

VISIONS

No 129, November 2014

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*Oxpens – we examine the Masterplan
See page 4 for the full story*



The start of joined-up planning?

By Peter Thompson, Chairman

Hold the dates!

Spring Clean 2015

6 and 7 March – register now
on our OxClean website
www.oxclean.org.uk

AGM

Wednesday 11 March 2015

All welcome – see page 11
for details and page 2 for
information about nominations
to the Executive Committee

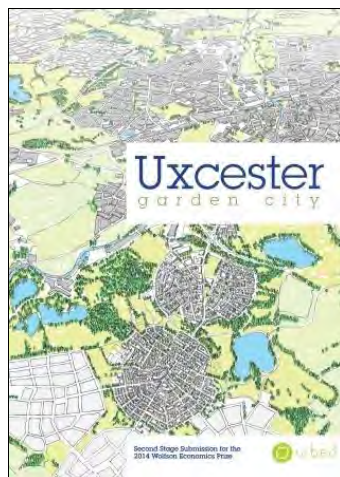
**There are welcome signs that our
leaders are beginning to grasp the
nettle of joined-up planning.**

Planned growth has never been more important for our city region. Which-ever politician you talk to, there is agreement that maintaining, let alone improving the quality of our lives is dependent on nurturing the nation's economic potential. Here in Central Oxfordshire we have immense potential to help drive the national economy but are held back by the housing crisis and flaws in our transport networks.

Oxford is now acknowledged as one of the least affordable places in the world

to obtain accommodation. The assessment of housing needs carried out at the joint behest of the five county planning authorities concluded that around 100,000 new homes must be provided by 2031 – 28,000 serving the city alone. Even if these figures are open to dispute, it is clear that we need considerably more new housing than we envisaged.

Of the five authorities, two have Local Plans which have been made obsolete by this new assessment, while the other three continue to prepare their own. Already, there are protests from local communities who fear the destruction of the character of their towns and villages, and of the landscape and settings in which they sit.



A Garden City for Oxford?

Meanwhile, under national legislation, authorities without an adopted Local Plan have little power to prevent piecemeal and uncoordinated development wherever a landowner or developer may be able to make a case. And with an 'official' assessment that 100,000 homes are required, making that case is not difficult.

Accommodating nearly 20,000 more houses within the city of Oxford than was previously planned for, over the next 17 years, is likely to be a massive challenge. The difficulties facing Cherwell, South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse and West Oxfordshire District Councils are not much less.

Connecting this new housing to centres of employment and social activities, against a background where transport has already been identified as a serious problem, is another huge challenge. And over-arching all of this is the pressing need to de-carbonise our lifestyles.

Under current regulations, every planning authority has a legal duty to cooperate with other authorities in the preparation of Local Plans. Just how this duty is to be interpreted seems not to have been tested yet, but our region presents a crucial test case.

Surely it is clear that coordinated planning of housing, jobs and transport is not just common sense, but is crucial to the quality of life of all the citizens of our region?

Enter the Growth Board

There are signs that the 'joined-up thinking' required may be gaining a

foothold. An Oxfordshire Growth Board, accountable to the County Council, has recently been established with the authority of a 'Statutory Committee', that is to make binding decisions. Its stated functions include (among others) facilitating collaboration between local authorities on economic development, strategic planning and growth, and transport.

The Board's membership includes representatives of all the local authorities (one of which supplies the Chairman on a rotating basis), the Local Transport Board, the Local Enterprise Partnership, the Universities, the organisations running Harwell and Culham, and the county Skills Board; Network Rail is listed as an 'observer'.

It is evident that economic growth is the Board's unifying theme and we do have serious concerns that there is more to quality of life than this. Planning legislation requires proper consideration of social and environmental consequences of development and we shall all have to be vigilant that these new administrative structures reflect these issues at least as well as they do economic growth.

Planting a Garden City

In September the Wolfson Foundation announced the winner of its 2014 Economics Prize, for "a proposal for a 21st century Garden City, which is visionary, popular and economically viable". The prize was awarded to Nicholas Falk and David Rudlin of the design practice URBED.

Nicholas Falk is one of our members and was the driving force behind a series of seminars which led to the recent publication of the *Oxford Futures** report. Our congratulations go to Nicholas and his colleagues, not only on their success but also on their continuing commitment to furthering the debate on our city's future.

Their prize-winning proposal, for the fictional town of 'Uxcester', suggested that instead of trying to create a truly functional, independent 'new town' from scratch, it was much more feasible to develop an established town along Garden City principles, where existing communities are thriving and social and cultural facilities already exist. Oxford was cited as one location

with the potential to form the 'nucleus' of such a Garden City.

The proposals for 'Uxcester' are now receiving serious consideration in various quarters, despite some high-profile dismissal. They do seem to offer a prospect for a route forward in which the inevitable compromises between economic growth, social and cultural amenities and inherent conservatism can be resolved.

