

VISIONS

No 127, March 2014

Contents

- 1-2 Chairman's commentary
- 2 Members' survey results
- 3 Transport
- 4 Planning/Obituaries
- 5 AGM agenda/People/Streets
- 6-7 Programme
- 8 Blue Plaques in 2013/Contact us

More consideration for cyclists is key to beating the traffic congestion that blights our city



How cycling helps us all

By Peter Thompson, Chairman

AGM

Thursday 13 March 2014

All welcome at our AGM
Magdalen College Auditorium,
Longwall Street

6.30pm Refreshments

**7pm Talk by Neven Sidor of
Grimshaw Architects on
*Railways divide cities ...
stations connect them***

8pm AGM

See page 5 for the agenda and
the enclosed *Annual Review 2013*

It's time to take cycling seriously as a transport policy.

Transport issues have always been central to our efforts to create a 'better Oxford'. As our recent member survey showed, most of you share the view that the volume of traffic blights our city and erodes our quality of life.

Of course, the car is seductively convenient but it comes at a terrible cost: nationally, nearly 2,000 deaths and 190,000 injuries, an estimated 29,000 deaths from vehicle-produced air pollution, homes blighted by isolation and noise, many beautiful streets ruined by traffic or parking, and children banned from playing in the street.

At the same time, the attractiveness of the car for journeys in the city is often illusory: convenience has been eroded

by parking difficulties and the delays from congestion frustrate us all and impede the economy. There are only two possible solutions to this conundrum: create more road capacity or reduce the volume of traffic.

In Oxford, with its historic quarters, river systems and flood plains, it is well-nigh impossible to increase capacity. Reducing volumes of car traffic means persuading many more of us to change our behaviour – to 'switch modes' in the jargon. Oxford's rail infrastructure is experiencing unprecedented levels of investment to enhance the service. We already enjoy high levels of bus use. Cycling offers a solution to most of the problems of urban travel: cheap, quick and convenient, noise and pollution-free, easier to park, and extending the life-expectancy of its exponents to boot.



Changing gear at last

However, these benefits have little recognition in the UK. Less than 1.5% of journeys here are made by bike compared with 10% in Germany and 26% in Holland. Remarkably, over a third of our journeys of less than two miles are made by car, as are over half of journeys of less than five miles. Perhaps belatedly, recognition of the benefits of cycling, and what it has done for continental cities, has led to changes in official policy here, nationally and locally. Both the City and County Councils are now positively promoting cycling as transport policy.

The rationale for this is not to please current cycling enthusiasts but for the well-being of everyone. When more people cycle we all benefit: from improvement of air quality and the built environment, speedier travel and better health. Even those of us forced or determined to continue using cars in the city are helped by reduced traffic and pressure on parking spaces.

Can cycling ever be safe?

Surveys repeatedly reveal that safety is the number-one reason given for not

cycling. In reality, the perception belies the evidence – the health benefits of cycling far outweigh the risks of injury. Nevertheless, it is perception that drives behaviour, and, if Oxford is to benefit from reducing traffic, much better conditions for cycling will have to be provided – it must be perceived as unquestionably safe.

This means much better-considered schemes than we have seen to date: proper segregated paths wherever possible; direct and continuous routes between important nodes; proper connections between travel modes; junctions and roundabouts designed with cycling convenience and safety prioritised; better bike parking solutions. To quote a recent report by Lancaster University: *“If we genuinely want to see a cycling revolution in Britain, we need to ... start creating safe and pleasant conditions where anyone... would be happy to ride”.*

If all this sounds expensive, it is much cheaper to improve our infrastructure for bikes than to make our roads better for cars. If cycling-prioritised improvements are made when road maintenance is happening anyway, they

could be effectively cost-free. If the appropriate policies had been in place 30 years ago, most of our urban streets would have been transformed by now, through routine repair.

Changing hearts and minds

However, it isn't just engineering that is needed, but a change in attitudes. 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. So we continue to lobby for cycling to be taken seriously, for something more than lip-service to be paid to truly creating cycling conditions in which everyone is happy to ride.

