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Spring Clean 2012

Book the date in your diary!

Friday 2 March and Saturday 3 March

Look out for details on our website and in the local press in the early New Year

Annual General Meeting

Thursday 15 March at 7pm

Please make a note of the date.

See speaker details on page 11 and elections/ agenda items on page 12



The Society was recently honoured with an award from Civic Voice and the Marsh Christian Trust. Peter Thompson (left) is shown receiving the award from Tony Burton. Full story on page 5.

A framework for a free-for-all?

By Peter Thompson, Chairman

The Government's proposals to transform the **national planning policy framework** (published in July) represent the biggest-ever change to our planning system. The aim is to simplify the planning system and promote economic growth by making it easier for businesses and housing developers to obtain planning permissions. The proposals heralded blasts of criticism from such as the National Trust and the Council for the Protection of Rural England, who warned of the desecration of the countryside in a wave of uncontrolled development. Ministers accused their critics of nimbyism and hysteria, while the debate in the media seems to be characterised more by heat than by enlightenment. We discuss the issues at greater length on page 3 and our full response to the consultation can be viewed on the website - www.oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk/mpc.html

Developing sites in Oxford

At local level, the City Council has recently been consulting on proposals for establishing policies and standards for **residential developments**, and for designating the type of **land use**. This designation is not the green light for development – it merely establishes what use is considered most appropriate for the identified site.

Perhaps the most controversial of the proposals are those relating to the Council-owned **car parks** at Headington, Summertown and St Clements. There is widespread concern that closure of these car parks would jeopardise the commercial interests in the vicinity. On the other hand, it seems implausible that these valuable sites should be preserved indefinitely for surface-level parking, particularly in view of escalating fuel costs and policies aimed at reducing car dependency. This dilemma demonstrates the inevitable compromises necessary in determining policies which reflect the best interests of the city as a whole. At the time of writing, proposals for some dense but undistinguished student housing on the St Clements site have just been refused and we await developments.

Libraries - saved or still vulnerable?

The County Council never did organise the consultation workshops advertised in their initial announcements and the consultation ended on 30 September. We duly submitted a response, which can be viewed on our website (www.oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk/library%20closures/libraries250511.html). In essence, we are delighted that all

the libraries will continue to operate but are disappointed that the Council seems reluctant to explore more widely the opportunities we believe to be available. We are also concerned that, despite the proposed reliance on **volunteers** to run 21 of the 43 libraries, the Council has provided no details on how it intends recruiting and managing this indispensable workforce. We shall watch developments with interest.

What's wrong with our high streets?

There is widespread concern about the nation's high streets – a high percentage of empty retail units, 'clone towns' devoid of individuality, a lack of vibrancy. The Government has commissioned **Mary Portas** to review matters. It has to be said that none of the descriptions rings true for Oxford where we are fortunate in having a lively, varied shopping centre – though that is not to say we should be complacent. We regret the reluctance of national retailers to depart from a 'house style' and to provide shopfronts more sympathetic to the buildings they occupy, many of them historic or at least quite distinguished. This is a theme we are addressing through our Shopfront Awards (of which more next year).

Another issue is the proliferation of small branches of the **national supermarkets**, to the detriment of independent stores. There seems to be a popular view that 'they' should do something about it and stop this happening. In reality, there is little the City Council can do to determine the identity of a particular retailer. Planning restrictions can prevent, say, food retailing, but cannot exclude any specific organisation, and developers are at liberty to negotiate tenancies with whomsoever they prefer. In the final analysis, the success of all retailers, national or local, is in the hands of customers.

Our response to the Portas review can be seen on the website www.oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk/mpc.html

Peter Thompson, Chairman



Energy Seminar participants in discussion about reducing our carbon footprint – see next column

Managing our energy

Almost 60 people attended our Energy Seminar, held at St Hilda's College on 24 September, including members, Oxford City councillors and members of several 'low carbon' groups from Oxford.

Dr Brenda Boardman, Emeritus Fellow of the Environmental Change Institute at Oxford University, started with some sobering statistics on the energy situation in the UK. She emphasised the need for everyone to reduce their energy usage so that the ambitious national targets for greenhouse gas reductions can be achieved. Whether to mitigate the risks of disastrous climate change, or to safeguard our energy supplies and keep them affordable, it is inescapable that the next decades are going to need massive behavioural change, as well as wholesale adaptation of all our building stock.

Bruce Mullett, a Partner at Architects ADP, spoke about the challenges and opportunities in building design. New houses will have to be zero carbon by 2016 but the problem lies with the existing housing stock of which only 30 per cent will be replaced by 2050. Upgrading existing houses could cost as much as £350 billion.