Peter Thompson
Chairman



PS We are delighted that Nicholas Falk has agreed to deliver the pre-AGM talk on his Garden City ideas on 11 March – all welcome. Book the date in your diary.

**Oxford Futures* is available at oxford-futures.org.uk and in print from Liz Grosvenor, 15 Lime Walk, Oxford OX3 7AB price £6.50 for members (£10 non-members) including p & p. Cheques should be made payable to Oxford Civic Society.

Executive Committee

Nominations for Officers and membership of the Committee and notice of any business to be put on the agenda of the AGM should be sent by **Wednesday 25 February** to:

Hon Secretary, Oxford Civic Society,
67 Cunliffe Close, Oxford, OX2 7BJ,
e-mail info@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

Nominations should have the consent of the nominee and require seconding. Potential candidates are invited to contact **Vernon Porter** for an informal discussion.

The agenda, reports and accounts will be published in the March newsletter and will be available from the Hon Secretary after 25 February.



The Green Belt debate continues ...

We encouraged responses to the Chairman's views on the Green Belt, published in our last issue. Here are three of them.

Tom Snow, an OCS member, writes

Many congratulations on this newsletter! It shows that the Society is contributing thought and advice over a wide range of planning issues of vital importance and is adding so much value to what would be achieved by the political/local government process on its own.

I was particularly pleased that the Green Belt issue has finally been addressed and in a careful, dispassionate and reasonable way which should convince all but the die-hards.

The Oxford Green Belt Network

The aims of the Network are to protect Oxford's countryside and to promote interest in the purposes and benefits of the Green Belt. We are not anti-development but do not see the necessity for a Green Belt review.

Calls for a review of the Green Belt have arisen as a result of pressure from a business-led and unelected Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and from the questionable methodology and conclusions reached by a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) produced by property consultants. In neither case have their reports and statistics been subject to public scrutiny and the accuracy of their claims for much more housing in Oxfordshire is open to question.

The work of the above bodies is no substitute for strategic planning on a regional and county-wide basis. In the past Structure Plans co-ordinated planning for the whole county. Instead, the government's "presumption in favour of sustainable development", coupled with the extension of permitted development, has weakened controls and opened the way to speculative development by property owners and corporate investors. A Green Belt review would pander to these interests.

Such are the attractions of Oxford that

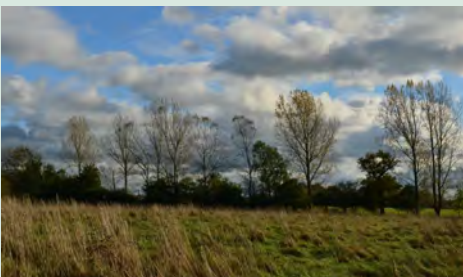
the demand for employment space and housing will never be satisfied and attempts to do so risk damaging the very attractions which contribute so much to the city's international reputation as a place to visit and to study.

Nor should it be forgotten that the Green Belt protects, not only the setting, but also the character of Oxford. The historic core, by its nature, cannot be expanded and will be put under intolerable pressure if the outward spread of the city is not restricted. At the same time, the intensification of human activity adds to those never-ending traffic problems which tinkering with roundabouts can do little to solve.

Too often we see the Green Belt portrayed as an obstacle to progress rather than as something of benefit to all. It is not about protecting landscapes or areas important for wildlife. Other designations do that. It is about controlling and directing growth. It is also about ensuring that present and future generations have access to a semi-natural world outside the city, an antidote to the stresses of urban life.

See www.oxfordgreenbelt.net

Ian Scargill



Campaign to Protect Rural England

CPRE agrees with the Society that some difficult questions need to be answered concerning the future of Oxford and the wider region. The focus of that debate should not be on whether "we sacrifice economic growth for environmental protection". Rather, we should be asking how much economic growth is suitable for the City and the County as a whole and how sustainable growth can be achieved while protecting the county's

most valuable assets – its Green Belt and its rural countryside. Unfortunately, the 'desired' level of economic growth has already been decided upon behind closed doors. The SHMA proposes 100,000 houses for Oxfordshire within the next 17 years and is overstated by a multiple of more than two. It is based on the growth strategy outlined in the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan (SEP), driven by the LEP. The SEP anticipates the creation of 85,000 jobs by 2030. In a county of full employment, this effectively means a massive increase in the population. So even were we to achieve the inflated housing targets, we would not have tackled existing local housing need.

This economic plan has *not* been subject to public consultation, which we believe is unacceptable. CPRE believes a public inquiry should be held, as with the old County Structure Plans.

Meanwhile, although space within the city is tight, that is all the more reason to use it wisely. That includes building to a higher density, prioritising sites for housing rather than employment, and encouraging creative approaches such as co-housing.

