

# VISIONS

No 130, March 2015

## Contents

- 1 Chairman's commentary
- 2 Commentary (continued) / Letters
- 3 Involving citizens
- 4 Transport / Cyclox
- 5 Design Review Panel / AGM
- 6-7 Programme
- 8 Blue Plaques in 2014 / Contacts

*The new clock tower at Harris Manchester College. Would the Design Review Panel have approved? Read about the new Panel on page 5*



## A race against time

By Peter Thompson, Chairman

## Hold the dates!

### AGM and talk

**Wednesday 11 March 2015**

All welcome – see page 5 for the agenda and enclosed review of 2014. The speaker will be Nicholas Falk

### Spring Clean 2015

**6, 7 and 8 March** – see our website [www.oxclean.org.uk](http://www.oxclean.org.uk)

### Developers are queuing up to build housing in our region. How can we ensure this development is both sensitive and sustainable?

In the last issue of *Visions* I referred to the Wolfson Prize-winning Garden City proposals, in which Oxford is a hypothetical case-study. These proposals seemed to me to offer a prospect of better solutions to the housing crisis and the need to create successful communities, while preserving Oxford's charms and its glorious rural setting. Getting growth right is just as important for rural Oxfordshire as it is for the city.

The theme of why and how Oxford might grow, in ways which lead to improvements and benefits rather than catastrophe, is one with which the Society has been concerned since its inception. **However, we now seem to stand at a real crossroads and time is running out if we are to be confident that the region will remain as attractive to future generations as we regard it now.**

In recent years national planning policy has been 'streamlined' in favour of the developers and they are now swarming across our region, eager to exploit the opportunities. Within Oxford commuting territory alone a single national developer has proposals for substantial schemes in at least 10 towns and



villages. The fact that five of these involve appeals shows not only the antipathy towards them but the determination of the developers. Reliance on the market for badly-needed houses is hardly a recipe for the preservation of beautiful landscape or charming country towns. Moreover, scattering developments across the whole county puts more cars on the roads for it will never be viable to provide effective public transport to every village.

The only way to steer development to protect what we love and deliver communities which people are proud to be part of is by having robust Local Plans. Having five different planning authorities is hardly a recipe for efficiency, consistency and coordination across our region, and the absence of adopted plans in some districts leaves them very vulnerable. And although local

authorities do have a duty to cooperate, there is little evidence of them doing so in any strategic vision for the region as a whole or for the transport implications to be factored in.

Building the environment for future generations should not be a matter of politics and power-games, but of applied common sense, sensitivity and technical expertise across a spectrum of disciplines. Here in Oxford we have world experts in those disciplines; do we have the sensitivity and common-sense to make use of them?

### Oxford Futures continues

The development of ideas is continuing, with a number of Oxford Futures events having already taken place, or due shortly, involving Oxford University, Oxford Brookes University, University College London and communities around the city. A symposium organised jointly by the Society and the Oxfordshire Strategic Partnership is planned for mid-summer. We are really hopeful that the positive engagement of more key organisations will lead to genuine recognition that we all have to do better and we **can** do better.

Like it or not, the popular view that development is a dirty word and that planning is there to stop it is not going to prevail. **We must show that development can work to our benefit, but lying down in front of the bulldozers will not achieve this; taking the controls and helping to steer is a more constructive approach.**

Many other places are not only controlling development better, they are benefiting their communities and economies too. Economic growth should not trump other considerations, but there is plenty of evidence that places like Cambridge offer more affordable housing, easier commuting and a better quality of life. Many cities of mainland Europe are more successful still. Why can't we resolve not to emulate but to outstrip them?

**Peter Thompson  
Chairman**

**PS Do join us at  
our AGM on 11  
March to hear  
Nicholas Falk from  
URBED on 'smart  
growth' in our  
region.**



## Your letters – the Green Belt debate

### Dear Editor

Our Green Belt network is under threat as never before because of the pressure for housing. The number of new houses predicted is not being questioned, although it sounds like a number thought up by an unelected Local Enterprise Partnership wanting to expand business interests here.