Justin Rhodes, a Director of Lewis Building Technology, showed how people could manage their energy consumption more efficiently by fitting better heating controls, even fitting controls for heating and lighting that could be operated remotely by mobile phone/computer.

Martin Brook, a Director of Ecoliving, spoke about renewable energy from ground and air source heat recovery. Ground source heat can be recovered using a borehole in a small garden or using a buried pipe system in an area four times the footprint of the house. Air source heat recovery can be combined with heating and ventilation. Heat source pumps using 1kW of power can produce 3-5kW of output.

Finally, Dr Chris Jardine, Technical Director of Joju Solar, highlighted the benefits of PV solar panels, in particular the current, very favourable feed-in-tariff. A typical household system will generate electricity and a good return on the capital cost. However, to maximise these benefits we still need to reduce energy usage which is 3,300 kWh per year for a typical household.

As our photo shows, the Seminar ended with a lively discussion. You can read the full presentations on our website – www.oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk/gue.html

Gordon Balme

The National Planning Policy Framework – our response

In July the Department for Communities and Local Government launched its consultation on plans to radically simplify the planning system in England and Wales to stimulate economic recovery and provide thousands of new homes. We were 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, itself a reflection of the caution of mortgage lenders. The supposed justification for the reform has led to **widespread scepticism as to its purpose**.

The most radical proposal is to **scrap most of the current policies**, together with much of the guidance and to replace them with a simple overriding principle: there will always be **a presumption in favour of 'sustainable development'**. This is not defined but it is suggested that the Brundtland Commission definition of 1987 should be used: "*Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*". But in the context of national or local planning legislation (which was never the purpose for which it was written) this means almost nothing. Should we build nothing, because future generations may need to build something else just there? Or should we build everywhere, since future generations can demolish anything to pursue their own objectives?

The 52 pages of the proposed Framework are riddled with crucial terms with no definitions. With such imprecision and such a strongly-expressed presumption in favour of development, the fear is that **almost anything will be permissible**. The 1,100+ pages of existing policy, and the associated guidance notes, provide detailed interpretation of the 'material considerations' that planning authorities must consider when dealing with applications. And since any particular proposal does not require reference to every page of the guidance, the argument of complexity is not accepted by all.

The proposed Framework requires planning authorities to prepare Local Plans setting out policies to which any development proposals must conform. But **Local Plans must be consistent with the Framework** and where no conforming Local Plan is extant (has not been prepared, is out of date, or has not yet been certified as conforming) it may be ignored. In these circumstances, any development need only conform to the vaguely-defined terms of the Framework. Since only 30 per cent of planning authorities have current, adopted Local Plans (and it's not known the extent to which

these might conform to the Framework), some predict a development free-for-all in the hiatus which will prevail until new, conforming Local Plans are in place.

The '**localism**' agenda gives communities (however they may be defined) opportunities to prepare Neighbourhood Plans. However, these must conform to any extant approved Local Plan, except that they may allow additional development, unless they are developed before a Local Plan is in place. How much real local control will actually materialise is thus a matter of conjecture – some might call this tokenism.

Although the Framework commits to preserve **Green Belts**, it also refers to 'appropriate development' and suggests that development in villages in Green Belts (rather than encroachment of cities into them) would be acceptable. We cannot be confident that the proposals give Green Belts adequate protection.

The strong emphasis on the presumption in favour of development suggests that the right to develop might become automatic, unless the planning authorities or others can demonstrate convincingly that the proposal is unsustainable, rather than the developer having to demonstrate the reverse. Potentially, this could impose a huge **additional burden on cash-strapped planning authorities** and conservation groups, while alleviating developers of much of their responsibility.

It has been suggested that, since the proposed reforms **do not repeal the underlying 2004 Act**, the fundamental protections against undesirable development are retained. This, however, only appears to provide the dubious consolation that planning decisions can, effectively, be made by the courts, not planners.

This combination of concerns has caused much distress. Oxford City Council has well-advanced Area Action Plans and will shortly publish the next stages of its Sites and Housing Allocations policy. If these are certified as a Local Plan conforming with the new Framework, the adoption of the Framework may have less effect on the city than surrounding rural areas. But as our surrounding countryside is Green Belt, **we should all be concerned at the outcome** of the current proposals. They could take effect from April next year.

Transport matters

We have continued discussions about the relocation of the **railway station**, spurred on by the decision of the British Rail Residual Board to sell a parcel of land in Oxpens Road, once used for railway sidings. This land would form an essential part of any redevelopment and we have been urging interested parties to get the sale postponed until a more comprehensive plan for a new station can be put together. It is clear that many of them can see the advantages of moving the station (more than two dozen reasons have been cited), but no single organisation can justify the expenditure required. We were encouraged to hear Lord Bill Bradshaw recently say that this was “an opportunity in a lifetime”.