We, the public, not the potential profiteers, need to decide whether we want Oxford to be like Cambridge, which has sprawled across its Green Belt, but has not been able to address the issue of affordable housing, or whether we want to maintain and enhance our historic City by protecting its surrounding Green Belt and wider countryside.

CPRE is calling for an alternative vision for the county's future – one that is not based on economic growth at all costs and which, critically, is subject to open and public debate.

See www.cpreoxon.org.uk

Helen Marshall, Director, CPRE Oxfordshire

What are your views? Do write to us – see the back page for the address.



Planning to repeat the mistakes of the past?

Two major plans under discussion are indicative of the risks of disjointed planning. Clive Booth and Ian Green report.

The Northern Gateway

The City Council's Northern Gateway Area Action Plan (AAP) is controversial partly because of the scale of the development proposed – 150% more houses and 80% more business units than the current Local Plan provides for. Such large increases raise serious questions about the density and quality of the accommodation and the ability to provide the amenity space and social facilities necessary for a successful community.

But the biggest problem with developing this site is the traffic – exacerbating already serious congestion round the A34/A44/A40 interchanges, chronic poor air quality and the segregation of communities.

The Northern Gateway AAP does nothing to remedy matters. Tackling traffic problems is a County Council responsibility. The City can specify nothing in the way of alterations to existing roads, or measures to reduce the volumes of traffic already congesting the area. Such is the madness of our disjointed local government system!

The only measures proposed so far by the County Council are modifications to the Wolvercote and Cutteslowe roundabouts. These proposals have been developed to accommodate greater volumes of traffic and to enable safer (although convoluted) crossings of the connecting roads for pedestrians and cyclists. There is no sign that the County Council is either committed, or has the resources, to implement any other schemes. Their vague press statements about measures that 'could' start in 2016 are unconvincing. They have not addressed, or even considered, the issues of air quality, other classes of environmental degradation, the consequences of increased traffic flows elsewhere, such as in Summertown and the Woodstock Road, or the partition of communities.

The AAP envisages that many people will access the site on foot or bicycle.

Unfortunately, none of the measures discussed in the AAP to encourage and facilitate pedestrian and cycle access, for example in crossing the A40 and A44 roads, or connecting conveniently to the new Water Eaton railway station, fall within the capacity of the City Council to deliver. This is either because the measures are the responsibility of the County Council or because they involve provision beyond the city boundary.

We consider that any decision on policies determining the scale and shape of the Northern Gateway development is premature until much more is known about the how the traffic issues will be resolved, with a binding, timetabled commitment that the necessary infrastructure resources will be made available.

The traffic problems must be resolved before development starts. Otherwise, all the mistakes of allowing development without infrastructure, which have bedevilled British town planning for decades, will be repeated again.

Oxpens – the Masterplan

Located in the Oxford West End, close to the railway station, the University and the Westgate Shopping Centre, the Oxpens site has the potential to make a valuable contribution to the life and economy of the city.

The site has several owners: Oxford City Council, London and Continental Railways and the Oxford Business Park each own parts of it, while current uses include the Royal Mail sorting office, Oxford Ice Rink, a coach park, a petrol station, sheltered housing and a range of local businesses.

Multiple ownership carries the risk of fragmented site development and the City Council has attempted to prevent this by developing a Masterplan for the whole site to act as a guideline for use by owners and their developers.

Now adopted, the Masterplan is key to



The extent of the Oxpens site
Image courtesy of David Lock Associates

determining the appropriateness of planning applications. This Plan builds on the policy guidance set out in the Oxford West End Area Action Plan and was prepared through a process involving many stakeholders (including both Councils and the Society).

Even so, we still have strategic concerns. **Does the Masterplan adequately address the implications of the railway station and Westgate redevelopments and the role the site could play in implementing economic growth strategies? We have also voiced local planning concerns: does the Masterplan adequately address city centre transport issues, including cycling provision?** It is also of concern that London and Continental Railways has recently attempted to move ahead with the development of their part of the site alone and we appreciate that this is being strongly resisted by the City Council.

Clearly the planning applications which come forward for the development of this site will need our close scrutiny!



Using their influence – Oxford Strategic Partnership ...

Several groups are now helping to shape a new vision for the city. The Oxford Strategic Partnership is one, as Kathrin Luddecke, Policy Officer for the City Council's Policy and Partnerships, explains.

The Oxford Strategic Partnership (OSP) was founded in 2003 and brings together key representatives from the public, business, university, community and voluntary sectors within Oxford. Our purpose is to show leadership, creatively using our individual organisational powers and influence to contribute to the well-being of Oxford. Our remit includes Oxford's economic base, the quality of life of its citizens, and ultimately its social cohesion and identity.

The ambition of the Partnership is that:

Oxford should be a city in which all our citizens feel happy to live and experience a high quality of life.

We want Oxford to be a world-class city for everyone.

