by the Oxford Preservation Trust to create a heritage centre in St George's Tower, and the obtaining – in the nick of time – of a major grant from the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) to help finance the project, ensured success. The castle and prison development has been widely praised as a first-class example of successful urban regeneration and has won several national awards.

Meanwhile, proposals for a so-called 'Oxpens Leisure Village', which included a casino and a bingo hall, were being brought forward. Supporting the strong objections of the St Ebbe's New Development Residents' Association (SENDRA), the Society asked John Gummer, then Secretary of State for the Environment, to call in the plans. Gummer set up a Public Inquiry and eventually, in late 1996, rejected the scheme.

2004 was a busy year, with the Society involved in preliminary discussions on the development of the West End Quarter, the redesign of Broad Street and Cornmarket, and proposals for the extension of the Westgate shopping area and for the provision of better cultural facilities within the Town Hall complex.

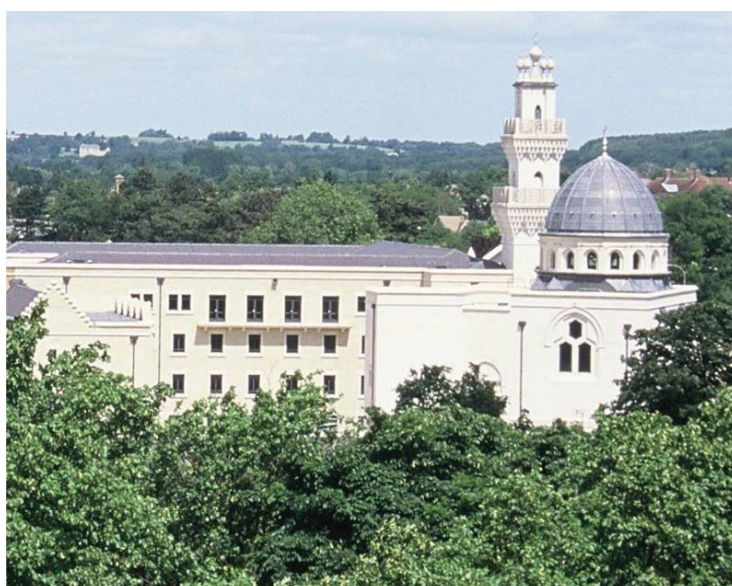
In 2007 the Society objected to the siting of an 85 metre-high wind turbine on the edge of the city, noting that "We would very much like Oxford to be a leading city in terms of modern sustainability. However, we need to take a close look at the visual impact of the application. There are places where a turbine could be sited without clashing with the cherished views." In the same year Oxford's famous skyline was also under threat from the university's proposed £29 million book depository at Osney Mead, and, in conjunction with the Oxford Preservation Trust – which had the resources to employ a barrister to argue the case – the Society objected strongly and ultimately successfully.

This was due in part to the City Council's High Buildings Policy, which had been adopted in 1964 following the University Congregation's rejection of a proposed 25-storey tower in the University Parks for the Zoology Department. The policy recognised that, surrounded by hills, Oxford is one of the few cities that can be seen as a whole from outside and also possesses a unique skyline, a precious national asset. It allowed small scale additions such as the ziggurat on the Saïd Business School and the dome and tower of the Islamic Studies Centre on Marston Road, but not great blocks or long unbroken runs of high roof: any proposed building over 18.2 metres high within a 1.2km radius of Carfax could be rejected. On the whole the policy has worked well, though in recent years it has been under threat and in 2018 the Society was closely involved in the City Council's latest review of it, part of preparing the new Oxford Local Plan.

In 2009 the Society questioned the wisdom of siting a 40 metre-high big wheel (overleaf) – a miniature version of the London Eye – on Worcester Street car park, citing the potentially negative impact on Nuffield College, the Castle Mound and the Oxford Castle site. As

The new Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, one of the few tall structures allowed in the city.

(Photo courtesy of the Centre)





How the proposed Ferris wheel might have looked.

(Photo courtesy of the Oxford Mail)

Chairman Tony Joyce said "This type of attraction can be a lot of fun, but I'm sure that there are better locations for it."

Around the same time Oxford Brookes University was bringing forward plans for major additions to its Gypsy Lane site in Headington. What had been Oxford Polytechnic had become a university in 1992 and had already expanded into the Headington Hill Hall site on London Road (freed up by the sudden death of Robert Maxwell and the collapse of his Pergamon Press) and into the nearby Government Buildings site on Marston Road.

The expansion of Brookes' footprint, together with a steady increase in the number of Headington houses in student occupation, had caused tensions between local residents and the university. These had been partly resolved by the formation of a co-ordinating committee of Headington Residents' Associations to liaise with the Brookes authorities, set up by Tony Joyce, later Chairman of the Civic Society and a Headington resident himself.

When Brookes put forward plans for a major addition to its Gypsy Lane site – the John Henry Brookes Building (*below*) – they were strongly opposed by the Society and by many others. However, Joyce did a lot of work to persuade the university to lower the height of the centre-piece library and enlarge the basement instead. This added another £1 million to the overall cost of the scheme but as Joyce said "What they are now proposing is clearly an improvement and has been designed to meet the reasons for the rejection of the previous scheme. Brookes might not have gone as far as some local residents would have liked, in order to be perfectly satisfied. But there has to be a compromise." The John Henry Brookes Building was completed in 2014 and has won several major prizes including the Royal Institute of British Architects' Building of the Year award.

In 2012 the building by Oxford University of several large blocks of flats overlooking Port Meadow (overleaf) caused enormous protest and retrospectively sparked one of Oxford's most bitter planning battles. There had been a failure to establish adequate preliminary consultation on the plans and the full implications of the submitted application were not properly appreciated. The Society, along with other organisations, admitted it had "taken its eye off the ball" and Chairman Peter Thompson described the buildings as "hideous". He went on: "The impact is more adverse than people had anticipated. [The blocks] are going to be regarded as monuments to the university's irresponsibility, standing there like a sore thumb for centuries to come." The Society later gave evidence to the investigation into what had gone so badly wrong with the planning process.

The John Henry Brookes building, completed in 2014.

(Photo courtesy of Oxford Brookes University)





The controversial flats as seen from Port Meadow. (Photo from the Society's archive)

Perhaps as a result of the Port Meadow flats debacle, even more care was now taken by everyone concerned to scrutinise major planning applications. When proposals for the Westgate shopping centre were evolving the designs were altered several times in response to comments from the public and from groups including the Civic Society. In January 2014 Peter Thompson was able to give a cautious welcome to the amendments but noted that the issue of traffic management remained a key one. Around the same time the Society was also joining other groups in warning that the size of the proposed student flats in Manor Place would ruin the tranquillity of the adjacent Holywell Cemetery, as well as blocking out light and spoiling views from an important heritage site. The Society was represented at the public enquiry which upheld the City Council's refusal of Merton College's planning application.