The Green Belt has served Oxford well in previous years and once it is bitten into, will serve no purpose of preventing sprawl as has happened in Cambridge.

I think this idea of 'Growth for Oxford' is flawed and that we risk spoiling it for future generations. We already have good employment numbers and any new jobs (80,000) will inevitably attract in-comers who will need housing, schools, roads and the rest. Oxford is primarily a university city with currently 28,000 students, in itself a challenge.

It is becoming a nightmare travelling around Oxford even without the roadworks. Even people who studied here say they avoid Oxford because of the traffic and work people find it a source of frustration.



Just what is the point of 'driving' the economy if only to be thwarted by traffic jams? There is only so much that can be done by making hamburger roundabouts!

**Shirley Leach**

### The Chairman responds

The objectives for which the Green Belt was conceived are as vital as ever, but the pressures for development are much greater than ever too. If Oxford is not allowed to expand, other places will suffer from sprawl.

Our housing needs were assessed jointly on behalf of all five Oxfordshire councils, not the LEP. They were as much driven by the distress already being caused by high housing costs as by future economic growth.

Growth will come whether we wish it or not however and the challenge is to steer it, as my article above indicates. The key to solving transport problems is not trying to stultify the local economy, but changing the mind-set that transport means cars and investing in efficient alternatives. We agree that tinkering with roundabouts does not solve the basic issue!





# What should 'involving citizens' really mean?

**Oxford's approach to involving local citizens in decision-making differs markedly from that of Lambeth.**

**Should the Lambeth model be the future asks Richard Bradley?**

In the run-up to the national election there is certain to be talk of devolving more powers to local government and community levels. We can expect to see all the political parties wanting to extend the Localism Act.

What does this mean for us? We would surely all agree that citizens should have opportunities to partake in public discourse in a meaningful way. But does that go beyond taking the public's views into account? Might it imply direct public participation in decision-making alongside local politicians?

Civic Voice, the umbrella group of civic societies, aims to influence the policies of political parties and has published a manifesto called *Localism for Real*. One key principle in the manifesto is to "give all citizens opportunities to actively shape the future of their place".

## How to shape our place?

To what extent is participatory democracy realistic? Is it just hot air which sounds good during an election campaign? There are several knotty issues:

- ensuring that a vocal minority does not over-ride the wishes of the less forthcoming. Activists, civic societies included, can be very skilled at putting their interests over;
- decisions must be at an appropriate level, to avoid stasis or severely compromised solutions. National planning surely requires national decision making, regional issues regional decision making, and so on. It would be folly to plan the route of HS2 based on local decisions and yet it is surely wrong to over-ride the interests of those affected;
- democracy comes at a cost. If we want citizen involvement in decision-making then the costs must be recognised.

These are all strong arguments why the most effective form of democracy

enables elected politicians, at the appropriate level of government, to make decisions on our behalf.

But is that good enough? What about the plethora of issues that affect where we live – traffic calming, street furniture, signage, trees, lighting, walking routes, street cleaning ...?

## The Oxford approach ...

We see this played out in the differing approaches of Oxford and Lambeth. Oxford City Council states:

*As an overarching principle, the City Council believes that services must be delivered within a framework of standards where people have access to high quality services regardless of where they live. This means that the majority of services should be designed, delivered and reviewed on a city-wide basis....*

*Community engagement is about ensuring that elected councillors are aware of and engaged with the views of individuals, community groups and other stakeholders. It is not intended to enable minority interests to overrule the best interests of the wider community and the city as a whole. ... the responsibility for the final decision on any issue that involves the Council's resources rests with the city's elected councillors.*

## Doing it the Lambeth way ...

Lambeth Council states:

*Our vision is one of citizens, businesses and council staff working together on an equal footing, allowing citizens more direct control and influence over the design and delivery of services that make a difference in their lives....*

*The Programme puts local residents in the driving seat – a world away from residents being consulted on schemes already designed and scoped by professional officers. We also devolved decision-making to ward councillors, helping to coordinate community engagement in their areas, making decisions based on residents' feedback and being held accountable for those decisions.*

## So, which is right?

Is Oxford City Council being realistic and effective, by:

- recognising that Councils and councillors have the skills and resources to do things;
- recognising the practical difficulty of getting people involved;
- seeking consistency of services across the city?