OSP partners recognise that many issues in the city cannot be addressed by organisations working alone, but only by working in partnership. We focus on four priority areas:

- economic development, growth and regeneration
- safer communities
- low carbon city
- stronger communities

In July 2014, Anne Gwinnett, Director of Corporate Affairs at Oxford Brookes University, was appointed as the new Chair of the OSP and has welcomed Peter Thompson as a new member of the Board. Commenting on her ambitions for the Partnership Anne says:



"I have observed the partnership grow from strength to strength since I joined it in 2010, with some very tangible outcomes from its work and an increasingly shared understanding of the key issues and opportunities facing the city and its environs".

The Partnership's recently published 2014 Annual Report gives an account of the achievements of partners working together on the four priority areas. It also outlines the focus of work over the coming year. The report and more details of the OSP, including members and papers from all meetings, can be found at www.oxfordpartnership.org.uk

... and Oxford Pedestrians Association

We work in partnership with many organisations, such as OxPA, on issues of common concern. Corinne Grimley Evans reports.

Oxford Pedestrians Association (OxPA) has been campaigning for people on foot in Oxford since the early 1990s. A group of citizens, frustrated in attempts as individuals to influence council policies, formed the Association to support the interests of people on foot. We now have about 100 members and through our website, monthly meetings and newsletters, are in contact with many more. OxPA is also sought by the media to speak for the interests of pedestrians.

Our aims are to promote walking as a means of travel and recreation, to ensure that the interests of pedestrians are at the centre of transport planning and implementation, and to create conditions for walkers that are safer, more pleasant, convenient and appropriate for this world class city. We often work with other organisations, such as Cycloxx and the Society, to further our aims.

Despite the welcome improvement in attitudes to transport over the last two decades, with the needs of pedestrians (and cyclists) being formally acknowledged in official transport policies, there is still much to be done.

In the past we have campaigned for city-wide 20mph speed limits, Car Free Days, for more and better street crossing points, and for adequate and properly maintained pavements, without unnecessary clutter and illegally parked vehicles. We have worked with the Council to create safer and more convenient routes, and are currently working on a city map for pedestrians.



Unfinished business includes Broad Street, where we have campaigned with other groups for regeneration of this beautiful place. We are now focusing attention on St Giles, pressing for more space for walkers and cyclists, less obtrusive parking and with a boulevard plan to allow visitors and residents to safely enjoy a potentially magnificent public space. OCS members have taken part in the preparatory traffic surveys we have carried out here over the last year. We are pressing for Hythe Bridge Street, one of the most dangerous, polluted and cluttered of Oxford's streets, to be incorporated into the current Frideswide Square plans to become a fitting approach from the station to the city centre.

New members are most welcome. Email info@oxpa.org.uk or write to OxPA at 431 Meadow Lane, Oxford OX4 4ED, tel 01865 779663, or visit our website www.oxpa.org.uk



Transport – big ideas, little funding

With the County Council generating ideas about new ways to improve transport and several major plans on the drawing board, there has been much for the Transport Group to consider. Andrew Pritchard reports.

Connecting Oxfordshire

During the summer we attended a series of meetings hosted by the County on 'Connecting Oxfordshire', led by Cllr Ian Hudspeth. These essentially listed small projects that were being funded across the county. Artists' impressions of a monorail around the ring road and a tram terminus at the southern end of St Giles were shown, and most recently, a 'bus tunnel' under the city centre. So far as we are aware none of these has been subjected to any detailed assessment or costing and they appear to be designed to stimulate debate rather than offer solutions for improving transport in the county.

The possibility of re-opening the **Cowley branch** to passenger traffic was also mentioned, but this single-track line would require substantial investment to upgrade it for a commuter service. A light rail alignment from Redbridge past Rose Hill to join it at Heyford Hill could be preferable.

The Station Masterplan

We attended the recent exhibition on the Masterplan in the Westgate which showed essentially what had been presented last December. Only a new

platform on the west side of the existing Platform 2 appears to be funded, with no monies for the proposed creation of a through island at Platform 1 or the station building itself. The former would almost certainly be needed for the suggested rail-based '**Science Transit**' service running every 15 minutes from Harwell and Didcot to Bicester, or passenger use of the Cowley line. Either would need an extra bridge across the river at the Oxpens, thus removing one of the claimed disadvantages of the alternative Oxpens station site proposed by Arup in 2004, which we supported.

The main **station building** will straddle the tracks immediately to the north of the Botley Road bridge, and there will be a competition to design it. A 3-D simulated 'walk-through' of the outline building did not show any ticket office or means of access to the platforms. No details were given of the proposed cycle parking beneath the Botley Road bridge. The new bus interchange was shown on the existing long-stay car park to the south of the station, but no details of which services will use this hub nor how they will access it.

The **Botley Road bridge** is to be widened and pedestrian and cycle routes provided separately on each side. More vehicle headroom will be provided by deepening the underpass rather than raising the railway tracks. Arup's earlier work on a similar layout sug-

gested that this would require the road to descend from about half-way along Frideswide Square to accommodate the extra headroom and two extra rail tracks across it. No allowance appears to have been made for this in the redesign of the square.