In 2015 the Society submitted a detailed and carefully-considered response to the design competition for Oxford railway station, an issue which had pre-occupied members of its Planning and Transport Groups for well over three decades. The following year, in collaboration with the Academy of Urbanism, the Society organised a one-day colloquium on the regeneration of the West End area (Oxpens, the station, Frideswide Square, Hythe Bridge Street and Park End Street, and Osney Mead), emphasising the point that the area should be designed as a whole rather than in separate master plans. Developers – including Nuffield College and the Saïd Business School, now key stakeholders – architects, councillors and other interested parties, showed an enthusiasm to work together and to think differently. The Society's view is that Oxford's West End could, if developed imaginatively, help to provide

"The development of the station site, Oxpens, Osney Mead ... these are all major planning matters which require the sort of serious, coherent and holistic approach that the Oxford Civic Society can provide."

Bob Price, former Leader of Oxford City Council, 2018

affordable housing, generate jobs, solve transport problems, reduce pollution and improve the quality of life for residents, workers and visitors. The Society continues to promote comprehensive planning of the area by maintaining a dialogue with stakeholders.

The Society's Planning Group continues to advocate best practice in the sustainable development and management of new and evolving buildings and spaces, while preserving the best of what has been inherited from the past. Always its aim is to encourage planners and developers to create built environments in which we and future generations will want to live and work.

6 Improving Oxford's street lighting

There is no excuse for ugliness, especially in Oxford.

James Stevens Curl, writing about street lamps in *The Erosion of Oxford*, 1977

In *The Erosion of Oxford* James Stevens Curl highlighted another cause for alarm: the destruction of old street lamps. The pleasing old design, fixed to the walls of buildings, was rapidly being replaced by “the last word in sheer ugliness”, modern lights, many shaped like ping-pong bats, on stand-alone poles which quickly became plastered with signs. Moreover, these replacement lamps were in a bewildering variety of styles: those along the middle of St Giles had no fewer than four different kinds of fittings, resulting in “virtual anarchy”.

The Society, reflecting its founder's concern, formed a working group on street lighting whose main aim was to persuade the city authorities to take aesthetic as well as economic and functional considerations into account when updating street lighting. It proved to be remarkably influential.



The scrolled lamp bracket designed by the Society's Robert Maccoun for the new replica Windsor lanterns. This example, drawn by City Conservation Officer Edith Gollnast, is on the wall of All Souls College.

(Image courtesy of Edith Gollnast)

In 1970 the group produced a booklet, *Street Lighting in Oxford*, researched and written by Thomas Braun. It advocated the retention and rehabilitation of Windsor lanterns, which were currently being taken down and sold off to the public from the City Council's depot on Nelson Street in Jericho for £7 each. As a result of Braun's study, the City Engineer's Department began to work in close consultation with the Society's working group and with John Ashdown, the newly-appointed City Conservation Officer. It was decided to use a modern replica of the old Windsor lantern in the minor roads of the city centre and in Old Headington.

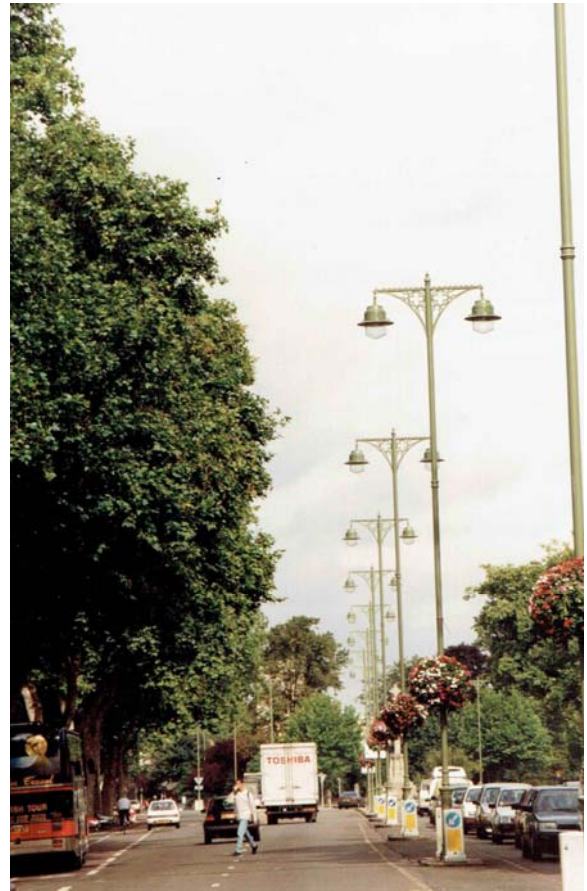
What was needed was a way of attaching these lanterns to the walls of historic buildings. A member of the group, Robert Maccoun, designed a special wrought iron wall-mounted bracket (*left*). Maccoun was an American engineer who lived on a former Oxford college barge and repaired boats for a living. He got on particularly well with Derek Parfit, the distinguished Oxford philosopher and convenor of the working group; both men cared deeply about the detail and appearance of historic

Oxford. Parfit offered to pay for prototypes of Maccoun's lamp brackets to be manufactured and they were installed on the High Street frontage of Parfit's college, All Souls, and in other nearby locations. Eventually the replica Windsor lanterns and Civic Society brackets were adopted in most of the small city streets and in Old Headington, as originally envisaged.

Parfit continued as convenor of the Society's street lighting working group for over two decades and under his leadership the group, as *The Oxford Times* put it, “soldiered on quietly for years” resulting in “a number of notable triumphs”. When city centre gas lighting was switched off in 1979, new lighting for the main roads and narrow lanes required careful consideration. Parfit worked with the lighting authorities, bringing together the opinions of a variety of concerned groups in a very positive way.

One of the biggest challenges was to find appropriate lighting for the High, sometimes described as the finest street in Europe. Thanks in no small part to Parfit and his working

group, an effective solution was found. Later, when the relighting of St Giles was under discussion, Parfit promoted designs which culminated in the elegant gothic column heads which we have today, not only in St Giles but also in the High Street, Broad Street and elsewhere.



(Left) A Windsor lantern on a Maccoun bracket in Pembroke Street. (Right) Lamp poles in St Giles with gothic column heads whose design was heavily influenced by the Society's Derek Parfit.

(Photos from the Society's archive)

7 Reducing the city's street clutter

"In a short time an enormous number of arrows, bollards, lines, stripes, lettering, lights, signs and other paraphernalia associated with traffic have appeared all over Oxford, contributing to the destruction of the visual qualities of the city."

Oxford Civic Society, *Let's LIVE in Oxford*, 1970

It was often argued that all of this 'paraphernalia' was necessary for the safety of pedestrians, but the Civic Society believed (and still believes) that in fact, as James Stevens Curl said in *The Erosion of Oxford*, there are "less hideous ways" of achieving the same goal. In Europe, for example, different textures of road surface and brick pavements were already being used to demarcate priorities at road junctions without making them ugly and messy.

