

VISIONS

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In Dutch towns the cyclist is king of the road. Could we encourage more people to cycle here? See page 6



Fighting for better governance

By Peter Thompson, Chairman

The possibility of local government reorganisation in the county offers the welcome prospect of a more strategic approach to planning – but we are dismayed at the fragmented approach to this opportunity.

A new stone has been thrown into the turbulent waters of Oxfordshire's local government pond. New legislation has finally opened the door to bids from local authorities for devolution and self-reorganisation. The bait for making such bids is the prospect of delegation of more power and, particularly, access to and control over significant funding. The quid pro quo is that the proposals should offer 'improved governance'.

After agreement across the county on the merits of making a bid for devolution, a rift promptly developed between

the County Council and the five second-tier Councils (Cherwell, West Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse, South Oxfordshire District Councils plus Oxford City Council).

Each side has now engaged the services of its own consultant to report on options for re-organisation, though the consultants' briefs seem to differ more in emphasis than substance.

The District Councils' preferred option is for the establishment of four new Unitary Authorities (SODC and VWHDC having combined), but their consultant is to compare this option ('A') with Option 'B' which proposes three Unitary Authorities (Cherwell and

WODC having also combined).

Two more 'comparables' have been suggested: a 'doughnut' solution with an Oxford City Council enlarged territorially to encompass 250,000 – 300,000 people surrounded by a separate new authority covering the rest of the county, plus a single unitary authority for the whole county.

These four options are identical to those identified by the County Council in its brief to its consultant, but here a comparison is also required with the status quo.

With all the multiple-authority options, the proposal is that some functions would be delivered by a Combined Authority.



Our group in Cambridge where development close to the station includes a mill converted to flats

These are suggested as:

- Adult Social Care and Health (through pooling budgets and joint commissioning)
- Children and Families Social Services
- Transport – infrastructure and maintenance
- Strategic Planning in support of Local Plans and
- Strategic Economic Development.

The stated objectives of both parties are similar: to reduce costs and improve services, leadership and democracy. More specifically, it is hoped that re-organisation will enable problems of adult social care to be better dealt with and facilitate economic growth through better strategic planning and delivery of development and transport infrastructure.

Our response

We responded in detail to a public consultation exercise in June. We considered that there was ample evidence of a current leadership vacuum, poor capacity for considered judgement (not least because of the fragmentation of responsibilities), and an opacity in the functioning of existing bodies such as the Local Growth Board, which needed

to be addressed. The public's understanding of the processes and institutions of local government is poor.

But we pointed out that the benefits of managing economic growth more effectively would far outweigh mere cost savings in administration – getting the management right is much more important than just saving money.

We went on to reiterate some of the proposals of our *Oxford Futures* report, which identified ways in which development of the city region could be much better managed. But key issues are: what functions require a strategic approach in terms of geography or time-scale? Which issues can safely and most appropriately be left to local communities (and how are those communities defined)? How can the democratic process be strengthened, to better engage the public, without jeopardising regional or even national interests?

Our response to the County Council's consultation was copied to Oxford City Council as well, since our observations were equally applicable to both the reviews in question.

It seems likely that one of the re-organisation options will eventually materialise and, potentially, this could achieve the objectives identified by the Councils. This should address the concerns we have consistently expressed with the status quo, not least the chronic failures in cooperation and coordination which have been the hallmarks of local development and transport planning.

But a remaining concern is that what really drives cooperation is the will to do it and the recognition that it serves everyone's interests best. Adjustments to an organisational structure may facilitate matters, but do not change hearts and minds. Real evidence that there is a genuine change of heart among the fractious local government bodies in Oxfordshire is rather hard to find. Indeed, the parallel reviews of potential options is perhaps, in itself, evidence to the contrary.

A visit to Cambridge

If a compatible organisational structure is no guarantee of cooperative behaviour, it is clear that cooperation is not dependent on an appropriate organisational structure. In April some members of several of our working groups

enjoyed a fascinating intelligence-gathering trip to Cambridge. Some key issues were clear:

- Cambridge University has been able to develop a collective vision, to speak with a single voice, to engage with the local authorities and to be instrumental in influencing development, for several decades;
- despite fragmentation of responsibilities across three or four local authorities, a collective will has enabled working together to create compatible and integrated development plans;
- public and community opposition to development has been muted – perhaps because of a relatively less-sensitive environment, perhaps because of better engagement and understanding;
- the management of development planning has been placed in the hands of very high-calibre individuals, committed to delivering a real vision of the future of the whole city region.