We continue to be concerned that the interfaces between the three separate Station, Oxpens and Westgate Masterplans still do not appear to have been addressed.

Frideswide Square

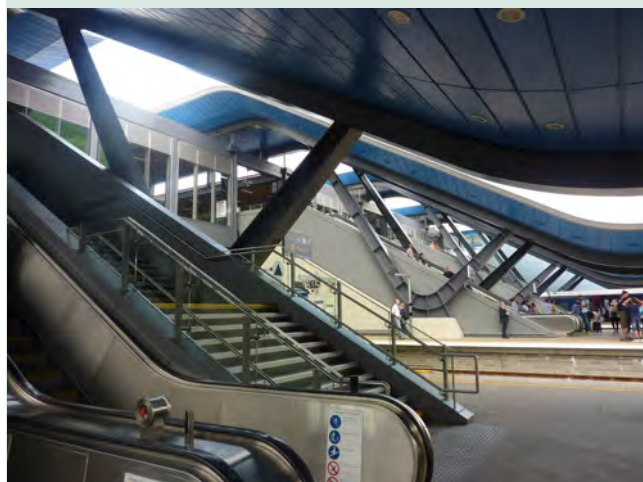
Some initial work has been carried out to reconfigure Frideswide Square, creating two-way access to Becket Street, removal of parking along the eastern side, and a mini-roundabout at the junction of Osney Lane and Hollybush Row. We are concerned that there is still a lack of detail about how cyclists will approach the roundabouts and negotiate the square, in particular the possible sharing of space with pedestrians.

Work to reconfigure the junction of Worcester Street and George Street is causing huge hold-ups along the Botley Road, extending up Cumnor Hill and Eynsham Road on a regular basis at peak times, with cross-city journey times of two hours or more. The main reconfiguration of the square next year will cause even greater disruption and it has been suggested that **a relief road for the Botley Road** should be built, serving the many large retail outlets, the Osney Mead Industrial Estate, and then crossing both the river and railway on a new bridge to provide direct access to the Westgate through the Oxpens. We believe such a road would hugely improve access to the industrial estate and increase local property values.

Botley's West Way

The developers of Botley's West Way shopping centre, Doric Properties, have formed an alliance with Mace and submitted some revised plans. Some minor amendments have been made as a result of the South East Design Panel's many critical comments, but the large car park and increased numbers of employees will inevitably increase traffic and thus the period of gridlock each day. The transport and retail assessments have both been modified, but are still inconsistent.

The size of the proposed development is still hugely unpopular with residents, most of whom see it as out of scale with the needs and nature of the local community. **We have again expressed our concerns to the Vale of White Horse about the inappropriateness of a development of this size in Botley.**



Reading's new station shows what can be achieved



Commuting in our region – what the census tells us

Peter Headicar, a member of our Transport Group, reports on what the 2011 Census shows about the city region’s commuting. The data reveal some surprises.

In 2011 there were 102,000 people commuting to, from or within Oxford – an increase of 8,430 (9%) since 2001. Of these 42,400 commute within Oxford (up 5%), 15,070 commute to places outside the city (up 10%) and 44,510 commute in (up 13%). Yet despite the overall increase in commuting, the number of people driving to work has barely altered in the decade.

Driving to work

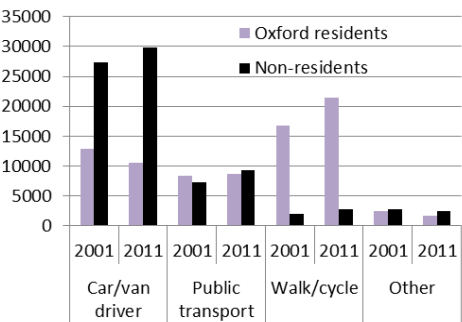
Driving as a share of all modes of transport has fallen for all commuters:

- within Oxford: down 7 points (to 25%)
- to places outside the city: down 5 points (to 63%)
- into the city: down 2 points (to 67%)

This stability in driver numbers may conflict with people’s perceptions of worsening traffic conditions. It should be remembered that commuting is not the only travel purpose at peak times. With a rapidly increasing population things like driving children to school and commercial traffic have grown.

The number of people commuting to workplaces in Oxford in 2001 and 2011 from inside and outside the city by the main modes of transport is shown below. (Note that a small proportion of the non-resident car drivers will in practice use Park and Ride for part of their journey within the city.)

Number of commuters to workplaces in Oxford 2001 and 2011 by residents and non-residents, by main mode



Driving to work at destinations in the city has reduced overall from 50% to 46%. This reduction is more remarkable given that:

- the number of people commuting from outside the city (from where car use is much higher) has grown faster than from inside;
- all of the net additional 7,050 jobs in the city have arisen in the Headington and Cowley/Littlemore areas where car use is highest (parking is less restricted and access by public transport from Oxford’s Travel to Work Area is poorer).