It is not only the roads that are littered with markings and objects but the pavements and pedestrianised areas as well. The Society has always concerned itself with general street clutter (including traffic lights, benches, kiosks, litter bins, junction boxes, phone boxes and bus shelters); the size and number of direction and traffic signs which obscure views; posts which obstruct the pavement (including bus stop posts and posts for hanging baskets); the paucity of bike racks which leads to streets being clogged up with haphazardly-parked and abandoned cycles; and the fact that street furniture is often not maintained. As Ros Weatherall and Paul Cullen noted in their 2006 Society publication *Signage in Central Oxford*, all too often the overall impression is untidy and not worthy of a city with a worldwide reputation for beautiful buildings and a high quality of life. When English Heritage launched its *Save Our Streets* campaign in 2006 to tidy up Britain's urban environment, it used examples from Oxford in its promotional literature to illustrate many of the problems.

Street clutter not only makes streets look ugly, it also presents obstacles – even dangers – to pedestrians, particularly those with impaired sight or with buggies or wheelchairs. In 1998 Tony Joyce, newly-elected to the Society's committee, welcomed the proposed pedestrianisation of Cornmarket but reported that more than 80 objects along its length impeded the passage of pedestrians. "Architecturally undistinguished," he said, "the view is messy and restless, confirming the present unpleasantness and inefficiency for those on foot."



A rash of poles, signs, bins, boxes, bollards and bicycles clutter the corner of Turl and Market Streets.

(Photo from the Society's archive)

Examples of illegal flyposting on existing street furniture.

(Photos from the Society's archive)



Drums like this and official poster boards to combat fly posting were designed by the City Centre Management Committee with advice from the Society.

(Photo from the Society's archive)

The problem is that several different authorities and bodies are responsible for the various objects. In *Signage in Central Oxford* the Society strongly recommended implementation of the Public Realm Strategy (2000) which emphasised that “measures will need to be put in place to ensure that all stakeholders in the urban environment work together towards a common goal”. That strategy, however, applied only to central Oxford, yet the same problems occurred in Headington, Cowley, Botley and Summertown.

Despite its best efforts, the Society did not manage to prevent the introduction, in 2007, of 180 new bus shelters with illuminated advertising panels which it believed would be eyesores, cluttering up historic city streets, residential areas and main routes into the city for years to come. But in 2012 Gordon Reid, City Centre Manager, asked the Society to inspect city centre locations around the forthcoming ‘wayfinding’ information signs (see the chapter 9), in order to identify items of street furniture which were redundant or particularly unsightly. Members of the Society, working with the Oxford Pedestrians’ Association, examined 67 sites; their report identified posts, poles and bollards which could be removed and other items of street furniture which needed painting, repainting or rethinking. Happily, many of the report’s suggestions have been implemented, though, as with everything the Society tackles, on-going vigilance is required.



One of the recommendations of the Society's 2012 *Report on Clutter in Vicinity of Wayfinding Signs* was the removal of the traffic lights at the junction of Cattle Street, Holywell, Broad Street and Parks Road. This was not acted upon, but when a traffic light was put out of action by a passing lorry several years later, it was realised that the junction worked much better without them. A smooth flow of traffic and better safety for pedestrians and cyclists, could be achieved by introducing a roundabout denoted only by differently-coloured road surface materials (above), as had been advocated by James Stevens Curl 40 years earlier. The reconfiguring of the junction recently won an award from the Oxford Preservation Trust.

(Photo from the Society's archive)

8 Protecting and enhancing waterways and green spaces

"Let us have more trees, more walls, more real nature in our suburbs, and not the masses of concrete, tarmac, little boxes unrelated to their site, and all the other horrors of the contemporary scene."

James Stevens Curl, *The Erosion of Oxford*, 1977

From its earliest days the Society was aware of the importance of green spaces in making the city a pleasant and healthy place to live, work in and visit. This even includes privately-owned but visible spaces like the front gardens of houses, and in 1995, alarmed at the disappearance of these, the Society pressed the City Council to refuse to allow the wholesale paving of front gardens for car parking. At the instigation of the Society's Planning Committee the Council produced a design guide which advises householders to retain as many features as possible (including greenery) and to use attractive paving materials rather than concrete or tarmac.

Oxford is particularly well-endowed with publicly-accessible green spaces, including Port Meadow, Christ Church Meadow and the University Parks, as well as the banks of our canal, rivers and streams. In 1974, concerned that these precious linear routes through the urban area were becoming degraded, members of the Society and the Oxford Preservation Trust formed a joint working party called the Oxford Waterways Action Group.

The group carried out an inspection of Oxford's waterways, noting features that were especially attractive and those that detracted from the beauty and potential enjoyment of the banks. The resulting report, *Oxford's Waterways*, also looked at how accessible the banks were to locals and visitors, and what plants and other wildlife were supported. It recommended further study into architectural features worth preserving and enhancing; dredging and flow; and pollution; and an official policy statement to act as a blue-print to successive councils, as had recently been produced in Cambridge. When the Oxford City Canal Partnership was formed in 2010, the Society was one of the inaugural members. Reflecting the Society's concerns, the partnership's aim has been to promote a vision for the canal as an environmental resource, a focus for the community and a contributor to the economic life of



The Binsey poplars on Port Meadow, paid for by the Civic Society, (left) drawn by Edith Gollnast and (right) photographed on a sunny day.

(Drawing courtesy of Edith Gollnast; photograph from the Society's archive)

the city. Through it the Society has contributed ideas for the future of the Jericho boatyard and the former canal basin.

The Society took practical action to enhance the river bank at Port Meadow when, in 1985, representatives met David Steele, the City Countryside Officer, to discuss the findings of a recent report by Society member Pamela Schiele into the worrying decay of the Binsey poplars. The lopping down of these trees' predecessors had been made famous by Gerard Manley Hopkins' poem of 1879 of the same name. It was agreed that the remaining healthy trees should be retained and a new line of 20 rare native black poplars, paid for by the Society, were planted. Nine years later the Society planted six more black poplars near Binsey in celebration of its 25th anniversary and has continued this replacement planting programme.



For National Tree Week in 1977 the Society planted two plane trees on St Giles. Other schemes to enhance public green spaces were to follow: in 1980, 14 members of the Society planted hundreds of aconites, snowdrops and wild type daffodils in the churchyard of St Mary Magdalen. Debenhams, whose shop is opposite the church, contributed towards the cost of the bulbs.

(Photo from the Society's archive)

9 Helping people to enjoy and appreciate Oxford's heritage

"The more people know about Oxford's history, the more they are likely to want to protect it."