Development at Barton

We continue to monitor the different views on how this development should be connected to the rest of the city. There are three main issues: (1) how to achieve permeability; (2) speed reduction on the northern by-pass to reduce its impact on the new development; and (3) urban design. Access is via Green Road roundabout at present, without traffic light control. The existing pedestrian and cycle tunnel could perhaps be expanded, but at least one at-grade road crossing should be built, to allow additional bus access. This could also provide new access to the JR Hospital. Slower speeds, an integral part of the boulevard proposal, would allow reductions in the embankment required to help attenuate the noise, and thus increase the area available for development. The road pattern must guarantee public transport services as soon as the first new houses are occupied, to avoid complete domination by the car.

Frideswide Square

The County Council continues to work on the redesign though no funds are at present available to realise a final plan. It is proposed that this should be the busiest ‘shared space’ in the world and we look forward to more detailed discussions with the County Council. We are concerned that any redesign may relocate bottlenecks elsewhere, though the Botley Road is often completely jammed to the ring road and beyond. Discussions with the bus companies about the idea of an interchange at a new Oxpens station have also revealed their concerns about the effects on bus services of redesigning the square.

Transport Group (formerly Travel Behaviour Group): *Juliet Blackburn, Richard Bradley, Tony Joyce, Andrew Pritchard (Convenor), Graham Smith, David Townsend*

Public transport

Most members will have found the new regime on Oxford’s buses to be, at least, no worse than before or, one would hope, better. The reduction in the number of buses using the High will please those who have complained about the number in the past although some people have noticed longer waits for a bus, especially on the Barton route. The recent ‘bus surgery’ in Broad Street was an opportunity to discuss any concerns with the operators.

Less welcome is the decision by the Government to cease offering half price coach travel for pensioners although both the Oxford Bus ‘Xpress’ and Stage Coach (the Tube) are considering offering some kind of discount themselves.

Building railway capacity

The rebuilding of Redbridge in south Oxford, which caused some traffic problems during last winter, is already paying dividends. As part of a project to increase clearances between Southampton and the Midlands it enables the biggest shipping containers to be carried on standard flat wagons and has taken well over **5,000 lorries off the A34** in the first four months. A good example of the need for increased capacity on the railways.



Which leads me to say something about the controversy over ‘HS2’ – the proposed new line between London and the North. The existing West Coast and East Coast routes are rapidly reaching their full capacity and the presence of long-distance expresses limits the ability to provide enough outer-suburban services in and out of London at the southern end and inter-urban services further north. The best way to solve this problem is to build another pair of tracks wholly for the long-distance trains. To add these two tracks to an existing route would involve the demolition of a large number of properties and the rebuilding of stations, and would disrupt trains for several years.

The best way is to build a new line through open country and, in the 21st century, it would be foolish to build it to the standards of 100 years ago, which is why it is planned as a ‘high-speed’ line, capable of speeds of up to 250 mph. This would bring us into line with most developed countries; even the car-dominated USA is planning high-speed railways.

David Townsend

Oxford Streets for People

The Streets for People team has had a busy few months. One of our main activities is the promotion of street parties as a way of building stronger communities. This year there were about 50 **street parties** across Oxford – starting with the Royal Wedding in April and continuing through the summer. Some are even planned for the Christmas period.

Next year the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the Olympics will give further opportunities to develop the street party movement. We are in discussion with the City Council about how to use these national events to reinforce local communities.

Streets are for play

Building on the success of street parties, we have been working with a charity called Playing Out. Their idea is simple: a street is closed on a regular basis after school so that children can play in a supervised, traffic-free setting. Recently they helped organise Oxford's first playing out event, held in Cowley, which was a huge success (you might have seen it on the local TV news). With growing interest from other streets, Playing Out is planning to run workshops for residents in communities around Oxford. If you are interested in helping to organise a workshop in your area please let us know.

Enjoying Oxford on foot

We are delighted to have joined forces with the Oxford Pedestrian's Association, with City Council encouragement, to help improve Oxford for those on foot. We have started by testing a process for street audits and exploring how the information collected by an audit might be used. We aim to provide the audit material to any of our members who wish to use it.

Pitts Road street party brought the generations together to enjoy food, chat, and local musicians and dancers

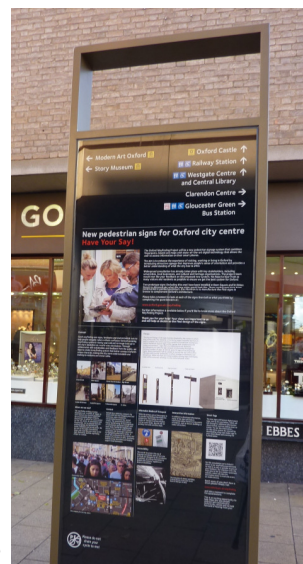


We are also building up knowledge on **Oxford walks**. There is a wide diversity of walk descriptions in existence and we believe there may be value in collating these in one place.