Photo courtesy of the author

It’s quicker by bike

The reduced proportion of Oxford residents driving to work in the city has been accompanied by a large increase in the proportion walking and cycling (up 9 points to just over 50%). However the proportion travelling by bus has not increased at all and for commuting to and within the central and inner areas of the city, the significance of bus travel has actually declined.

Among people commuting from outside the city, the reduced proportion driving to work is accounted for by slightly higher shares of both public transport and walking and cycling. Although the absolute numbers are small, bus and rail use have increased by 940 and 1,030 (16% and 76%) respectively and walking and cycling by 850 (43%).

Despite these generally positive messages it is of concern that the areas which are currently most significant in terms of the number and growth of commuters (from Outer Oxfordshire to

workplaces in the outer east and south-eastern parts of the city) are the ones where car use is highest (80% +) and where little or no overall reduction in drivers’ share has been achieved.

There are however useful comparisons to be drawn between these two outer areas whose workplaces currently account for 64% of all car driver commuters to and within the city. In the Headington area (outer east), major hospital and university employers have introduced significant programmes of travel planning and transport management. These have contributed to a large reduction in driver commuting from within the city, though not from outside, as the table below shows.

If peak traffic volumes are to be contained in future, more will need to be done to enable people commuting from outside the city to switch from their cars. This should be a key feature of the Oxford Transport Strategy currently being prepared by the County Council.

	Sector of Oxford city	
	Outer east	Outer south-east
Number of jobs (2011 change from 2001)	+21%	+15%
Number of driver commuters from within Oxford	-27%	-3%
Number of driver commuters from elsewhere	+26%	+29%
Overall no. of driver commuters to sector	+6%	+18%
2011 driver mode share from within Oxford	25%	44%
2011 driver mode share from elsewhere	77%	83%



Neighbourhood planning gathers pace

Richard Bradley updates us on Oxford's progress.

It is three years since the Localism Act gave communities the authority to produce planning policies and embody them in a Neighbourhood Plan. The process of producing such a Plan has been taken up with enthusiasm across the country, particularly in towns and rural areas. Almost 1,200 communities have formally embarked on neighbourhood planning, 130 have published a Plan, and 30 have gone through the whole process and have a Plan in place.

Despite the complexities of producing a Plan in a large urban area, three Oxford communities have formally embarked on the process: Wolvercote, Summertown/St Margaret's and Headington.

Wolvercote

There are two strands to the work of the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum: creating a Neighbourhood Plan and playing a role in planning consultations about major developments in the area.

By June, the Forum became aware that they were making slow progress with their Plan, so considered either (a) withdrawing from active involvement in the

major developments, or (b) putting the Plan on hold. They also had a choice between a Plan offering a general approach excluding reference to specific developments, and a more complex Plan including them.

In order to make best use of limited resources they decided to move the Plan on by creating a small number of simple, general policies that will apply to all developments in the area, while maintaining a watch on the major developments and actively using the Forum's growing influence.

Summertown/St Margaret's

This Neighbourhood Forum, with 60 members, is pursuing a similar path to that in Wolvercote, that is commenting on pressing planning applications while working on a Neighbourhood Plan. They see the two strands as complimentary, in that an agreed Plan would help inform planning decisions on specific developments. The aim is to have a Plan in place by late 2015 if possible. The work is being progressed through five working groups which are addressing the big issues – community/health, environment, housing, retail and transport.

Headington

The Headington Neighbourhood Form was the most recent Forum to be officially recognised, the City Council having 'designated' it in September. The Forum has 125 members whose aim is to have a Plan in place by late 2015.

Much of the work is being progressed through six working groups covering transport, housing, education, retail and business, character and identity, and amenities and green spaces. A public consultation on priorities with all residents, students and workers in Headington has just been completed.

Resources

All three Neighbourhood Forums are seeking additional members to help progress their Plans. Further details can be found on their websites:

headingtonplan.org.uk
www.summertownstmargaretsforum.org.uk
www.wolvercotenf.org.uk

and on the City Council's website
www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decP/NeighbourhoodPlanning.htm

Well done Cheney School!

Almost 300 young people looked on as our President, Sir Hugo Brunner, presented Cheney School with the **OxClean Shield** for its efforts in keeping the school grounds and surrounds litter-free. Four pupils spoke about litter and what the school does to discourage it.

Rosanne Bostock, our OxClean champion, said: "I am very impressed with Cheney School. It aspires to get the best out of its pupils on all fronts".

Spring Clean 2015

Please support this annual event, to be held on 6 - 7 March. Register now on our website – www.oxclean.org.uk – as a group or as an individual. **Join us, enjoy the fun and really make a difference!**



Four Cheney pupils with (left to right), Peter Thompson, Sir Hugo Brunner, Rosanne Bostock and the Head Teacher, Jolie Kirby



How to comment on planning applications

When a planning application appears to affect your life, what can you do about it? Tony Joyce spells out how to make your views known.