Vernon Porter, Secretary of Oxford Civic Society, 2018

Enabling people to discover and enjoy the historical and architectural delights of Oxford, as well as current and future plans for its development, have always been significant aspects of the Society's work. In the 1980s the Society collaborated with the Oxford Preservation Trust to organise a series of events for Environment Week, an initiative of the national Civic Trust (the predecessor of Civic Voice), to which the Society is affiliated. In 1985 free attractions included the opportunity to trace the route of the city walls and to clamber up the (otherwise inaccessible) Castle Mound, to follow a city centre church trail, go on guided tours of Port Meadow and Shotover Country Park, attend an open day at the Town Hall (which included recitals on the newly-restored Father Willis organ), take part in a photographic competition on *Images of Oxford (beautiful and horrific)*, and comment on an outdoor display of photographs showing recent shopfronts. Further entertainments were available in 1986 as shown by this poster (below).

OXFORD CIVIC SOCIETY

ENVIRONMENT WEEK

ALL WEEK The Castle Mound, open to the public from 12 noon to 2 p.m.

SATURDAY MAY 3rd A visit to the Examination Schools and University College Chapel. 10.30 – 12.30.

SUNDAY MAY 4th Wytham Woods Walk. Meeting at White Hart, Wytham at 2.15.

WEDNESDAY MAY 7th The Old County Hall, Old Court and Council Chamber, New Road. 10.30 – 12.30. Open to public.

THURSDAY MAY 8th Tour of Nuffield College 1.30 – 2.15.
"In The Footsteps of Alice." 2.30. A walk and talk with Mavis Batey. Meet at Tom Tower, Christchurch College.
2.30 p.m.

FRIDAY MAY 9th Old County Hall, Court and Council Chamber open 10.30 – 12.30.

SATURDAY MAY 10th Oxford in the Civil War. Talk, videos, tea. 2.30. Dragon School Bardwell Road.

Do Join U.S. * *

A 2005 flyer shows the range of the Society's events programme.

OXFORD CIVIC SOCIETY
REGISTERED WITH THE CIVIC TRUST

PROGRAMME
November 2005 – March 2006

29 November Tuesday 8 pm Eric Sidebottom on the *History of the Oxford Pathology Department, with particular reference to its role in the development of penicillin therapy.* Coffee 7.30. Magdalen College Auditorium (Longwall Street)

7 January Visits to Wadham College. C.S.L. Davies, College Archivist, on *The History and Buildings of Wadham College*, followed by tour of the College and tea in Hall. Tickets £5.50. Bookings by 8 December.

14 January Saturdays 2 pm

8 January *Mosque to Mosque – east side walks with*
15 January John Ashdown. See Programme Notes.
Sundays, 9.30 Tickets £3. Bookings by 8 December.

16, 23, 30 Jan. Mondays 6 pm Visits to Malmaison Hotel in the former prison buildings. See Programme Notes. Tickets £5.50. Bookings by 8 December.

8 February Wednesday 8 pm *The Sustainable City – Myth or Reality?* – talk by Mike Jenks, Professor Emeritus, Oxford Brookes University. See Programme Notes.
Coffee 7.30 St Anne's College, Woodstock Road

7, 8, 9, 10, 16, 17 February Further visits to Oxford Mail, Osney Mead, with John Chipperfield. See Programme Notes. Tickets £3. Bookings by 5 January.

4 March Saturday 2.15 pm 2.15 pm – *A View from the County Council* – opportunity to meet Joanna Simons, Chief Executive, Oxfordshire County Council.
3.15 pm – **Annual General Meeting** followed by home made tea – £3 on day.
St Aldates Parish Centre, 40 Pembroke Street

20 March Monday 8 pm *A Separate Town? The Development of Victorian East Oxford* – illustrated talk by Malcolm Graham, Head of Oxfordshire Studies, Oxfordshire County Council.
Coffee 7.30 Oxford Community School, Glanville Road

25 March Saturday 2.30 pm Visit to Oriel College. Talk on history and architecture by John Whitehead, followed by tour and tea. Tickets £5.50. Bookings by 5 January.

*All welcome at speaker meetings - non-members £3 admission
Programme information - Sheila Glazebrook, 01865-310488*

These events were the precursor to the now hugely popular annual *Oxford Open Doors*, run by the Oxford Preservation Trust as part of the national Heritage Open Days scheme since 2007.

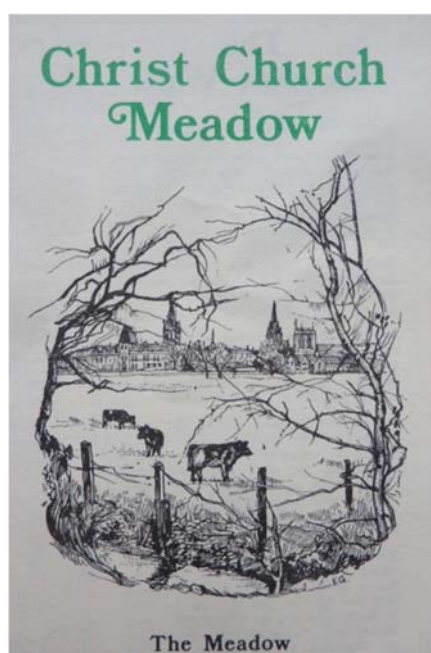
From soon after its inauguration the Society organised regular programmes of talks, walks and visits for members aimed at informing, entertaining and gaining special access to some of Oxford's many 'secret places' not normally open to the public.

The programme has always included a broad and eclectic range of events, which act as a benefit to existing members as well as a way of encouraging new people to join. Walks led by John Ashdown, City Conservation Officer, were particularly popular. As he later recalled: "Back in the 1970s, 'critical and convivial' walks were initiated by James Stevens Curl and developed by Victor Berry and Penelope Jessel; at some point I was organised into contributing. My work gave me access to the right people and a knowledge of change in the city. Pamela Schiele and then Sheila Glazebrook and I thus programmed many walks in the city centre and, after my retirement, the urban fringes and countryside. Now younger members have expertly taken over the task of leading memorable and informative walks".



Civic Society members enjoying guided walks (left) between Osney Lock and Folly Bridge in 1973 (with members of the Oxford Fieldpaths Society); and (right) to Lye Valley nature reserve in 2018.

(Photos (left) from the Society's archive and (right) courtesy of Marilyn Cox)



In 1981 the Society produced a guide (left; price 10p) to Christ Church Meadow, aimed at interpreting familiar surroundings in terms of national heritage. It was made possible by a grant from the joint Civic Trust / Carnegie UK Trust Heritage Interpretation Programme and a donation from the English Tourist Board, and included two walks, illustrated by City Conservation Officer Edith Gollnast.

Encouraging the City and County Councils to make it easier to get around Oxford on foot has been a key element of much of the Society's planning and traffic management work and in 2011 the Society's new *Streets for People* group launched *On Foot in Oxford*, a joint initiative with the Oxford Pedestrians Association and Ramblers Oxford.