Signs of the times

The **Wayfinding Project** is being undertaken by the City Council and partners. The project team will install about 70 information displays and finger signs across the city centre, replacing about 90 existing signs. The aim is to provide directions to key places, a brief description of each locality and, using smart phone technology, access to more information. When completed, the new signage will give visitors and local people a much richer experience of the city.

The Society is actively involved in this project – in particular we are part of the team which is creating and reviewing the information which goes on each board. Two prototype signs have been installed – one in Bonn Square and one at the top of St Ebbes.



Richard Bradley (Co-ordinator), Tony Joyce, Pauline Martin, Christine Thompson, Ros Weatherall

The Society is 'highly commended'

The **OxClean** and **Streets for People** campaigns have won national recognition from Civic Voice and the Marsh Christian Trust. Tony Burton, Director of Civic Voice, presented the 'Highly Commended' award to our Chairman at a meeting of local civic societies.

This is a new award recognising 'outstanding contribution' to the civic movement. Tony said, "The judges were particularly impressed by these two campaigns and Oxford Civic Society's working with the local council, schools and other partners and building new support for its activities".

Civic Voice, whose President is Griff Rhys Jones, is the national voice for the civic movement representing nearly 300 civic societies in England. Founded in April 2010, it has since lobbied Government on behalf of the civic movement, meeting with Ministers and giving evidence to Select Committees.

Why boulevards don't work

Graham Smith's article in the last newsletter about transforming the A40 between Barton/Northway and Headington prompted this contribution to the debate from architect and City Councillor, Mike Gotch. Graham's reply is on page 7.

The enthusiastic support for Graham Smith's ideas about a 'boulevard' on the lines of Hausmann's Parisian model prompts me to respond – not least because there is also some support in the City Council for the concept. We are in danger of a flawed, theoretically attractive idea being built, that will condemn whole generations of Barton residents to a substandard living environment from 2013/2014.

At the seminar on 9 June, two speakers criticised housing layouts planned around cul-de-sacs that prevented through traffic, and allowed shared use of roads by pedestrians and vehicles – yet this is precisely the planning model (allowing children's play and so on) much preferred by most residents in the UK. I spent a long career planning such housing schemes and never once heard the criticism that my approach – discouraging through traffic – was wrong. Another speaker said that residents would be better off if A40 lorry traffic passed through their main shopping and residential streets – and illustrated his point with a slide of two large trucks passing each other in the middle of a main shopping mall in the USA. Where have these theoreticians been for the last 50 years?

Moreover, it was stated at the seminar (and illustrated in the City Housing Site booklet) that dwellings adjacent to even a very busy road, should have living rooms and bedrooms facing the road – to add to the feelings of liveliness and community and visual linkage between the new housing to the north and south of the A40. Such an approach is contrary to most housing schemes close to noise generators such as roads or railways where dwellings nearest to the noise and fumes have gable ends, or rooms such as bathrooms or stairs, facing the noise source.

What residents say

None of the proponents of boulevards have had the complaints from residents at the Banbury Road end of the A40 that I have had as a City Councillor. These relate to traffic noise (particularly at night when speed control is least effective) and traffic fumes from the 40,000 vehicles that travel every day between the Headington and Banbury Road

roundabouts. Noise reduction measures are to be installed in social housing to improve conditions for residents. Experience what a boulevard means in practice – do not theorise – visit Holt Weer Close to the north and Hawksmoor Road to the south of the A40 at the Banbury Road roundabout and judge for yourself if we should recreate that environment.



To cite Sunderland Avenue as an example of what a boulevard might be like is invalid since it is a single carriageway road with slower moving traffic and with houses much closer together, yet, even so, with little sense of community links between north and south.

Even in the unlikely event of central government providing the tens of £millions needed to separate local traffic from through traffic on the A40 and A34, and reduce speeds and volumes on the ring road, the distances (at least 60 - 80 metres) between the new West Barton development and existing Headington housing and new Northway developments will make any visual linkage pretty unlikely.

Prioritise the links

In my view, better links should be developed between the new and existing Barton communities and facilities and at Northway, accepting that they will remain as separate communities. The City is right to identify these priorities and to much improve vehicular access to Barton. The debate will continue – but let's be creative yet realistic about options – and not construct major future problems.

One final point – it seems to me to be sensible that the City Council (in its consultation) requested views as to possible housing on Ruskin Fields. Whatever one thinks of that possibility, it is surely sensible to include the option in the present consultation exercise, since the possible new pedestrian/vehicular links across the A40 could provide access to Northway, to Ruskin Fields, and perhaps to the existing north entrance to the JR hospital, thus reducing traffic pressures on Headley Way.