We shall continue to lobby and cooperate with the City and County Councils, and with groups like Cyclox and Sustrans, to promote better facilities for cycling across Oxford and beyond.

Peter Thompson
Chairman



Members' survey – what you told us

Many thanks to everyone who took part in our recent members' survey. Vernon Porter sums up the results.

Events

Our walks and talks are popular. Busy diaries seemed to be the major impediment to participation. The need for a car sharing scheme for trips out of Oxford was mentioned. If anyone is willing to be a lifts co-ordinator, do get in touch.

Several members said that they would like us to try to hold some events in the day time – see the Programme page for our initial response. The Programme Group will add your many useful suggestions for meeting topics to their list. They will also investigate holding some talks out of the city centre.

Communications

Visions got a big 'thumbs up' and some of you also like the website and

e-bulletins, but you don't tweet. Not to worry, we use Twitter to tell the wider world what we are doing. We urge more of you to explore our websites, all of them rich sources of information.

Campaigning

Your answers validated the emphasis we put on local and strategic planning issues and transport and travel which are so intertwined with them. The

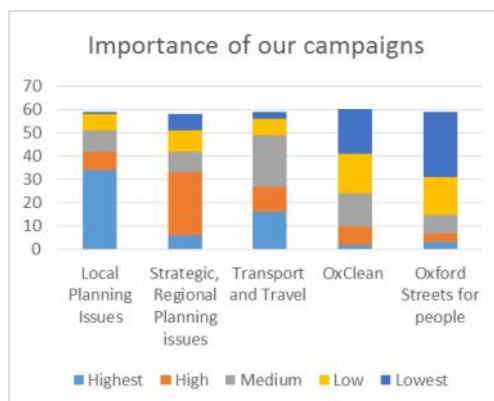
suggestions of other issues we might tackle and things you would like to see happen in Oxford provide much food for thought. As ever, we need enthusiasts willing to take up the cudgels on the Society's behalf. Could you contribute to any of our special interest groups or even start a new one?

Improving the Society

The most widely wished-for changes were for more young members and for residents from wider areas of the city to join us. Any specific suggestions, better still specific offers of help, will be most welcome.

Congratulations to Susan Ganter of Begbroke who won our prize draw.

She was among the 10 per cent of members who responded, about average for this kind of survey we are reliably informed.





Will the City Deal improve our transport?

The recently-announced City Deal for Oxford and its region should bring a few long-awaited improvements to our transport infrastructure.

Again and again we hear complaints that journey times in and around Oxford are too long. Businessmen say that it discourages them from locating major offices in the region and scientists at the Diamond source at Harwell find that they must allow half a day to travel and attend seminars elsewhere in the area. We were therefore encouraged to learn that the City Deal* includes a '**Science Transit**', a service between major research sites in the Science Arc from Harwell, Milton Park and Culham to Oxford and Bicester, with a 15-minute frequency. This would seem to be a clear opportunity for a faster local rail service to avoid congestion on the A34 and other roads but details and costs are still awaited.

The City Deal also offers the prospect of road improvements to support the **Northern Gateway** development, including work on the A40 bottleneck between Oxford and Witney. These improvements are intended to support economic growth in the region but they should also help reduce the misery of commuting for many local people.

Joining the dots at Westgate

We have continued to urge that the three separate **masterplans for the station, Oxpens and Westgate** are considered together. This is the only way to avoid the current conflicting visions of Oxpens Road as a four-lane road (Westgate) or a local shared space (Oxpens), and provide a coherent plan of transport arrangements for the many new shoppers and employees who will need access to the Westgate. A new transport plan for the central area of the city, due this spring, may provide



answers. In the meanwhile, we believe that proposals by John Lewis to remove the remaining **buses** from Queen Street are unnecessary, leading to intimidatingly high bus flows in the streets around the development.