However, despite our admiration of the way Cambridge has managed its affairs over the last 30 years, an irrefutable fact is that the city still has just as big (if not bigger) a problem with housing availability and affordability as Oxford and equally big problems with traffic congestion! Nevertheless, we concluded that there are lessons to be learned from Cambridge, including some on how not to do things.

The trip was greatly appreciated by all who attended. The organisation of the visit by Jonathan Scheele and a small group of helpers was impeccable!

Peter Thompson

Chairman





An even bigger success for OxClean

OxClean has not just inspired a city to clean up its act, but a nation too.

We are delighted to announce that at the recent annual OCVA Volunteer and Charity Awards Ceremony, **Rosanne Bostock** was presented with the Oxfordshire Volunteer of the Year Award for her tireless work with OxClean. Rosanne is the driving force behind the Annual Spring Clean which takes place each March. She also

spearheads OxClean's work behind the scenes to raise awareness of the litter problem and to press local authorities, schools and others to raise their game.

It was Rosanne's inspiration that led the Society to support her in starting the first OxClean Spring Clean in 2007. This year over 1,000 volunteers collected more than 7 tonnes of litter and recyclables from grot spots (streets, verges, playing fields, parks, even roundabouts) across Oxford.

Clean for the Queen

Rosanne's experience of running our campaign led to her involvement with this year's Clean for the Queen national event that marked the Queen's 90th birthday celebrations. This was held in coordination with OxClean's Spring Clean over the first weekend in March. The event was such a success it is set to become a regular annual event. Rosanne will be on hand to provide guidance.

As well as running the annual Spring Clean, Rosanne and her colleagues work all year round encouraging local litter picking groups and visiting



The 3rd Cowley Brownies get to work on the Spring Clean in March

schools, explaining the importance of keeping our environment litter-free.

Rosanne, thank you on behalf of us all and please keep up your great work!

For more information visit www.oxclean.org.uk

Save the date!

OxClean 2017 will be on 3 - 5 March and will be part of Keep Britain Tidy's Great British Spring Clean!



Rosanne Bostock with her prestigious award

OCS is all about people ...

Our sincere thanks go to activists who are retiring and we offer a warm welcome to two newcomers.



Kate Joyce has stood down from the OCS Executive. She has been a stalwart of the Society for many, many years, including being the coordinator of the Planning Group. She embodies the Society

in many ways and we are very sad to lose her. We owe her an immense debt of gratitude.

Richard Bradley has also decided to retire from the Executive. We offer him our sincere thanks for the time and effort he has put into Streets for People and community affairs, from promoting street parties to leading our campaign for 20mph speed limits.

From the Programme Group, **Keith Dyke** and **Don Naybour** have retired after helping to run our programme of events for many years. Their efforts, imagination, persistence and contacts have helped ensure that these events cover such a diverse range of topics and are well-attended and often over-subscribed.

Welcome

We are delighted to welcome **Wendy Robinson** and **John Goddard** to the Executive Committee. Wendy has joined the Comms Group with enthusiasm and has already transformed our contacts with the printed and broadcast media.

John was, of course, an Oxford City Councillor for 16 years and leader of the Council for two. As a member of the West Area Planning Committee, he was distinguished by being the only councillor to vote for refusal of

the application for the University's Castle Mill development proposal, so we are delighted that he has joined our Planning Group!

Is there a role for you?

We would welcome new recruits to the **Programme Group**, surely the most engaging of all our activities! No specific qualifications are needed other than knowledge of Oxford and we can guarantee a convivial time! Please contact Terry Bremble or the Chairman if you'd like to consider this.

Our initiatives are typically the result of **one person** taking up the cudgels on an issue they care about and persuading others to support them. If you're fired up about something, do contact the Chairman for an informal chat.

All contact details are on the back page.



Queen Street blues

The Transport Group has serious concerns about a raft of issues that impinge on us all, as Andrew Pritchard explains.