Can Lambeth Borough Council be more effective by using a participatory approach which:

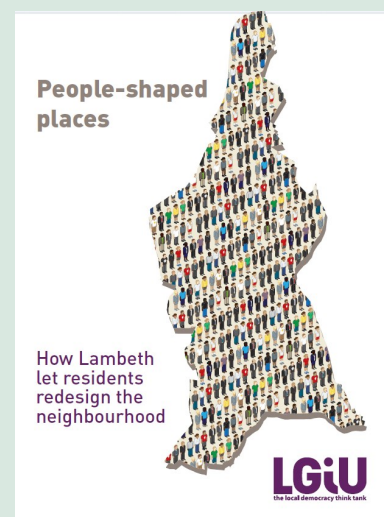
- aims to harness the resources of people to do things;
- seeks to overcome disillusionment with political processes;
- seeks to strengthen communities?

So far the outcomes of Lambeth's approach have been mixed. Participation has not been as good as expected, especially among poorer communities. But the approach is showing the value of tapping into local networks and the development of relationships between citizen and state.

Perhaps the differences between Oxford and Lambeth are not as substantial as presented here, but there is a stark difference in political philosophy.

Which do you support? We would welcome your views – do write to the Editor (details on the back page).

Read more on the [LGiU website](http://www.localdemocracy.org.uk).





## Can trains and trams help beat the traffic jams?

**Our Transport Group has been studying the potential contribution of new train lines and light rail systems to relieve congestion on our roads, as Andrew Pritchard reports.**

In November several members went on a rail trip along the old **Cowley branch line**, promoted by Chiltern Railways to support the running of perhaps two trains an hour. If re-opened the line would link Oxford station with new stations at the Magdalen and Oxford Business Parks, providing a new means for their employees to get to work. The service would almost certainly require four-tracking of the main railway line (Oxford to Didcot) which would help the case for a rail-based 'Science Transit'.

Earlier in the autumn we attended an 'Interchange and Integrated Transport' conference which provided an insight into Nottingham's development of an **integrated transport system**.

At an **Oxford Futures** conference on transport options we heard about the importance of relating spatial growth to

infrastructure and the importance of urban **light rail transit**. You can read a summary of this event on the [Oxford Futures](#) website.

It was interesting to hear in a Connecting Oxfordshire meeting of stakeholders that the County is considering **mass transit lines** as a possible contribution to reducing Oxford's congestion, together with a network of 'premium' cycle routes.

### The station

Little more has been heard about the **Station Masterplan**. No date has been set for the proposed architects' competition to design the new station. It is unclear how the costs of the new station, possibly £100 million, are to be funded, and monies for the reconstruction of the **Botley Road bridge** have apparently been given to Network Rail rather than to the County. We continue to receive support for our proposal for a new station and transport hub at the Oxpens, most recently from Lord Bill Bradshaw.



*Photo courtesy of Graham P Smith*

### On the roads

After a long period of disruption, the reconfigured **Worcester Street/George Street junction** (above) is now open. While motor traffic from Hythe Bridge Street must turn north, traffic from Worcester Street can simultaneously proceed southwards across the junction, providing a double hazard for cyclists, who are permitted to continue east into George Street.

Transport issues were among those quoted by the Vale of White Horse's Planning Committee for rejecting Doric Properties' **West Way** redevelopment proposal.

## Cyclox – the voice of cycling in Oxford

**We often work in partnership with other groups such as Cyclox. Its work is explained by Cecilia Fry.**

Formed in 2003, Cyclox aims to represent all cyclists, young and old, able bodied and the less mobile. Our vision is an Oxford where cycling is at the heart of transport policy and where cyclists can get into and around the city freely and safely.