The group's first task was to collate details of all published



The Walks in Oxford website brings together details of over 70 walks in or near the city.

See www.oxfordwalks.org.uk

walks and launch a new website *Walks in Oxford* (above) which has dozens of walks covering all aspects of the history, culture, geography and nature of the city.

Next the Society contributed towards *Oxford Explore*, a new wayfinding system of 70 signs and interactive interpretation panels for pedestrians, launched in 2012. This was a joint project between the City and County Councils with extensive input from the Civic Society, the Oxford Preservation Trust, Visit Oxfordshire and local historians. The Society successfully pressed for the inclusion of QR codes so that the panels would act as gateways to considerably more information. Richard Bradley, Coordinator of the Society's Streets for People group, said: "The signs offer a wealth of information about the local area, bringing our most fasci-

nating stories and colourful inhabitants to life. I would encourage residents as well as visitors to follow the Oxford Explore trail and re-discover their city anew."

An excellent source of information about Oxford's history from its earliest beginnings is the Museum of Oxford, first opened in 1975 in the former public library in the Town Hall. It successfully fought off closure in the late 1990s but its future was again threatened in 2009 when the financial crisis forced the City Council to review its forthcoming budgets and propose withdrawal of financial support for the museum.

The Society, led by the then Chairman Tony Joyce, rallied to save this precious resource. The Society held an emergency meeting to alert members to the possibility of closure and, with the aid of the *Oxford Mail* and some sympathetic City Councillors, mounted a campaign for the museum's retention and

The 'Oxford Explore' interactive wayfinding system, via which smartphone users can listen to personal accounts of city life, watch archive film, find examples of Oxford art and extracts from Oxford literature, see vintage views with postcards and pictures, and read accounts of local history, legend and cultural oddities.

(Photos courtesy of www.hotrodcreations.com)



modernisation. A successful Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) bid allowed the opening of a smaller version of the museum in the main Town Hall in 2012, now attracting 75,000 visitors a year, staffed by a corps of around 100 volunteers (quite a few of them Civic Society members) and supported by a growing Friends group. Another HLF grant gained in 2018 has now allowed a major £3.2 million redevelopment programme to go ahead, and a considerably expanded museum is due to open in summer 2020.

A very visible reminder of the whole county's history is the series of biographical plaques erected on buildings by the Oxfordshire Blue Plaques Board. The scheme was established in 1999 by Hugo Brunner, a Society member (later its President) and then Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire. It is supported by the Society. The first plaque was to marmalade maker Sarah Cooper, at 83 High Street and the second was to social reformer Felicia Skene, at 34 St Michael's Street. Since then over 100 plaques have been installed, all over the county, celebrating an enormous range of Oxfordshire people and their achievements and, as the scheme's strapline says, "bringing Oxfordshire's past into the present".



Oxfordshire Blue Plaques to (left) Sarah Cooper at 83 High Street, Oxford, erected in 2001, and (right) the first use of penicillin, unveiled in 2018.

(Images (left) courtesy of Stephanie Jenkins and (right) of the Blue Plaques Board)

10 Encouraging community cohesion

Like most cities, Oxford has expanded hugely over the last five decades and its population has become increasingly diverse and multi-national. The proportion of students has increased as both universities have grown and traditional communities have, inevitably, become fragmented, particularly as rocketing house prices alter the character and make up of local neighbourhoods. As highlighted by the Oxfordshire Community Foundation's 2016 report *Oxfordshire Uncovered*, social problems such as lack of community cohesion, homelessness and loneliness are becoming more pressing.

Helping people to feel part of, and hence to cherish, Oxford, has always been one of the Society's aims, as exemplified by its second (1971) publication, *Summertown: Towards an Integrated Community*. In the early 2000s, the Life Begins at 20 campaign (also known as 20's Plenty) was launched as a joint initiative by the Civic Society (with member Paul Cullen taking the lead), the Oxford Pedestrians Association and the cycling group Cyclox. All three groups agreed that streets needed to be thought of as ways to connect people, not simply as somewhere to drive or to park the car. They argued that slowing traffic down to lower speeds gives people the chance to cross the road more easily, to hold conversations over the noise of traffic and to enjoy a safer environment, and hence giving a sense of who the road is primarily for. As a result of their campaign Oxford became only the second city (after Portsmouth) to implement 20mph speed limits on all residential streets. Since then over 60 other towns and cities, including London, have adopted the measure.



(Photo courtesy of the Oxford Mail)



The theme of encouraging and supporting community cohesion was taken up again with the formation of the Society's Streets for People project in 2009. The overall aim of the initiative was to make Oxford's streets friendlier, more pleasant and safer, bearing in mind that they are not only spaces for travelling along (whether by foot, cycle, bus or car), but also for playing in and for interacting with neighbours. The project team lobbied the City and County Councils to

make improvements to the street scene, took over responsibility for the Society's efforts to reduce street clutter (see chapter 7), ran the Oxford on Foot project (see chapter 9), and supported Playing Out, an information and advice charity which aims to promote and encourage a return to street play through resident-led, safe direct action.

One of the main activities of the Streets for People project was to encourage residents to get to know their neighbours by holding traditional street parties, and to persuade the City Council to simplify road closure procedures to facilitate this. As project co-ordinator Richard Bradley said, "We wanted to help bring communities together and help bridge the gap between the generations. It's really important because these days people don't know their neighbours like they did 30 or 40 years ago".

"Last year's event was great fun. If you close the street it becomes a bit like a piazza and it creates a real focal point for the community."

Patrick Coulter, Highfield Residents' Association member and street party organiser, 2010



Street parties bring neighbours together and allow children to play safely in the street. This one was in Headington Quarry in 2010.

(Photo from the Society's archive, courtesy of Hilary Bradley)

In 2010 *Streets for People* helped to arrange 54 street parties and festivals, with a combined attendance of about 4,000. In 2012 there were 85 parties.

The Streets for People campaign and OxClean (see below), won national recognition from Civic Voice (which represents nearly 300 civic societies in England) in 2011. The Oxford Civic Society was 'Highly Commended' for making an 'outstanding contribution to the civic movement' through these two campaigns and by working with local councils, schools and other partners to build new support for its activities.



Streets for People's aim of making streets more pleasant and convivial has gone hand-in-hand with another major Society initiative, OxClean, which was launched in 2007. It aims to get local community groups, residents' associations, schools and businesses to collect all the litter in an area of their own choice.

The Society had long been concerned about discarded rubbish and had been pressing the City Council to take more action on litter since at least the early 1980s. When the *Litter Blitz* campaign, organised jointly by the County and City Councils, was held in March 1985, 20 members sporting Civic Society tabards took a prominent role in areas across the city.

Members of the local Nepalese community joined the Rose Hill Residents Association and Rose Hill and Iffley Low Carbon Group to clean up Rose Hill. They even made a video about how the OxClean project had brought them together for a common purpose.