The issue of segregation

By Graham Paul Smith

Mike Gotch criticises a potential solution but ignores the problem of **segregating** the residents of 1,000 new homes in West Barton from the adjacent city. 'Separate' isn't a problem but segregation is, especially in estates with significant problems. The poor conditions in his Wolvercote Ward are the result of poor urban and appalling traffic design. The boulevards in Paris have no similarity to these mean cases.

Perhaps Mike ought to look at Green Road (south of the Headington roundabout) where the A4142 has similar traffic numbers to Sunderland Avenue. This boulevard seems to attract "no unfavourable comment from residents, other than the 50mph speed limit is too high". Mike belittles "*Another speaker [saying] that residents would be better off if ...traffic passed through their main ...streets*". The illustration of a truck within a few feet of Americans on a great street was not to advocate such things but simply to point out that **when the urbanism is of a high quality** EVEN large trucks do not dissuade eating at sidewalk cafés. One of the key reasons why we lose local jobs, local retail and local life is precisely because of this desire to separate '*local from global movement*', rather than **tame** the *global* as it meets the *local*. This is the Department for Transport message (*Manual for Streets*, 1 and 2, 2007 and 2010).

The guidance on design of housing layouts which Mike used during his career is now withdrawn, not because "*it allowed children's play*" but because the limitation on through traffic means that everyone's journey is maximised. Restricting journeys transfers them elsewhere and this creates problems. It resulted in less freedom for children, effectively confining them to the estate, while housing, retail, employment, health and recreation became formed into bigger independent clumps accessible mainly by car and segregated by fast roads. This has resulted in strange conundrums: UK pedestrians are more than twice as likely to be killed as those in the Netherlands; we travel less by bike than other nations; almost alone in Europe, we use the car for an increasing proportion of journeys. We can make new housing developments fit for children's play, using new regulations for residential streets.

It's worrying that our analysis is dismissed and solutions attacked without exploration or generosity about the concerns behind them. Where is the political concern for future residents of West Barton?

Museum of Oxford – a new future

By Tony Joyce

The Museum of Oxford closed at the end of October to begin its major relocation and refurbishment. Many will treasure nostalgic memories of the existing displays, which date from 1975, but the new layout, when completed, will provide much easier access from within the Town Hall and display the very special collection in more attractive ways.

The initial phase is well under way, with the new museum shop on the corridor to the café, which is also being improved, as is the exhibition gallery. At the end of the corridor, extended education spaces will further this important work. Everyone has been delighted by the £48,628 grant from WREN (Waste Recycling Environmental Ltd) to help with the cost.

Planning is now in progress for the next phase. A £43,600 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund will enable a selection from the existing collection to be displayed in two large rooms, accessed from the Town Hall lobby at ground floor level. Ambitious plans for further extension within the framework of the listed Town Hall will need further fundraising.

In the meantime, the programme of museum events continues, with activities for schools and more temporary exhibitions in the gallery*. With all the work behind the scenes there will still be much work for the devoted band of volunteers, whose efforts in the last two years have been a major factor in keeping the museum open, and preparing it for what all hope will be an exciting future, adding to the interest and user-friendliness of a revitalised Town Hall.

*See www.oxford.gov.uk/museumofoxford

History collections under threat

The Oxfordshire Local History Association (OLHA) has drawn our attention to the budget cuts imposed by the County Council on the Oxfordshire History Service (OHS) and the combined Oxfordshire Studies and Oxfordshire Record Office.

OLHA believes the cuts are disproportionate, that they take no account of the challenges facing the service and that they seriously threaten its future viability as anything more than a holding operation.

To see their response to the proposed cuts, offer support, or to learn more about the OLHA, visit their website: www.olha.org.uk

Changing Oxford – from 1968

By Tony Joyce, Vice President

In February, Tony Joyce gave members a fascinating talk on how Oxford has changed and dealt with its challenges over the last 40 years. For those who missed his reminiscences, here is the first part of that story.

My wife and I, with three small children, moved to Oxford in 1968, when I was appointed as Usher (Deputy Head) of Magdalen College School. The first task was to find a suitable house. The advice was unequivocal: since MCS was sited east of Magdalen Bridge, one's house would have to be that side too – traffic congestion at peak periods made any other location impractical.

This was before the Marston Ferry Road had provided an alternative link across the river, and Magdalen Bridge was a major bottleneck. A contraflow system operated across the bridge: two lanes into the city and one out in the morning; the reverse in the evening. The system was controlled by a moveable island-crossing opposite Magdalen's porter's lodge. At the appropriate time, a large handle was produced and the island was wound across the road to change the lane priorities. Nevertheless, the traffic queues normally exceeded anything we see these days, except when a major accident brings the present system to near gridlock.