We have serious concerns about the County's proposals for **pedestrianising Queen Street**. If carried out, this will further isolate parts of Oxford and reduce connectivity, particularly from west to east (e.g. the railway station to the hospitals and the Old Road and Brookes campuses) and for North Oxford. We feel it's premature and unwise to consider pedestrianisation before the effects of the current closure associated with the redevelopment of Westgate, and the effectiveness of the changes in bus routes once it is completed in 2017-18, can be properly assessed. There appears to have been no proper technical assessment of the proposed changes, nor of the views of the bus companies.

We are particularly concerned about the proposed new bus turning circle at the intersection of Tidmarsh Lane and New Road, an already congested intersection, made more dangerous by the entrance to Worcester Street car park.

There appears to be no logic behind the associated proposed changes in **bus destinations**. While no network will be able to serve all destinations, the proposed changes would do little to address the severe problems of circulation by public transport within the city. There is still no indication of how the 40% increase in customers and staff at the new Westgate centre will reach it, though a suggestion was made at the recent Oxford Business Forum that driverless pods might operate between the railway station and Westgate.

This forum '**The future for transport in Oxford**', concentrated mainly on unlocking research funding for speculative projects rather than solving existing problems. Other projects discussed included the 'hydrogen market' (for hydrogen-fuelled vehicles, though a bus using this technology was said to cost £1 million, compared to £160,000 for a conventional one, and hybrid buses

were more expensive to maintain), driverless technology and an underground expressway using ultra-light vehicles.

There appears to be little tangible progress on the proposed new **Park & Ride** sites. We have noted that only one-fifth of commuters at whom the Eynsham P&R site is aimed wish to continue to central Oxford, raising questions about its viability. There was no mention of the Rapid Transit System suggested in LTP4, but discussion after the meeting with Ian Hudspeth revealed that work was 'continuing' on possible routes, though these would not be related to achieving rapid journey times, which are surely essential to getting drivers out of their cars.



One of the new colour-coded buses

Photo courtesy of Aubrey Morandarte, WLTM Transport Blog

The most visible result so far of LTP4 is painting buses different colours to designate services on different 'premium bus routes', though maintenance requirements often seem to produce different coloured buses on the same service. Completion of installation of the new bus indicator system, promised in notices in buses by the end of May, is now scheduled for mid-July.

On the rails

Network Rail spoke enthusiastically about the proposed new **Heathrow rail link** from Reading (journey time 26 minutes) with trains every 15 minutes, though bus company

representatives pointed out that coach journey times from Oxford are already competitive. The Network Rail representative was unaware of our suggestions for a transport hub at the Oxpens. They regard the current station Masterplan as a long-term project. Other sources suggest that work may not start until after 2020, though there is some confusion.

The proposal by Chiltern Rail to extend services along part of the **Cowley branch** has been widely publicised, but we were told that there is no guarantee that this will happen. Some expensive remodelling of the junction at Kennington would be needed.

On two wheels

The effects of the closure of **Queen Street** on cycle routes appear to have been neglected and we are very disappointed at the absence of segregated provision for cyclists along **Headley Way**, supposedly a premium cycle route. An opportunity to provide a safe cycle path between the Northern Gateway and Oxford Parkway alongside the railway has not been taken, though a bridge for the public right of way across the golf course has been provided by Network Rail.

We have complained about the physical effort required to place cycles in the upper level of stands provided at **Oxford Parkway** station.

'Cycle land', an informal community of bike sharers, has started projects for cycle sharing with Oxford University, Lady Margaret Hall, and is looking at peer-to-peer bike sharing to target visitors and tourists.

Limiting lorries

On a more encouraging note, the City Council is looking for freight consolidation sites on the ring road to reduce the number of heavy delivery lorries in the city, and the pollution that they cause.



Winning the battle of Jericho

The Planning Group has something to celebrate – a planning permission and a refusal. Clive Booth reports.

On 19 April the West Area Planning Committee granted, subject to numerous conditions, planning permission for the development of 'Land at Jericho Canal Side', more commonly known as **Jericho Boatyard** or Wharf. This is much more than a local regeneration initiative with a public square, community centre, several homes (including almost 40% affordable) and other facilities benefitting local people.