(Photo from the Society's archive)



OxClean was the brainchild of Rosanne Bostock, who brought the idea back from her travels in Australia. She spoke to the then Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire, Sir Hugo Brunner, who was the newly-elected President of the Society. He persuaded her to join the Society, where she formed a committee and launched Ox-Clean; it has been supported and largely funded by the Society ever since, with vital publicity from *The Oxford Times* and *Oxford Mail*.

In 2012 Rosanne Bostock was honoured by Oxford's Lord Mayor for her "invaluable and inspiring commitment as a volunteer to the Civic Society, particularly for the Ox-Clean Spring Clean". Four years later she was presented with the Oxfordshire Volunteer of the Year Award for her tireless anti-litter campaigning (above). At the same time OxClean was given national recognition when organisers were asked to advise on the setting up of the 'Clean for the Queen' initiative to mark the Queen's 90th birthday in 2016.



Rosanne Bostock in 2016 collecting her Oxfordshire Volunteer of the Year award.

(Photo from the Society's archive)

"OxClean is a great feather in the cap of the Civic Society."

Ann Spokes Symonds, former Lord Mayor of Oxford and Chairman of Oxfordshire County Council, 2018

The objectives of OxClean are not just to keep Oxford clean and tidy all year round, but also to build civic pride, improve local environmental quality, and promote lasting and sustainable changes to current practice and behaviour. This it achieves by successfully lobbying the City Council and other organisations to improve facilities and services, and by increasing litter awareness and personal responsibility.

For example, OxClean volunteers visit schools to speak to pupils, explaining the importance of keeping their surroundings free from litter. 'Spotless Oxford' encourages shops and other businesses to clean up their frontages on a regular basis.

The reach of the OxClean project, and the level of involvement, have been hugely impressive. Over the annual 'Spring Clean' weekend in March 2019, over 1,000 volunteers from 95 groups (including 20 schools) filled thousands of rubbish bags, removing tonnes of litter plus a lot of flytip from local streets, public spaces and 'grotspots'.



The Society was a sponsor of the Ashmolean Museum's One World Festival in November 2017. The Festival celebrated in music, song, dance and prayer the multiple faiths and communities that make Oxford such a diverse and colourful city.

(Photo courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum)

11 Oxford Civic Society and the next 50 years

By Sir Clive Booth, President and Ian Green, Chairman

The Civic Society's 50th anniversary has presented a great opportunity to look back on our many and varied achievements since our founding in 1969, and to think collectively about our aspirations for the future.

There is no doubt that over the last 50 years the issues on which the Society has campaigned, and the activities which we have engaged in, have changed. As an entirely voluntary body, we can only reflect the passions of individual members and those members' ability to inspire collective enthusiasm. This is a strength, since passion is a powerful motivator, but it is also a weakness, in that there are inevitably issues which we neglect through inadequacy of human (and other) resources.

We would all like to increase and diversify our membership, both in terms of individuals and organisations, as we see this as key to strengthening our voice, improving dialogue and boosting public participation in the making of decisions which affect us all. Our new Student Ambassadors scheme, in partnership with Oxford Brookes University, will see students promoting the values of the Society to their peers while taking up opportunities to meet local politicians and other influential people and to see at first-hand how policies are developed and decisions are made. The City Council now sees the Society as an effective partner in public consultation and in the coming years we want to try to work even more with councillors to help them engage with their constituents on planning and other issues.

Getting the balance right between people's need for housing and the preservation of the Green Belt is going to be a major issue in the next few years and a highly contentious one. We believe that there could be more dense development in the city centre but also that Green Belt policies must be re-assessed. In our view, ideas such as workplace parking schemes, congestion charging and gondola lifts need to be seriously considered – and

A relocated railway station at Oxpens? The Society's view

Oxford's railway station will be rebuilt at some time in the future to accommodate extra rail traffic. This presents a once in a century opportunity to effect useful change.

The Society has argued long and hard for consideration of relocation of the station to Oxpens where it could form the focus of a new integrated transport hub. The County Council considered it in 2004. Although the Oxpens solution has many advantages over the reconstruction of the station at the now cramped existing site, the Oxpens option was dropped because of additional signalling replacement costs.

In 2013 and with new-found national commitment to rail investment, Network Rail had approval to complete reconstruction, electrification and re-signalling of the whole Oxford rail network. What killed the 2004 Oxpens proposal thus ceased to be relevant.

Even though the earlier constraint was removed, additional ex-railway land had become available. When the extension of the Westgate Centre to the west towards Oxpens was approved, the Oxpens solution was never again seriously reconsidered. Masterplans for the station were developed which, in the Society's view, served to highlight the constraints of the existing site.

The Oxpens site is now less suitable for the station as planning permission has been granted for student accommodation in a critical location. Even so the Society has not given up on this key development planning issue.

sooner rather than later – if we are going to improve traffic congestion and reduce pollution. We welcome the 2018 Gilligan Report which recommends £150 million be spent on major improvements to encourage cycling into and around the city, but we will need to keep up the pressure on the City and County Councils to ensure that these are implemented. We will continue to argue for moving the railway station to Oxpens (see previous page), as part of an integrated transport hub, and for greatly improved rail connectivity within and around Oxford.

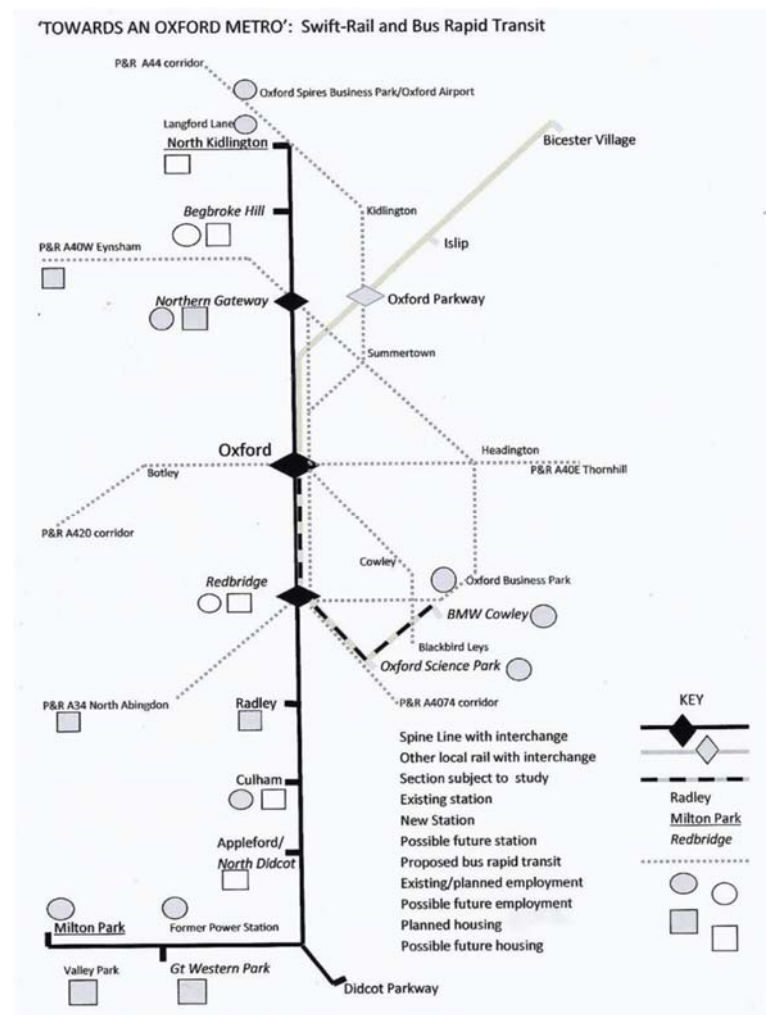
An Oxford Metro system is an example of the ideas that the Society has been developing for rail connectivity. Demand for travel in the city-region will increase and past solutions of more and bigger roads are unacceptable – people are going to have to get out of their cars. But the bus services are at near-saturation at peak times and buses are damaging to the city's historic environment.