With well over 3,000 planning applications being submitted each year to the City Council, most of us will be affected by at least one at some stage. This may be a new and possibly worrying experience, so we hope that the following notes may be of some help. The Planning section on the Council's website www.oxford.gov.uk is very helpful and should contain all necessary information, since almost the whole documentation of the planning control system is online these days.

At the outset, it is important to stress that ideally **every development proposal, by the time it becomes a formal planning application, should be in a form which is acceptable to the whole community.** Local applicants should discuss their needs and plans with their neighbours in advance; institutions and developers should carry out meaningful consultation with residents, local interest groups and other interested parties. This can alleviate many later problems, lead to a more harmonious outcome and require less complex and expensive control procedures.

Finding out

The first you may learn of a planning application is a yellow A4 notice posted near the site concerned, stating briefly the nature of the proposal, its reference number and the date by which any comments or objections should be submitted. All city planning applications are also published weekly in lists which may contain 60 or so items, but you can register to receive the details of any applications within a stated distance of a particular address (see the Council's website). All residents' associations and other area groups are strongly encouraged to do this. It is a useful safeguard for individuals also.

What's proposed exactly?

Using the application reference number or the address you should be able to find sufficient detail on the Council's website to understand exactly what is

proposed. If anything is not clear, or if you have difficulty in accessing information online, a duty planning officer at St Aldates Chambers (opposite the Town Hall) should be able to help you. If you have a major anxiety about the impact of the proposed development, it is useful to inform your ward councillor and a member of OCS Planning Group as soon as possible.

How decisions are reached

Only the larger or more contentious applications are automatically taken to Planning Committee. The great majority of applications are decided by the Planning Officers as soon as possible after the closing date for comments. Such applications are shown by the letters **DEL** at the end of the application number. The application information shows which officer is handling a particular application.

In contentious cases, your councillor, if contacted in good time, may be able to ensure that the application is brought to Planning Committee for full discussion – and you will be able to attend and make your own points. Planning committee members then vote on the proposals, based on the officer's full report and recommendation.

Grounds for objection

If you consider that some important information, of which you have local knowledge, has been omitted from the application, contact the relevant officer as quickly as possible. Where the proposal directly impacts your own property through overlooking, cutting off important light or in other ways, invite the officer to call and view the problem. Photographs can often make particular points convincingly.

The City Council has a series of policies relating to development (see Planning Policy on the website). When objecting to a particular proposal, it is important to relate your objection directly to one of these policies if possible, so that a defensible reason can be given for refusal of a planning application. Though the Core Strategy deals with major issues and has revised



Special planning controls apply in Conservation areas, such as St Clements, above. There are 18 designated Conservation Areas in the city, all listed on the Council's website

some policies, most of the policies likely to be relevant to local applications have been retained from the Local Plan 2001/16. The chapter on Core Policies is particularly relevant, but more advice on this may be needed. Chapter 5 on the Historic Environment deals with Listed Buildings and the more stringent restrictions which apply in Conservation areas. One of the Supplementary Planning Documents (for instance on Parking Standards or Balance of Dwellings) may also apply.

On highways issues, it is the County, as highways authority, which is responsible for commenting, but local experience of traffic and parking problems is often very relevant.

If you wish to make a formal objection you may do so by letter, by email to planning@oxford.gov.uk or by using the Public Access electronic response form. All comments are displayed on the application website, so it is possible to see what other objectors have said.

Speaking up

If an application goes to Planning Committee and you wish to address them, be aware that the total time allowed is only five minutes and this may need to be shared with any other objector wishing to speak. Try to be as succinct as possible and restrict yourself firmly to the points at issue.



Booking form: January-April ticketed events

Closing date for applications: **15 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 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		
Merton College Chapel Friday 27 February, 2.30pm@£5	
Merton College Library (additional fee) <i>(Numbers for the Library tour are limited and places will be allocated by ballot if necessary. If you wish to see both Chapel and Library please send <u>two</u> separate cheques.)</i>@£5	
Fisher Row walk Saturday 7 March, 2pm Sunday 15 March, 2pm@£5	
A walk through concrete Oxford Wednesday 22 April, 7pm@£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, 66 Southfield Road, Oxford OX4 1PA

Tickets will be posted to you after Christmas.