The project has the potential to create a new venue of importance to the whole city of Oxford. Anyone who has attended a concert or sung in the magnificent St Barnabas Church can testify to the splendid acoustic. Once the church is set in a much more welcoming setting, surrounded by attractive facilities, St Barnabas will bid fair to be a serious concert centre as well as a beautiful place of worship. The bridging of the canal will also create new walking and cycling routes of benefit to a much wider community.

Much, however, remains to be done, because this is an exceedingly complicated project. The landowners, developer, canal trust and local community bodies still face many challenges.

An artist's impression of the new canal side development, with St Barnabas Church taking pride of place (image from the planning application)



The proposed new Manor Place development (image from the planning application)

These include a redesign of part of the proposed buildings, an agreement on the position and design of the canal bridge and a transfer agreement for the ownership of the land on which the community space and buildings are sited. If work on the site is to start during the coming winter quiet season for canal use, work on satisfying the conditions needs to be completed quickly.

Manor Place student housing

Tucked away in the historic heart of Oxford, and accessed from St Cross Road and Manor Road, lies a site that promises to be almost as controversial as the much criticised Castle Mill student flats bordering Port Meadow. Within a metaphorical stone's throw lie St Cross Church, Holywell Cemetery, St Catherine's College and Magdalen College Deer Park.

Almost three acres in area, it is a tranquil oasis in the Central Conservation Area, once tennis courts and allotment gardens. Such a central site cannot perhaps permanently escape development. The City Council has designated it for potential use as student residences or car-free residential development. It is owned by Merton College.

The application which has aroused so much concern is for 286 student rooms with ancillary facilities in four buildings up to four floors in height. On 12 April the West Area Planning Committee refused planning permission on grounds which included 'over-development of the site', failure to make a 'place of sufficiently high quality', which was 'out of place with its character and surroundings', among a long list of reasons for refusal.

Such a decision to refuse requires courage at a time when the government has tilted the scales so much in favour of developers by changes in the planning rules that give primacy to economic growth at seemingly any cost.

Had Merton College chosen to develop the site for its own students, it is scarcely conceivable that it would have chosen to build so many small rooms with such limited social facilities in buildings of mediocre quality in such a sensitive setting.

The application also demonstrates the limited role of the Design Review Panel which was set up in the wake of the Castle Mill student flats debacle. Does the panel focus too much on the narrow question of the design of the buildings rather than other important issues? It is to be hoped that Merton and the developers will come forward with a better proposal.



The wind and the willows ...



Danny Dorling, Halford Mackinder Professor of Geography at Oxford University, recently gave a talk on cycling that electrified our members. In case you missed it, here is his summary of the case for a radical solution to our transport challenges.

Oxford and its county are changing. I was brought up in the city, left in 1986 and returned in 2013 to find a city transformed. Cornmarket had been pedestrianised. Cycle lanes had been painted on pavements. Most of the city was now a 20mph zone. Many things had got better – and they will get better again.

But the city is also now full. It has built up to its greenbelt boundary. Compared to wages and salaries, rents and house prices have never been so high. I have made and lost many new friends in just three years. Most leave because they cannot afford to stay. Without access to the depleted stock of social housing, someone with a career in Oxford can no longer afford a family-sized home unless at least one adult in their household is very highly paid.

Progress often takes a step back as the extreme unaffordability of the city currently demonstrates. New initiatives can also be bad initiatives. The image above shows bikes squeezed between cars on the main approach from the train station to the city centre and the creation of a new death trap. I use it often.

Transport has become congested because there are more people in Oxford. The hospitals have expanded. New businesses have started in the city and both universities have grown. And no one – no one – planned for all this. There is no plan for England's largest city between Birmingham and London. There has been no foresight.

A new secondary school is to open in September 2017. As I write, no one knows where it will be built. In June the city thankfully proposed more housing,

to the north and south, but not better transport links, let alone building housing to the west and east where there is land above the floodplain nearer to the centre. In May permission was given to build on open countryside in Oxfordshire. There will be more homes, but how to avoid more traffic?