Chiltern Railways' connection into Oxford Central Station demonstrates the potential for an Oxford Metro. The journey from Bicester to Oxford city centre on the new service takes only around 14 minutes, for a return fare of as little as £3.10. A demonstration train to Cowley on the old branch line ran in 2014 – two temporary stations were built and the feasibility of a service from Cowley to the city centre was obvious. But a north-south 'Spine Line', running in the existing rail corridor from North Kidlington to Milton Park, also offers huge potential.

Building an Oxford Metro means recognising that public transport is the 'skeleton' on which all development should be planned. The outlook for integrated strategic planning is more positive than it has ever been, so we are getting there.

The biggest argument against such a system is cost. But with the enormous increase in land values when agricultural sites are scheduled for development, there should be hundreds of millions of pounds which could be tapped. Currently this land-value uplift simply benefits the landowner, but this may change soon.

Over the last 50 years many local politicians and council professionals have come and gone, but the Civic Society has been a constant and steady presence, with a long-term view of the county's future, informed by our own long-standing experience of its past. Oxford is an exciting place in which to live and work: our internationally-renowned scientists are at the forefront of developing new technologies like



How an Oxford Metro system might connect key locations in the region. A public transport system such as this is critical to halting the rise in car-borne traffic and reducing the levels of air pollution in our region.

driverless cars, and the City Council has an ambitious plan to introduce the world's first zero-emissions zone by 2020. As former Chairman Peter Thompson said in 2017:

"Oxford and its region could be even more wonderful if we get things right. It could be a dynamic place, with a unique historic core and setting, surrounded by centres of world-class business and research, housed in dramatic, zero-energy buildings, with fulfilled and productive people enjoying creative lifestyles, and living in attractive, efficient homes in strong local communities. Cloud cuckoo land? We already have the knowledge and the technology ... what we still need is the collective will. Oxford is very much a city of the future. **We cannot walk backwards gazing with nostalgia at the past. We should be striding forward, with frequent glances over the shoulder.**"

We intend, over the next 50 years, to do just that.



Diamond Light Source at Harwell is the national synchrotron, a giant 'microscope' so powerful it can reveal the secrets of everything from fossils to jet-engines to viruses. It is the kind of science-led industry that our city-region is renowned for. New development such as this needs a coordinated approach from all of our councils working jointly towards a plan that integrates employment, housing and transport infrastructure. The Society is playing a role in that planning.

(Photo courtesy of Diamond Light Source)

Appendices

Membership of the Society

Currently (April 2019) the Society has 758 individual members and 39 corporate and affiliated members.

Corporate members

All Souls College	MICA Architects Ltd (2017), formerly Rick Mather Architects (2007)
Archetype Design	Mogford Ltd (2009)
Architects Design Partnership (2010)	New College (2012)
Beard Construction (2019)	Oxford Brookes University (2008)
Carter Jonas (2017) formerly Kemp & Kemp (2013)	Oxford Bus Co (1996)
Christ Church College (2014)	Purcell UK (2015)
Finders Keepers (2012)	ROX (2010)
Freeths LLP	Savills (L&P) Ltd (2011)
Hoare Lea (2012)	Stagecoach in Oxfordshire (2010)
Kingerlee Ltd (2009)	St Anne's College (1996)
Lincoln College (2008)	St John's College (2002)
Low Carbon Hub (2014)	Summer Fields School (1999)
Lowe & Oliver Ltd (2009)	Symm Group (2008)
	Wadham College (2010)

Affiliated members

Friends of Old Headington	Norham Manor Residents' Association
Friends of Quarry	Osney Island Residents' Association
Friends of Turrill Sculpture Garden	Oxford Guild of Guides
Highfield Residents' Association	Oxford Pedestrians Association
Iffley Fields Residents' Association	St Ebbe's New Development Residents' Association
Jack Straws Lane Association	St Margarets Area Residents' Association

The Society's constitution

Oxford Civic Society is a registered charity (no. 1116739) established for the public benefit for the following purposes in the area comprising the City of Oxford and its surroundings:

- to promote the conservation, protection and improvement of the built and natural environment and infrastructure, public or private;
- to encourage high standards in the management and development of the built and natural environment and infrastructure, in particular but not exclusively by promoting sustainable development and the prudent use of resources;
- to foster civic pride and stimulate and educate the public, in particular but not exclusively by promoting understanding and appreciation of the beauty, history, geography and character of different localities;
- to encourage individuals and communities to understand, appreciate, conserve, protect and improve the quality, beauty, history, geography and character of their locality; and
- to support and promote actions and initiatives which encourage the growth and development of a strong and active community within the City of Oxford and its surroundings, and encourage individuals to play an active part.

Aims and values (revised in 2018)

Aims

- To influence the development of Oxford as a city where people enjoy living, working and visiting;
- To inform its members – and others – about Oxford; its key qualities and characteristics, as well as its problems, with constructive, soundly-based proposals for its further improvement;
- To co-operate with Oxford's residents' associations and civic societies nationally to develop community-led solutions to shared problems; and
- To learn from other cities, in both the UK and abroad, where creative strategies might be helpfully applied in Oxford.

Values

- Valuing and enjoying our existence as a voluntary membership-led organisation;
- Taking pleasure in working with and through members' interests and commitment to urban improvement;
- Sustainability – in the design, construction and maintenance of buildings, in transport developments and in energy and natural resource conservation; and
- Providing independent and informed policies and proposals.