The station and the bridge

Further research by our Group has shown that the cost of a **new station and transport hub** at the Oxpens should be similar to or lower than building on the present site. An Oxpens transport hub would use the least attractive part of the site (by the tracks) and leave around three-quarters of the area for further development, which could provide much-needed housing and help fund the hub as part of a flagship development.

We welcomed the decision to rebuild the **Botley Road bridge** to provide three traffic lanes with a standard headroom of 16 ft (currently 13 ft 10 inches) plus pedestrian and cycle paths on each side. However, we feel that this should not be linked financially to redevelopment of the station on the present site.

At a private presentation of the draft **station masterplan**, we saw plans showing a two- or three-storey station across the tracks to the north of the bridge, and a bus station and multi-

storey car park to the south of it. We were concerned however that the effects of lowering the road level on **Frideswide Square** and the road junctions either side of the bridge had not been addressed, nor had the scale of disruption while the work is carried out. It is surprising that no objections have yet been raised to the demolition of the YHA, which will be essential for the proposed third platform on the west side of the station. We remain convinced that the Oxpens site has greater financial and operational potential.

Not yet a 'cycling city'

As our Chairman points out, cycling has much to commend it. Despite Oxford's aim to be considered a 'cycling city', the opportunity to make incremental improvements, at minimal cost, is often missed, such as in lower St Aldates. We have continued to press representatives of both City and County to support this aim by giving cyclists equal or greater priority over cars, as well as providing secure cycle parking at new developments such as the Westgate, at blocks of flats and at the new station.

Andrew Pritchard for the Transport Group

*Read about the City Deal at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/city-deal-oxford-and-oxfordshire



Roger Dudman woe

Clive Booth represented the Society on the independent review of a controversial planning decision. He reports on the review's findings.

We shall probably never know why the University of Oxford changed the brief for the student housing on Roger Dudman Way from the humane “*creating a sense of place and community*” to one that produced the egregious structures that now dominate Port Meadow. Nor do we know why the University's pre-application consultations were so deficient as to overlook our Society and, apparently, other amenity and community groups. (At least, Turbo Ted's Nursery was consulted!)

Nor will we know whether the councillors charged with determining the planning application would have voted differently had the recommendations of the independent review undertaken by Vincent Goodstadt already been implemented. They might have decided that the urgent need for student accommodation trumped the negative impact on a cherished landscape. We elect our councillors to take tough decisions!

The City Council commissioned the independent review following the outcry when local people finally became aware of the blocks being built. The review was published at the end of December. We had the small consolation of being



included in the working party of three councillors and three community organisations appointed by the Council to oversee the review.

In relation to the key actors in the planning process, Goodstadt's report can probably be best summed up as ‘could do better’; or, expressed in terms of academic qualifications, he was awarding ‘lower seconds’, rather than ‘firsts’. These were among the shortcomings identified in the review:

- There was inadequate consultation on the proposal and it could have been more clearly documented.
- The planning application documents contained errors and omissions.
- Clear records were not kept of the documents submitted at various stages nor of some of the communications and meetings between the planning department and the applicant.

The flats seen from Port Meadow

- The visual assessment provided to the planning committee was limited.
- The information provided to members about the design of the buildings and the height reduction offered by the applicant was not clear.
- The report to councillors could have been clearer, particularly in weighing the balance between the need for student accommodation and the visual impact of the design.
- The University breached two requirements relating to contamination.

The report makes six major recommendations designed to address the shortcomings. If implemented by all those to whom they are addressed, the recommendations should greatly strengthen the processes affecting planning applications for major projects in Oxford.

Lady Wheare and Mavis Batey

Long-standing members of the Society will have learned with sadness of the deaths recently of two remarkable members of the Oxford community.

Mavis Batey, renowned in her later years for her work with the Garden History Society, was at times a valued adviser to the Society on garden and landscaping issues.

Joan Wheare, during her time as a member of the Society's committee, stimulated members into a number of

high-profile campaigns. For example, she campaigned for the building of the Ice Rink and the cleaning up of Friar's Entry, where her working parties with scrubbing brushes, mops and buckets were the forerunners of our more recent OxClean campaigns. Well into her nineties she was still regularly phoning the Chairman to suggest issues requiring the Society's attention! Members can read a delightful tribute to her in the [Oxford Mail](#).