The other advice was that since air pollution down on the plain was so great, it was far healthier and more pleasant to be up on a hill – so the choice of Headington was almost automatic, and we were lucky to find a house in Latimer Road.

Life in Headington was comparatively simple. There was a sub-post office/stationers at the bottom of Latimer Road, and a general store within three *The Co-op, on the corner of London and Windmill Roads*



minutes' walk. The district shopping centre deserved its name: independent butchers, fishmongers and green-grocers competed for trade; the Singer Sewing shop, in addition to repairing one's machine, stocked an impressive array of haberdashery. The children walked or were pushed to primary and nursery schools. My wife had little need to shop elsewhere and none to drive. Just up the road the Moulin Rouge cinema was the local Phoenix. Our neighbours worked for the city, the car factory or the university; others walked to their jobs at one of the hospitals, or Brookes as it moved towards Polytechnic status. Buses, though having to fight their way through the general congestion, still ran through Cornmarket to connect us with the north of the city.

Saturdays in the football season were interesting. Oxford United, playing at home on their Manor Ground between Osler and Sandfield Roads, attracted big crowds, often from far afield. With no significant parking at the ground, fleets of long-distance coaches parked in designated bays on Headley Way and neighbouring side streets. Other spectators parked wherever they could, completely filling both sides of all the residential streets in the area, often across entrance driveways. If one needed to use the car that afternoon, the only safe bet was to get out before lunch and not return till the match was over. Many will still recall the six mounted police clip-clopping up Headington Hill to control the crowds. At the finish, London Road was closed for ten or more minutes to allow the spectators to disperse. Some Headington shops would close temporarily as a precaution against more exuberant celebrators. Headington School boarders were kept safely on site.

All this, of course, was before the M40 – whose construction had recently begun around High Wycombe – had reached Oxford; and the final links to create a ring road for the city, by joining together the Northern, Eastern and Southern Bypasses had only been in place for a couple of years. In its attempts to reduce traffic through the centre, particularly the High Street, the city was still considering a southern relief road across the river at Eastwyke Farm (on the Four Pillars Hotel site). Up Iffley Road from MCS, many of the houses stood mournfully empty and boarded up, awaiting the demolition which this scheme would have required.

In 1972 I moved to work away from Oxford for 20 years. How the city attempted to respond to its problems, and the changes we found on our return, must await a future instalment!

See also Mark Barrington-Ward's book Forty Years of Oxford Planning, published by the Society in 2010

Planning matters

By the Planning Sub-Committee

The planning group still meets fortnightly but now in the City Council Offices in St Aldates Chambers. There have been initial problems over access on screen to application papers and drawings, but there is some improvement as the system settles down, and we hope for more. At the time of writing our last report a few application results were still described as 'pending' and these have now been resolved. They include *granting* of a Tree Preservation Order on the oak tree at 26 Lathbury Road, *permission* for part demolition and rebuilding at the corner of **Little Clarendon Street/Walton Street** and *permission* also for the very large research buildings on the **Old Road Campus, in Headington**. Extensions for **15 Farndon Road** were *refused* but the application returned with modifications a few weeks later and has now been *permitted*.

The walls of Jericho

On land to the rear of **Observatory Street, Green Templeton College** asked for temporary permission (for 10 years) to build a sports pavilion, and to make an opening in the wall to allow entry. This would have threatened the integrity of the setting of the famous listed Observatory and Tower of the Winds, (below) and the application has been *withdrawn*.



Photo courtesy of Oxford University

St Clements car park

In August came an application to redevelop this car park and public conveniences to provide student accommodation, with 140 bedrooms and facilities in three blocks, and with 74 replacement car parking spaces underneath the buildings, and new public toilets. Permission for this development was *refused*, on the grounds of its impact on both the listed **Florey Building** and **27 St Clements Street**, as well as other neighbouring residences, the effect on the views into and out of the St Clements conservation

area, and the failure to provide alternative parking space (the proposed provision at Harcourt House, Marston being regarded as unsatisfactory). It was also felt that scant attention was being paid to important features of the site, such as Angel Meadow and the tree-lined riverside.

Residential development

In July the owners of **3 Bladon Close** re-submitted an application to erect a large two-storey house with four to five bedrooms, which had already been completed. This application was *refused* (again) and has now gone to appeal. **Isis Cottage** is quite conspicuous on the river-bank towing-path, near **Iffley**, and *permission* was given to add to it with a detached summer-house; we hope that in scale and design this will be sympathetic to its unique rural setting.

In **Grove Street, Summertown**, *permission* has been given to demolish the **Grove House Club** and in its place to erect a two-storey terrace, (with accommodation in the roof-space) providing one 4-bed house and three 3-bed houses, comprising 26 bed-spaces on this limited site. Car parking will be restricted, but provision for bin and cycle storage looks inconvenient.