Our ambition is to persuade local councils to turn 'Cycletopia' in the Oxford city region into reality. Our views are set out in [A vision for cycling in Oxford](#) which you can read on our website.

Oxford has recently been chosen to be one of the cities eligible for the second phase of the national Cycle City Ambition fund and we are urging the councils to press for a share of the £114m fund. The current improvements at The Plain came from the first phase of this fund but we have been disappointed with the

concessions made to motorists and buses in the final version of the plans.

We are involved in all the current transport consultations in the city, among them:

**Westgate:** we are pleased that planners agreed to our requests for a 'cycle hub', for cycle access from west to east and for other requests. We continue to press for as much secure and sheltered parking as possible;

**Frideswide Square:** we were disappointed that the County prefers us to

share space with pedestrians and have not made what we regard as safer provision for cyclists joining the traffic on the new roundabouts;

**Oxford Parkway Station:** we are pressing Chiltern Railways and the County Council for improved cycle access to the station from North Oxford and for more parking spaces;

**Oxford Station Masterplan:** we have attended meetings but await the details of how cyclists' needs are to be accommodated.

Our membership is now almost 300 and we continue to recruit. Members benefit from discounts at local bike shops, a free printed copy of the invaluable [Oxford Bus and Cycle Map](#) and the opportunity to meet other cyclists at events and via our popular online forum. To join just go to [www.cyclox.org](http://www.cyclox.org) or phone 07989 869 995.







## Oxford Design Review Panel – a welcome innovation

**Could the new Panel be the most significant development control innovation in decades? Ian Green from our Planning Group reports.**

Prompted by a review of the Roger Dudman Way student accommodation planning process, the City Council established the Oxford Design Review Panel (ODRP) in partnership with the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) which offers design review as one of its services.

The ODRP's remit is **to promote high quality design** and help to create better places and environments in the city.

Since February 2014, the ODRP has held 26 review meetings on 24 development schemes which have been judged to be major projects or which are sensitive in terms of design, public interest or impact on a locality.

The reviewed schemes have been a mix of those at pre-planning application and planning application stages.

But despite this level of ODRP activity we know almost nothing about its impact on design quality. We do know that the Dragon School decided to re-think its proposals for a new Music School following ODRP

comments and it is possible that the ODRP has caused major revisions to other plans before submission.

**But the ODRP cannot demonstrate the virtues of well-thought out schemes and how design can reconcile the aspirations of different interest groups if its review meetings continue to be closed to the public.**

We are convinced that the ODRP would benefit from access to local knowledge through public participation just as the public, including potential



*The Design Review Panel should help us avoid controversies such as the Roger Dudman Way flats*

developers, will benefit from access to ODRP's deliberations.

Respecting developer confidentiality may be important in some cases to encourage developers to seek advice but public access to review meetings could be with or without access to pre-application early designs.

We look forward to discussing the ODRP's ways of working and ways of monitoring its impact at a symposium to be held by the City Planning Department before the end of March.

## Annual General Meeting – Wednesday 11 March 2015

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

The Society's 45th Annual General meeting will take place in the Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street

The pre-AGM talk *Oxford as a Garden City? How we can achieve quality growth* will be given by Dr Nicholas Falk, URBED, winner of the Wolfson Economics Prize 2014

Refreshments will be available from 6.30pm

### Agenda

- |                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 1 President's opening remarks      | 6 Treasurer's report and accounts for 2014    |
| 2 Apologies for absence            | 7 Reports of Working Groups                   |
| 3 Minutes of the 2014 AGM          | 8 Election of Officers for 2015-16            |
| 4 Matters arising from the minutes | 9 Election of Committee Members for 2015-16   |
| 5 Chairman's report                | 10 Any other business which has been notified |

Please bring this agenda and the enclosed *Annual Review 2014* with you. The Review constitutes our report to members.

Minutes of the last AGM and the full accounts for 2014 are on our website and will be displayed at the meeting.