Chairmen and Presidents

Chairmen

1969 – 1973	James Stevens Curl
1973 – 1974	Clive Wood
1974 – 1988	Penelope Jessel
1988 – 1989	Ronald Blease
1989 – 1991	Ralph Davis
1991 – 1993	Peter Glazebrook
1993 – 2000	Edwin Townsend Coles
2000 – 2010	Tony Joyce
2010 – 2017	Peter Thompson
2017 – present	Ian Green

Presidents

1992 – 1996	Dame Penelope Jessel (first holder of post)
1997 – 2000	Sir Stephen Tumin
2000 – 2004	Anthony Smith
2004 – 2010	Mark Barrington - Ward
2010 – 2017	Sir Hugo Brunner
2017 – present	Sir Clive Booth

Groups that the Society is affiliated to, works closely with, or on whose committees the Society is represented

Civic Voice

Coalition for Healthy Streets and Active Travel

Cyclox

Headington Action

Oxford City Canal Partnership

Oxford City Council Planning Development User Group

Oxford City West End Steering Group

Oxford Museum Development Trust

Oxford Pedestrians Association

Oxford Strategic Partnership

Oxfordshire Blue Plaques Board



*Another of the Society's greetings cards,
based on an image by Rachel Harrison*

Sources

Interviews by Liz Woolley, May, June and July 2018

The Society and the author would like to thank the following people who gave interviews.

- John Ashdown, former Oxford City Conservation Officer
- Mark Barrington-Ward, former editor of the *Oxford Mail* and former President of the Society
- Jane Bigos, daughter of Gerard and Helen Turner, co-founders of the Society
- Juliet Blackburn, co-convenor of the Society's Transport Group
- Sir Clive Booth, President of the Society
- Rosanne Bostock, organiser of OxClean
- Sir Hugo Brunner, former President of the Society
- Colin Cook, Lord Mayor of Oxford 2018/19
- Debbie Dance, Secretary of the Oxford Preservation Trust
- Sheila Glazebrook, former Secretary, Membership Secretary and Programme Secretary of the Society
- Peter Glazebrook, former Chairman of the Society
- Malcolm Graham, former Head of Oxfordshire Studies
- Ian Green, Chairman of the Society
- Liz Grosvenor, Membership Secretary of the Society
- Tony Joyce, former Chairman of the Society
- Vernon Porter, Secretary of the Society
- Bob Price, former Leader of Oxford City Council
- Andrew Pritchard, co-convenor of the Society's Transport Group
- Fran Ryan, member of the Society and Secretary of the Oxfordshire Community Land Trust
- Ann Spokes Symonds, former Lord Mayor of Oxford and former Chairman of Oxfordshire County Council
- James Stevens Curl, co-founder of the Society
- Peter Thompson, former Chairman of the Society and convenor of its Housing Group

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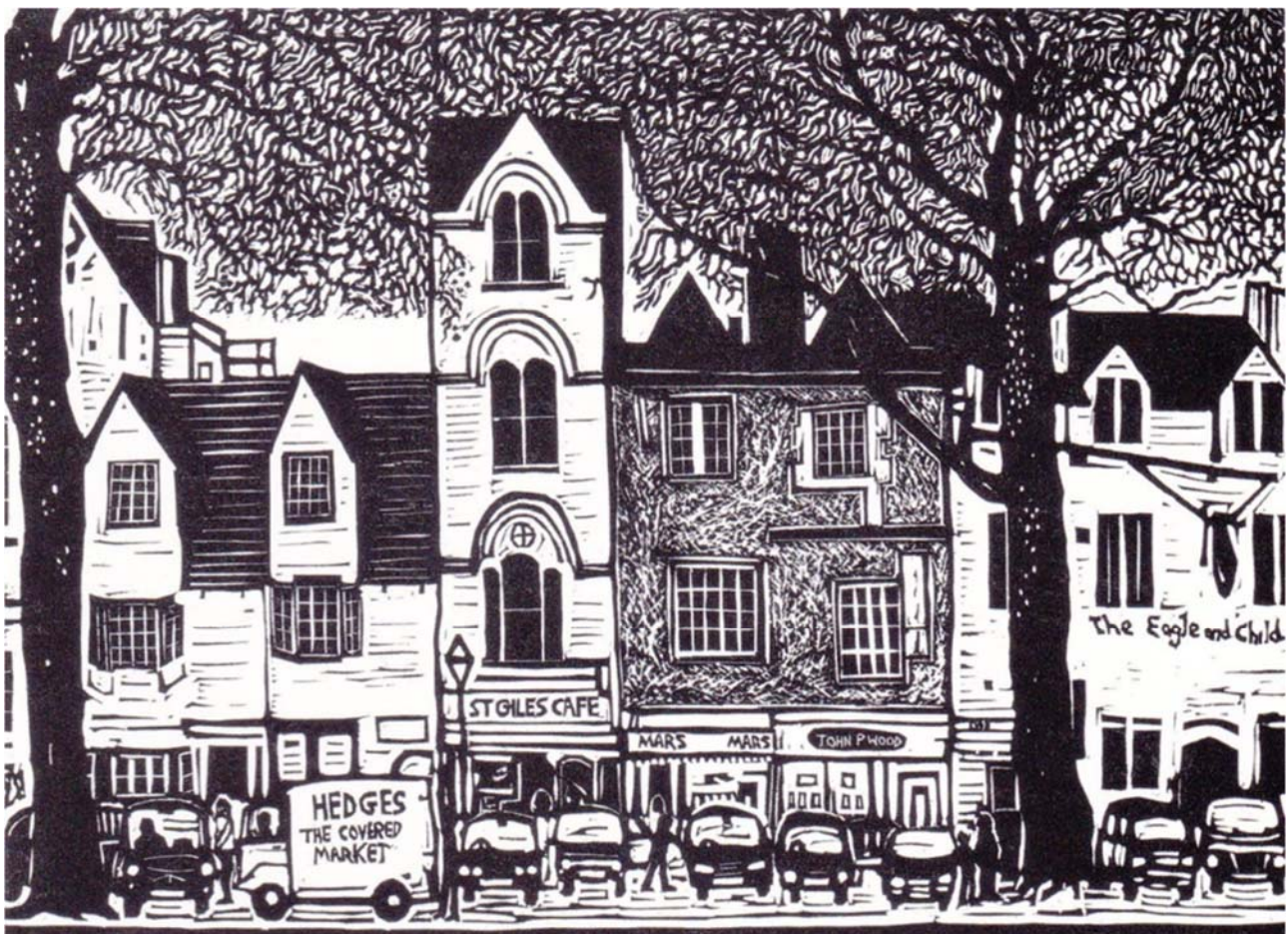
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'Looking across St Giles' by Ben Pritchard, one of the greetings cards produced and sold by the Society.

(Image courtesy of Liz Grosvenor.)

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Courtesy of Peter Thompson, former Chairman

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A welcome to new members

Oxford Civic Society is for people who care about Oxford, want to enjoy it more fully and help shape its future.

Join via our website www.oxcivicsoc.org.uk or contact:

Liz Grosvenor, Membership Secretary

membership@oxcivicsoc.org.uk, phone 07505 756 692