September brought another 18 applications to which we objected. About half are understandably still awaiting decisions, (which may be included in the next report), but some have already been *refused*. These include extensions to houses in **Rose Hill**, at **17 Church Hill Road** and **5 Fairlie Road**, and also at **42 Windmill Road, Headington**. Also *refused* are proposals at **16 and 17 Vicarage Road, Hinksey**, to extend houses to the rear on two storeys, and put in rear dormer windows.

However at **21 – 25 Hill Top Road, Headington**, *permission* has been given to demolish the buildings and to erect a two-storey replacement with rooms in the roof-space, to provide four flats (with 1, 2 and 3 bedrooms). The internal accommodation will be cramped and with little outdoor amenity space. An interesting application still *pending* is for **103 – 104 St Mary's Road**, where it is proposed to convert and alter an existing workshop to provide three work/live units, each with two bedrooms, with also erection of a second building containing three flats. The design is ingenious but the accommodation here would be rather cramped.

Gillian Argyle, Clive Booth, Kate Joyce (*Convenor*), Neil MacLennan, Chris Rayson, Peter Thompson, Tim Treacher

Booking form January – March ticketed events

Closing date for applications: **12 December**

Please enclose:

1. cheque/s payable to Oxford Civic Society, one for each event
2. one stamped, addressed envelope for all tickets

Member's name

BLOCK CAPS PLEASE

2nd member's name

IF APPLICABLE

Address

Post code **Telephone**

Email

EVENT	No of tickets	Amount enclosed
Visit to Jesus College, Thursday 22 March at 2.30pm@£7	
Visit to three Anglican churches in Cowley, Thursday 29 March at 2.30pm@£7	
Summertown walk Please indicate your preferred date below (more than one date if wished)@£4	
Saturday 14 April, 2-4pm Sunday 22 April, 2-4pm Thursday 26 April, 6-8pm		

Note: Tickets are allocated soon after the closing date for applications but if you miss it, it's always worth asking if there are places left. A ballot for tickets will be held if necessary. Cheques are banked three weeks after ticket issue; after that no refunds can be given.

Send completed form to:

Alan Hobbs
66 Southfield Road, Oxford OX4 1PA
tel/answerphone: 01865 248 105



Programme calendar 'Cut out and keep'

January – March 2012

*ticketed events

Thursday 9 February 7.30pm for 8pm
 The future of Oxford, viewed through the lens of the past, a talk by John Melvin, architect, town-planner and author of *The Stones of Oxford: Conjectures on a Cockleshell*.

Tuesday 6 March: 7.30pm for 8pm
 Christopher Day talks about Town and Gown in Oxford, from the 14th century to the present.

Thursday 15 March 6.30pm for 7pm
 Pre-AGM talk by James Erskine on his company, Creation Theatre, and the current state of theatre and the arts in Oxford.
 AGM starts at 8pm

Thursday 22 March* 2.30pm
 Visit to Jesus College, co-founded by Elizabeth I.

Thursday 29 March* 2.30pm
 Visit to three Anglican churches in Cowley, led by Gillian Argyle.

Saturday 14 April* 2-4pm

Sunday 22 April* 2-4pm

Thursday 26 April * 6-8pm

Two-hour walk round the parish of Summertown, led by Alastair Lack.

*Contact for booking/tickets only:

Alan Hobbs
 66 Southfield Road
 Oxford OX4 1PA
 01865 248 105



Programme January – March 2012

Digital photos of events (max 4, preferably captioned) can be sent to newsletter@oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk

Open talks – all welcome

no pre-booking, members free, non-members £4 at the door

Thursday 9 February: The future of Oxford, viewed through the lens of the past

Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street

Tea/coffee 7.30pm, talk 8pm

John Melvin, an award-winning architect and town-planner, has known Oxford for 40 years. In his recent book, *The Stones of Oxford: Conjectures on a Cockleshell*, he is critical of commercial Oxford. In a city where much land is owned by the council and colleges, he examines whether Oxford has been well served by past planning decisions. He will focus on the visual consequences of these decisions and in particular on the future of shopping centres in Oxford.

Tuesday 6 March: Town and Gown in Oxford

Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street

Tea/coffee 7.30pm, talk 8pm

Christopher Day, Fellow of Kellogg College, is a highly regarded expert on the history of Oxford University and the county of Oxfordshire.

In this talk, he will concentrate on the long and often uneasy relationship between Town and Gown over the centuries, from the St Scholastica's Day riot in 1355 at the Swyndelstock tavern by Carfax through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to the present time.