We have been very fortunate in those who have served the Society in the past – a tradition which continues today.

Tony Joyce, Vice President



Annual General Meeting – Thursday 13 March 2014

Please join us for the pre-AGM talk at 7pm and the AGM at 8pm

The 44th Annual General meeting of the Society will take place in the
Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street

The pre-AGM talk *Railways divide cities ... stations connect them* will be given by
Neven Sidor of Grimshaw Architects

Refreshments will be available from 6.30pm

Agenda

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. President's opening remarks | 7. Reports of Working Groups |
| 2. Apologies for absence | 8. Election of Officers for 2014-15 |
| 3. Minutes of the 2013 AGM | 9. Election of Committee Members for 2014-15 |
| 4. Matters arising from the minutes | 10. Any other business which has been notified |
| 5. Chairman's report | 11. Address by Freddie Gick, Chair of Civic Voice |
| 6. Treasurer's report and accounts for 2013 | |

Please bring this agenda and the enclosed *Annual Review 2013* with you. The Review constitutes our report to members.

Minutes of the last AGM and the full accounts for 2013 may be found on our website.

Some printed copies will be available at the meeting.

Vernon Porter, Honorary Secretary, info@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

OCS people

We'd like to say a warm thank-you to **Tony Roberts** who has retired as our Webmaster. Tony took over our early website from Stephanie Jenkins, joining the newly formed Comms team in 2003. It's thanks to Tony's expertise that we've been able to run our three linked websites – all of them vital 'shop windows' to members and the wider world.



Tony has passed on the codes to **Tony Turton** (left), who has been master-minding web content for a couple of years. Tony T is also our enthusiastic tweeter

– see: <https://twitter.com/oxcivicsoc>.

For details of 'volunteer vacancies' see *About us* on [our website](http://oxcivicsoc.org.uk).

Streets are for parties – and walks!

If you haven't already done so, it's time to start planning your street party. As you know, our **Oxford Streets for People Group** encourages street parties as a way to help people get to know their neighbours and build pleasanter, safer communities. Many streets do this year on year but if you're new to this, you'll find all you need to know on the Streets for People website – www.oxstreets.org.uk.

You don't need an excuse for a party, nor do you need to have 'traditional' activities. Some successful street events are based on film showings or communal dancing, for instance.



Look out soon for the launch of our **Walks in Oxford** website that offers over 70 super walks – another way to celebrate our streets!

Richard Bradley for the Streets for People Group

Booking form: May – July ticketed events

Closing date for applications: **Monday 7 April**. 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 CAPITALS PLEASE

2nd member's name (if applicable).....

Address

Postcode Telephone

Email

Event	No. of tickets	Amount enclosed
For events on more than one date, please delete any dates you <u>can't</u> do and indicate your preferred date/s		
Boars Hill walk (note: we advise stout footwear) Wednesday 21 May, 5.30pm Sunday 25 May, 2.30pm@£5	
Windsor Castle visit Wednesday 4 June, 8.30am@£35	
Ripon College Cuddesdon visit Monday 16 June, 2pm I can offer a lift / I need a lift to attend (please circle as appropriate)@£8	
A walk on the Welsh side Sunday 6 July, 2pm Wednesday 9 July, 2.30pm Tuesday 15 July, 6pm@£5	

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

Send this completed form to Alan Hobbs – see right.

About our price increase

Members will notice **an increase of £1** for visits and walks. There has been no price increase for several years, but during that time, fees for speakers and venues have been increasing. Our aim is to cover the full costs of running the programme. We hope that members will continue to feel the programme is good value.