Programme calendar 'cut out and keep'

January – April 2015

****ticketed events***

Friday 27 February* **2.30pm**

Merton College Chapel

A visit

Saturday 7 March* **2pm**

Sunday 15 March* **2pm**

Fisher Row, a walk with Alastair Lack

Wednesday 11 March 6.30 for 7pm

A Garden City for Oxford? A talk by Nicholas Falk followed by AGM at 8pm

Wednesday 22 April * **7pm**

Concrete Oxford, a walk led by Adrian James Architects

***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 – someone will be pleased to take your place

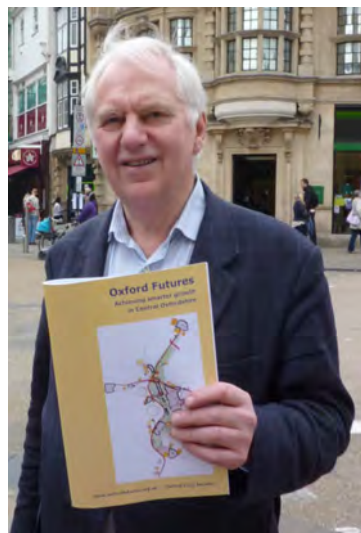




Programme January – April 2015

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



A Garden City for Oxford ?

Wednesday 11 March

Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street †

Coffee/tea 6.30pm, talk 7pm, AGM 8pm

Dr Nicholas Falk, founder director of Urbed and recent winner of the Wolfson Economics Prize, will discuss why further growth is needed in the Oxford area. His report on *Oxford Futures* showed how 'smart growth' can be achieved and here he will focus on the alternative scenarios, including Garden Cities. Dr Falk hopes to encourage a discussion on the overall priorities or goals that should be used in evaluating different options.

This talk will be followed by the AGM.

† *Wheelchair - accessible venue*

Members-only visits

Tickets needed for these events
Bookings by **Monday 15 December**

Merton College Chapel

Friday 27 February, 2.30pm

This visit allows you to view and hear the new Dobson Organ in the Chapel. Merton College Musical Director, **Benjamin Nicholas**, will take us through the journey of how the new organ designed by Dobson was selected for the Chapel, transported, engineered into place, tuned and decorated to reflect all aspects of the Chapel.

For limited numbers, there will also be an opportunity to visit the Library, led by **Dr Julia Walworth**, Fellow Librarian.

Discovering Fisher Row – a walk

**Saturday 7 March 2pm and
Sunday 15 March 2pm**

Fisher Row between central and west Oxford lies between two streams of the Thames and the people who lived there were long connected with boats. In the 16th century there were fishermen's houses, bargemen came in the 17th century and canal boatmen after the Oxford canal opened. A small, close-knit community where occupations were inherited, it was sometimes at odds with the city of Oxford – particularly in the 19th century. **Alastair Lack** explores this fascinating and somewhat forgotten corner of Oxford.

A walk through concrete Oxford

Wednesday 22 April 7pm

Oxford has a surprisingly rich collection of buildings from the last half century which use concrete not just for the structure but also for the external finish. Initially the structure and the finish were one and the same thing. But things have changed: concrete has grown up. Nowadays concrete can be virtually indistinguishable from stone and is a finishing material of great finesse (and expense).

This tour, led by **Adrian James Architects** (2013 winner of the best concrete building in the UK) will look at examples of concrete buildings in Oxford's city centre that span this whole period, from the most brutal to the most refined.



Concrete at St John's College

OCS people

Farewell Ros!

We will sadly miss **Ros Weatherall** who recently moved to Cambridge. Members will find it hard to recall major Society initiatives in which Ros has not played an essential role.

The environment has been her major concern, from the state of city streets and the clutter of signage to traffic congestion and air pollution: she has been an active and charmingly hospitable member of the Streets for People Group. As Environment Secretary and Executive Committee member she has been one of the prime movers in the initiation and continuation of the OxClean campaigns.

With her late husband Paul Cullen she worked for improved bus services, better bus shelters and a more connected network, and she championed better facilities for cyclists. As a statistician, she oversaw and analysed our questionnaires on these and other topics.

Her most recent project has been to encourage a fresh look at St Giles, to enhance the delights of this remarkable space. Her quiet persistence and deep commitment have ensured the progress of her concerns in ways that have greatly reinforced our aims.

We look forward to keeping in touch with Ros and wish her a very happy life in her adopted city.

Tony Joyce

Programme Group



Our warmest thanks go to **Alastair Lack** who has stepped down from the Group, which he has led for the last five years. Alastair brought enthusiasm and a deep knowledge and love of Oxford to the role. We are delighted he will continue to share his expertise by leading walks and tours.

We extend a hearty welcome to **Terry Bremble** who has taken over Alastair's role. Terry is a former Chair of the Oxford Guild of Guides and very knowledgeable about Town and Gown. We are most fortunate to have her support.



Tony Verdin

We've learned with sadness of the recent death of Tony Verdin who served as our **Treasurer** for a number of years in the early 1980s. A man of immense energy and enthusiasm, he continued playing rugby long after his contemporaries had given up. Tony had wide business interests, including owning the Cherwell Boathouse and Restaurant.



Contact us/who's who

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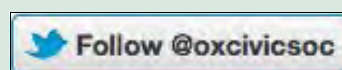
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