Vernon Porter, Honorary Secretary, [info@oxcivicsoc.org.uk](mailto:info@oxcivicsoc.org.uk)



## Booking form: May – July ticketed events

Closing date for applications: **Thursday 2 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		
<b>Historic Iffley – a walk</b> Thursday 28 May, 6pm	.....@£5	
<b>The Weston Library – a visit</b> Tuesday 9 June, 5.30pm	....@£8	
<b>Haseley Court Garden – a visit</b> Thursday 18 June, 2.30pm <i>Please let us know if you: need a lift / can offer a lift (circle as appropriate)</i>	.....@£8	
<b>The summer quiz – a city trail</b> Thursday 25 June, 6.30pm	.....@£5	
<b>Wytham Woods – a walk</b> Saturday 4 July, 2pm	.....@£5	
<b>Oxford pubs – a walk</b> Thursday 9 July, 6pm	.....@£5	
<b>Alice's Adventures in Oxford – a walk</b> Tuesday 14 July, 10am Thursday 16 July, 2pm	.....@£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**



### Programme calendar 'cut out and keep'

**March – July 2015**

*\*ticketed events (March-April sold out)*

**Saturday 7 March\*** 2pm  
**Sunday 15 March\*** 2pm  
**Fisher Row**, a walk with Alastair Lack

**Wednesday 11 March 6.30 for 7pm**  
**Oxford as a Garden City?** A talk by Nicholas Falk followed by **AGM at 8pm**

**Wednesday 22 April \*** 7pm  
**Wednesday 6 May\*** 6pm  
**Concrete Oxford**, a walk led by Adrian James Architects

**Thursday 28 May\*** 6pm  
**Historic Iffley**, a walk led by Elizabeth Wells

**Tuesday 9 June\*** 5.30pm  
**Weston Library**, a visit and talk by Richard Ovenden

**Thursday 11 June 6 for 6.30pm**  
**John Henry Brookes** and the future of Brookes University, a talk by Bryan Brown

**Thursday 18 June\*** 2.30pm  
**Haseley Court Garden**, a tour with owner Fiona Heywood

**Thursday 25 June\*** 6.30pm  
**The summer quiz**, a city trail

**Saturday 4 July\*** 2pm  
**Wytham Woods**, a walk with Nigel Fisher

**Thursday 9 July\*** 6pm  
**Oxford pubs**, a walk with Alastair Lack

**Tuesday 14 July\*** 10am  
**Thursday 16 July\*** 2pm  
**Alice's Adventures in Oxford**, a walk 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.  
Someone will take your place!*





## Programme May – July 2015

### Open talk – all welcome

No pre-booking, free to members. Bring a guest to one lecture free. £4 for other non-members

### The story of John Henry Brookes and the next 10 years for Oxford Brookes University

**Thursday 11 June**

*Oxford Brookes University, Gypsy Lane campus, London Road – go to main reception*

**Coffee/tea 6pm, talk 6.30pm**

John Henry Brookes was an outstanding educationalist who laid the foundations of the university. **Bryan Brown**, author of a new biography, will talk about Brookes and his ideals. A member of the senior management team will then update us on the next 10 years of estate development.

**NB No parking available. Buses 8, 9, U1 and 280 from town**

### Members-only visits

Tickets needed for these events – bookings by **2 April**

### Historic Iffley – a walk

**Thursday 28 May 6pm**

**Elizabeth Wells**, Chairman of Iffley Historical Society, will lead a walk through this delightful village describing its history and buildings of architectural interest, including a visit to its extraordinary Norman church. The walk ends with drinks at the Isis pub on the river for those who wish.

### The new Weston Library – a visit

**Tuesday 9 June 5.30pm – 7.30pm**

The former New Bodleian Library in Broad Street has undergone a major rebuilding programme to improve its facilities for readers and visitors alike. Our visit will start with a glass of wine followed by a talk by Richard Ovenden, Bodley's Librarian. We will then tour the library.