Programme calendar 'cut out and keep'

March – July 2014

**ticketed events*

Thurs 13 March 7pm/AGM at 8pm
Pre-AGM talk on station design by
Neven Sidor of Grimshaw Architects

Thursday 3 April 7.30 for 8pm
The National Trust, a talk by its
Director General, Helen Ghosh

Wednesday 21 May* 5.30pm
Sunday 25 May* 2.30pm
Boars Hill – walking with poets, a
walk with Philip Stewart

Wednesday 4 June* 8.30am
Windsor Castle, a visit by coach

Monday 16 June* 2pm
Ripon College Cuddesdon, a visit

Thursday 19 June 2.30pm for 3pm
Meet the Chairman, an informal talk
and discussion

Thursday 10 July 7.30pm for 8pm
University College – building the
Front Quad, a talk by Dr Robin
Darwall-Smith

Sunday 6 July* 2pm
Wednesday 9 July* 2.30pm
Tuesday 15 July* 6pm
A walk on the Welsh side, with Mark
Davies

***Contact for booking/tickets only:**

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

**If, at the last moment, you can't
attend, please phone Alan Hobbs
so someone can take your place**





Programme May – July 2014

Open talks – all welcome

No pre-booking, free to members. Help us to recruit new members by bringing a guest to one lecture free.
£4 for other non- members

Meet the Chairman – an informal look at the Society's work

Thursday 19 June

Ship Street Centre, Jesus College (The Bastion) †

Coffee/tea 2.30pm, talk 3pm

The Society continues to be involved in a diverse range of initiatives – regional development, planning, transport, communities, Streets for People, OxClean, Blue Plaques and the events programme. In all these areas, we have a positive story to tell. In this afternoon meeting, **Peter Thompson**, Chairman of the Society, will demystify the latest developments, invite questions and encourage a dialogue with members.

† **Wheelchair - accessible venues**

Recreating a College - Univ and the building of the Front Quad

Thursday 10 July

Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street †

Coffee/tea 7.30pm, talk 8pm

The building of the front quad at University College – with its frontage on the High Street – took from the 1630s to the 1670s. In that time, designs fell by the wayside, money was hard to find and the Civil War caused major interruption. Above all there was the narrow escape of the very fine stained glass in the chapel by the Van Linge brothers. **Dr Robin Darwall-Smith**, archivist of University College, follows this long project through from design to completion and tells a story with many a twist and turn.

Members-only visits

Tickets needed for these events: bookings by 7 April

Boars Hill – walking with poets

Wednesday 21 May, 5.30pm

Sunday 25 May, 2.30pm

Tickets: £5

In 1842, the poet and academic Arthur Clough began taking undergraduates and friends for walks round Oxford, including Boars Hill. One of them, Matthew Arnold, subsequently wrote the poem 'Thyrsis' in memory of Clough, gaining inspiration from 'the signal elm' on the 'crown of the hill'. The poem changed the history of Boars Hill. A succession of poets from Robert Bridges and John Masefield to Robert Graves and Edmund Blunden made their homes there. On this walk, **Philip Stewart**, a local resident and Oxford academic, will take us to 'the signal elm' and point out the homes of some of the poets inspired by Boars Hill.

Windsor Castle – 1,000 years of history

Wednesday 4 June 8.30am

Tickets: £35

Windsor Castle is the oldest and largest occupied castle in the world and the Queen's official residence. The castle covers some 13 acres and contains the great apartments of state, furnished with treasures from the royal collection. The tour will also take in Queen Mary's Doll's House, a miniature masterpiece, and the superb St George's Chapel, where ten monarchs are buried. In addition, there will be a short tour of the royal archives with a special guide, followed by tea.

The ticket price includes return coach travel from Water Eaton Park and Ride, entry to the Castle and the tour of the archives.

Ripon College Cuddesdon

Monday 16 June, 2pm

Tickets: £8

The new award-winning Edward King chapel is a stunning modern building and the centrepiece of the visit. Prior to the tour, **Martyn Percy**, Principal of the College, will give a talk in the new Harriet Monsell lecture theatre about the College's history, ecclesiastical and architectural development and its vision of the future. Refreshments will be served at the end of the tour. Please indicate on the booking form if you are willing to offer a lift or whether you need one to attend.