A child will be leaving Oxford today who will return in three decades' time and they will also see a very different city then. Change is inevitable. The city and county have never fossilised. These will probably be the kind of changes that have already happened elsewhere, not least within Sheffield, where I lived before returning to Oxford, with its wonderful tram network. Oxfordshire may be a little slower on the up-take than South Yorkshire but that does not mean it will not change.

Gridlock

Much of the region, the A40 and A34 especially, is often gridlocked with traffic. People have become used to queuing and polluting in their vehicles. Ridiculous proposals are still made. The modern-day version of building a road through Christ Church Meadow is the suggestion of putting a tunnel under the High Street to allow cars to traverse the city underground and generate even more traffic. Of course, that won't happen. But we should worry that it was even proposed.

More of the city centre will be pedestrianised, or at least made car free, while buses slowly inch their way through. Many more tourists will come and hopefully we'll learn to spread them out a little more and give them a better experience.

A proposal for six roads to be made one way only for cars, lorries and buses. Cycle routes are shown in blue from Richard Mann's maps of Oxford. Cycles would then have more space for two-way traffic on these routes.





... how to encourage more cycling

The case for cycling

Eventually there may be trams again in Oxford, as there were until 1914, but trams are expensive to install. So what can be done that is far cheaper than building new infrastructure? What is the easiest option that does not require any demolition, that will not attract road-protestors, that is both financially viable and environmentally desirable? The answer is bicycles.

In the Netherlands over 50% of people get to work by bike or walking compared with only 15% in Oxford (21% in Cambridge). A quarter of Dutch pensioners cycle, in the UK only 1% do. It's good news that more people in Oxford are cycling and walking now than a decade ago and that commuting by car has decreased (by just over 2%) – but we have a long way to go to reach European levels of cycling or even those of Cambridge.

Two issues need to be addressed. The first is safety because the perceived dangers of cycling are a significant deterrent to many people. We also need more space for safer cycling. The blue routes in the map opposite, first drawn by Richard Mann of Cyclox, are the recommended cycle routes, but they cannot take enough bikes if we are to attract people out of their cars. The growth of the city's population will put even more strain on the road routes.

A one-way solution

We could generate more capacity for bikes and make cycling safer by making six of the arterial routes one-way to **motorised** traffic:

- Banbury, Iffley, and Botley Roads would be one-way into the city
- Woodstock, London and Abingdon Roads would be one-way out of the city
- the Cowley Road should no longer be a route for cars and vans to enter or leave the city.

This would leave space for **four cycle lanes** going in **both** directions on the main arteries of Oxford. Two would be slow lanes, slow enough for a motorised buggy. Cycles and buggies would travel both ways; buses, cars and vans only one-way. (Motorised buggies have

transformed travel for people with disabilities. There are also adaptations to bikes for disabled people.)

Everywhere would still be accessible by car, but their journeys would be longer, albeit with less congestion as fewer people chose to drive. This solution has other benefits. Junctions are far less complex if most of the traffic on the main road is only flowing one way. Crossing the road is also easier – as long as the fast bike lanes don't become too fast. Pollution on the main roads could be more than halved as smoother-flowing traffic emits less exhaust fumes.

All of these things might also encourage more people to walk to work or the shops. Walking and cycling are better for us than sitting in cars or buses so our health should improve too.

Better cycling provision in the city would make housing on the edge possible, but not sprawl. Most people can only cycle short distances. It would free up space on the roads for the growing population and make cycling safer.