### Haseley Court garden – a visit

**Thursday 18 June 2.30pm – 4.30pm**

Haseley Court at Great Haseley was the final home of the American garden designer, Nancy Lancaster, which she saved from ruin in the 1950s. Over the next 30 years Mrs Lancaster remade a superb 10-acre garden. In the words of garden historian Anna Pavord, "There is more exuberance,

style and good design in Haseley Court than you might gather in a whole season of garden visiting". The present owner, Fiona Heywood, will escort us round the garden.

After the tour there will be tea in the barn.



*Please let us know if you need or can offer a lift.*

### The summer quiz – a city trail

**Thursday 25 June 6.30pm**

Following two successful summer quizzes, this new trail will challenge your wits, eyes and antennae. Finish with tea, biscuits and the answers at Lincoln College. Be prepared to look up, search information boards and study familiar buildings with a new eye.

### Wytham Woods – a walk

**Saturday 4 July 2pm**

A walk round one of the most researched areas of the world with a variety of habitats that support 500 species of plants and 800 species of butterflies and moths. Led by the Conservator, **Nigel Fisher**, this walk is a chance to learn about the history, ecology and research interests of this exceptional semi-natural woodland.

### Oxford pubs – a walk through history

**Thursday 9 July 6pm**

The city contains many distinctive pubs such as the Mitre, the Bear, the Turf Tavern, the Eagle and Child and the Lamb and Flag. Many of these pubs are old as the colleges and often owned by them, all with their own place in the story of Oxford. Join **Alastair Lack** as he explores the history of some favourite city pubs – and finish with a drink!

### Alice's Adventures in Oxford – a walk

**Tuesday 14 July 10am**

**Thursday 16 July 2pm**

**Mark Davies'** walk will commemorate 150 years since the publication of the world's most famous children's story. Two miles (with Pleasure and Delight guaranteed), via the resting place of two hatters, University Parks and the "loveliest building of the plain". Ends with a visit to the museum of the University Press in Jericho, where the first edition of *Alice's Adventures* was published in July 1865.



## Blue Plaques in 2014

The Society funds the running costs of the Oxfordshire Blue Plaques Board. Eda Forbes, its Secretary, writes about the seven plaques installed last year.

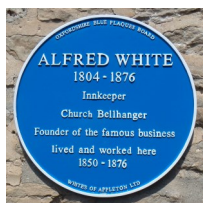
The last unveiling of the season was for the writer **Elizabeth Bowen** (1899-1973) at The Coach House, The Croft, **Old Headington**, where she lived 1925-35 and wrote her first novels. Professor Dame Hermione Lee, the authority on Bowen's works, gave the address.



In **Islip** we honoured **Robert Graves** (1895-1985), poet and writer, at World's End, where he lived with his young family 1921-26 and participated fully in village life. His son William Graves was delighted to unveil the plaque.

Exponents of traditional crafts received recognition: **Larcum Kendall** (1719-1790), who made the marine chronometers used by Captain Cook and Captain Bligh, was honoured in **Charlbury**, his birthplace. Jonathan Betts of the Royal Observatory Museum, Greenwich, and Master of the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers, was the speaker.

**Alfred White** (1804-1876), founder of Whites of Appleton, church bell hangers for nearly two centuries and still thriving, was commemorated at the picturesque Greyhound, **Besselsleigh**, where Alfred was innkeeper. Brian White, great-great-grandson and managing director of the family firm, did the honours. The focus on rural England continued when we celebrated **The Countryman's** years of publication at Greyhounds, Sheep Street, **Burford** (1947-2003). The present editor, Mark Whitley, travelled from Skipton where the magazine is now published, to unveil the plaque.



**Baron Penney** (1909-1991), mathematical physicist and public servant, was commemorated at his former home in **East Hendred**, highlighting the area's association with atomic science. The speaker was Professor Steve Cowley, CEO of the UK Atomic Energy Authority. In **Abingdon**, home of the MG factory for many years, **Cecil Kimber** (1888-1945), creator of the MG marque, was honoured at The Boundary House, now a pub on the Oxford Road. Jonathan Wood, motoring historian, gave the tribute.

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