Thursday 15 March: Creation Theatre and the arts in Oxford – pre-AGM talk

Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street

Tea/coffee 6.30pm; talk 7pm; AGM 8pm

James Erskine, Creative Director and Chief Executive of Creation Theatre will discuss the work of his company and the current state of theatre and the arts in Oxford.

Please see the back page for further details of the AGM

Members only visits and walks

tickets are required for all these events: bookings by 12 December

Thursday 22 March, 2.30pm: Visit to Jesus College

Tickets £7

Jesus College was the only college founded in the long reign of Elizabeth I and the queen herself was its co-founder in 1571. Associated in particular with two undergraduates, TE Lawrence and Harold Wilson, Jesus has traditionally been known as the college for Welshmen. The visit will include the three quadrangles hidden between Cornmarket and Turl Street as well as some of the more recent buildings. The afternoon will end with tea in the college Hall.

Thursday 29 March, 2.30pm: Visit to three Anglican churches in Cowley

Tickets £7

Gillian Argyle will lead a tour of three Anglican churches in Cowley: St Alban's in Charles Street – with stations of the cross by Eric Gill and a door

carved by John Brookes, the founder of Oxford Brookes University; St John the Evangelist; and the adjoining St Stephen's theological college, the original home of the Cowley fathers. Tea will be served at the end. One of the chapels is only reached by several flights of stairs.

Sat 14 April, 2-4pm: Summertown walk and on Sunday 22 April, 2-4pm and Thursday 26 April, 6-8pm

Tickets: £4

Alastair Lack will lead a walk round the parish of Summertown, once a small hamlet on the road out of Oxford and the haunt of highwaymen. Taking in the oldest and little known existing buildings and some of the remaining large houses, he will tell the story of a neighbourhood that has developed from a small adjunct of Oxford to a place with its own lively sense of identity.

OxClean schools award



Cherwell School won the shield in our Anti-Litter Campaign for Oxford Schools. The shield was presented by our President, Sir Hugo Brunner, and campaigner Rosanne Bostock to two senior members of the school's Council. OxClean is continuing discussions with the new Headmaster, Paul James, on how the school can build on this success.

Champion recyclers wanted!

Oxford City Council is looking for more people to become Local Environment Champions, to support their neighbours to recycle more. Generally this involves giving information about what people can recycle and how but champions are often the eyes and ears of the community, for instance reporting fly tipping or other problems. Champions can choose how much they want to be involved. The Council provides information, news updates and occasional meetings. If you'd like to help contact Maria Warner – mobile 0782 554 6178 or email mwarner@oxford.gov.uk

Annual General Meeting 15 March 2012

Nominations for Officer positions and membership of the Executive Committee and notice of any business to be put on the agenda should be sent by Wednesday 29 February to: **Vernon Porter, Hon Secretary, Oxford Civic Society, 67 Cunliffe Close, Oxford, OX2 7BJ** e-mail info@oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk

Nominations should have the consent of the nominee and require seconding. If you are interested in joining the Committee please contact **Vernon Porter** for an informal discussion.

The Annual Review and provisional agenda will be published in the March Newsletter. The final agenda will be available from the Hon Secretary after 29 February and at the meeting.

Contact us/Who's who

Oxford Civic Society
67 Cunliffe Close, OX2 7BJ
075 05 756 692

info@oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk

oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk

oxclean.org.uk / oxstreets.org.uk

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**President:** *Sir Hugo Brunner*

**Vice President:** *Tony Joyce*

**Chairman:** *Peter Thompson*

85 Lonsdale Road, OX2 7ET (558 616)

[chairman@oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk](mailto:chairman@oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk)

**Hon Secretary:** *Vernon Porter*

67 Cunliffe Close, OX2 7BJ (557 660)

[info@oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk](mailto:info@oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk)

**Treasurer:** *Gordon Balme*

336 Woodstock Road, OX2 7NS (511 387)

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(Environment Secretary and
OxClean Chair: *vacant*)

Membership Secretary: *Liz Grosvenor*

15 Lime Walk, Headington, OX3 7AB (765 453)

membership@oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk

Newsletter Editor: *Hilary Bradley*

24 Beaumont Road, OX3 8JN (762 418)

newsletter@oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk

Oxford Streets for People

Project Co-ordinator: *Richard Bradley*

24 Beaumont Road, OX3 8JN (762 418)

info@oxstreets.org.uk

Planning Sub-Committee Convenor: *Kate Joyce*

68 Blenheim Drive, OX2 8DQ (556 050)

Programme Group Convenor: *Alastair Lack*

83 Frenchay Road, OX2 6TF (511 326)

programme@oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk

Transport Group

Convenor: *Andrew Pritchard*

33 Laburnum Road, North Hinksey, OX2 9EL
(240 014)

University Liaison: *Stuart White*

'Yarnells', Yarnells Hill, OX2 9BG (247 669)