A walk on the Welsh side

Sunday 6 July, 2pm

Wednesday 9 July, 2.30pm

Tuesday 15 July, 6pm

Ticket: £5

In the centenary year of the birth of Dylan Thomas – a poet with Oxford links – this city centre walk pays tribute to the work of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Gerald of Wales, TE Lawrence, Dylan Thomas and an incalculable number of Joneses in Oxford! Led by local historian, **Mark Davies**, and walking from west to east, from pre-Roman to post-war, expect a two-hour walk and tales of 'rough and adventurous relaxations' and of dragons, marvels and monstrosities.



Blue Plaques in 2013

Eda Forbes, Secretary of the Blue Plaques Board, tells us about last year's plaques honouring four notable Oxfordshire residents and a Civil War event.

Last year's Blue Plaque season began and ended in the far reaches of the county. At Faringdon Folly in April we commemorated composer, artist, writer and eccentric **Gerald Tyrwhitt-Wilson, 14th Baron Berners (1883–1950)** who drew the cultural luminaries of the day to Faringdon House. The writer Sofka Zinovieff, inheritor of Faringdon House, made the journey from Athens to unveil the plaque.

Down at Goring-on-Thames in September our subject was **Samuel Saunders (1857–1933)**, local boat builder, whose imagination and enterprise inspired him to go on to design speed and flying boats and to found the aeronautical company Saro Ltd at Cowes. The guest of honour was Raymond Wheeler, biographer of Saunders.



In Oxford **Father Richard Meux Benson (1824–1915)** was commemorated at his former Mission House in Marston Street. He was the esteemed benefactor of East Oxford and founder of the Society of St

John the Evangelist (Cowley Fathers), the first monastic community created in the Church of England since the Reformation. Our photo includes the Bishop of Oxford who did us the honour of inaugurating and blessing the plaque.

Meanwhile at Noke we helped to revive the reputation of the remarkable genre and portrait painter **William Logsdail (1859–1944)** by erecting a plaque at the Manor House. Logsdail expert Professor Nancy Rose Marshall came over from the University of Wisconsin-Madison for the occasion.

In June we set a plaque on **Cromwell House, Old Marston**, (below) to clarify the historical importance of the former mansion (now 17 and 15 Mill Lane) where tense negotiations were held in May-June 1646 to bring about a peaceful end to the siege of Oxford. The speaker was Professor Peter Gaunt, President of The Cromwell Association, and the music of the Oxford Waits contributed a touch of period colour.



Contact us/who's who

Oxford Civic Society

67 Cunliffe Close, OX2 7BJ

075 05 756 692

info@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

oxcivicsoc.org.uk | oxclean.org.uk | oxstreets.org.uk

President: *Sir Hugo Brunner*

Vice-President: *Tony Joyce*

Chairman: *Peter Thompson*

85 Lonsdale Road, OX2 7ET (558 616)

chairman@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

Vice-Chairman: *Sir Clive Booth*

43 St John Street, OX1 2LH (557 762)

vicechairman@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

Hon Secretary: *Vernon Porter*

67 Cunliffe Close, OX2 7BJ (557 660)

info@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

Hon Treasurer: *Richard Dodd*

81 Five Mile Drive, OX2 8HN (512 607)

treasurer@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

Membership Secretary: *Liz Grosvenor*

15 Lime Walk, OX3 7AB (765 453)

membership@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

Newsletter Editor: *Hilary Bradley*

24 Beaumont Road, OX3 8JN (762 418)

newsletter@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

Oxford Streets for People Co-ordinator: *Richard Bradley*

24 Beaumont Road, OX3 8JN (762 418)

info@oxstreets.org.uk

Programme Group Convenor:

Alastair Lack

83 Frenchay Road, OX2 6TF (511 326)

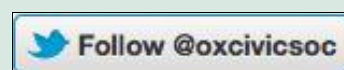
programme@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

Transport Group Convenor:

Andrew Pritchard

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

transport@oxcivicsoc.org.uk



OCS newsletter is published in March, July and November

ISSN 2051-137X