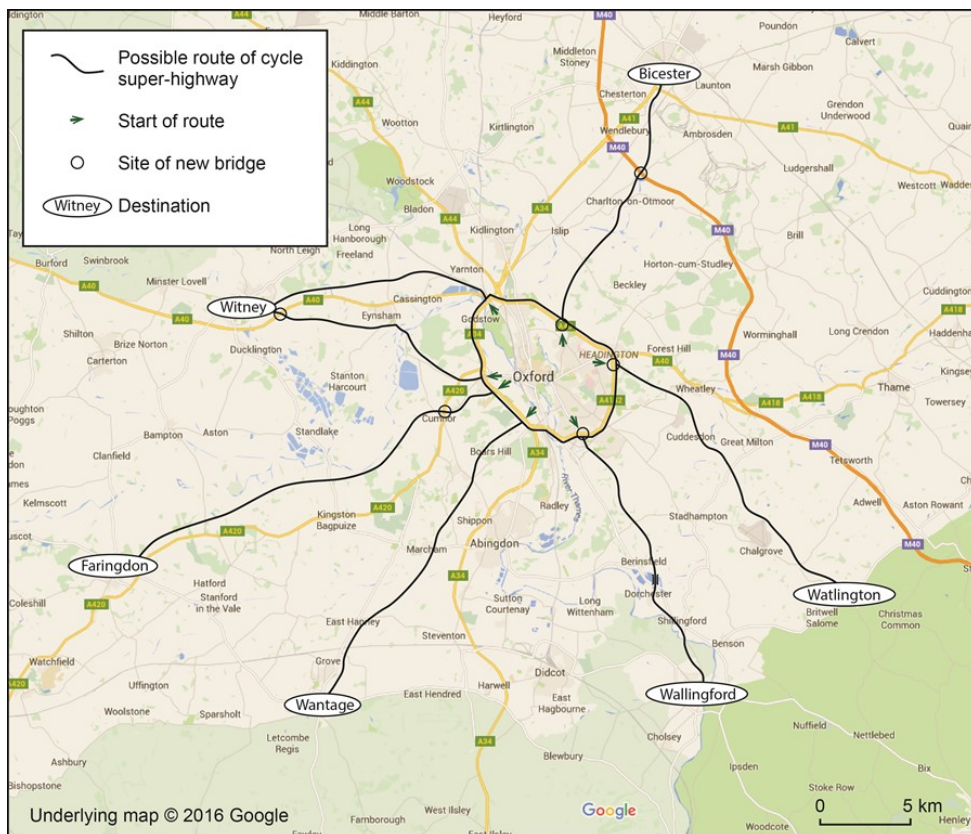
Oxford contains many bikes with almost nowhere to go outside of the city. So where would you put cycle super-highways? Here are seven off-road suggestions, and an improved cycle path around the ring road to link them

Many cities in Europe have already achieved this – but none in the UK. Oxford could be the first.

By making travel around the city safer and easier by bike, you give people the freedom of the city. Schoolchildren, students, workers and pensioners will be able to get about more easily and, who knows, chat and make new friends (or at least be less unaware of each other as strangers in cars).

Simultaneously the building of more housing will not simply result in more gridlock on the roads. Build cycle routes out to the countryside and people need not get in a car to get away, to get to feel the wind and see the willows that are all around us.

I first saw beautiful smooth and wide rural cycle paths in South Yorkshire and Derbyshire criss-crossing the Peak District. They were built away from roads. My children learnt to cycle on them. Oxfordshire children, adults and tourists have nothing like this – until we choose to create it.





The 'Internet of Things' – at our service

Van Coulter is excited at the potential of the 'Internet of Things' to transform our lives.

We're at the cusp of a communications revolution. A fast-approaching interconnectivity of all electronic devices, known as the 'Internet of Things' (IoT), will enable us to automate routine tasks and processes and collect 'big data' for more efficient service delivery. Just as the introduction of electrical power lessened burdens at work, at home and extended our leisure opportunities, so the IoT has the potential for positive transformation of our lifestyles.

IoT is not just about better internet connection. However, coverage and speeds are planned to improve in step-changes. IoT can also work via mobile phone applications, over telecommunications networks and the 'white space spectrum' released by the implementation of digital TV broadcasting.

The collection and massing of 'big data' is perhaps the IoT's greatest attraction. When properly analysed, that data has the capacity to inform innovation within enterprise and policy within government. Informed knowledge provides power to create better products, better policies and better outcomes.

You may have read about 'Smart Oxford' in the November 2015 issue of *Visions*. This article brings the story up to date. IoT systems already work for Oxford in settings ranging from natural ecosystems to buildings and workplaces. Applications are starting to provide environmental sensing and to inform urban planning.

Oxford's floods in early 2014 - the IoT can help us to manage the risk better
Photo courtesy of John Broad



Monitoring our river levels

Oxford floods! That flooding causes hardship, distress and economic loss. Nominet, a not-for-profit company headquartered here in Oxford, works in association with Oxford's Flood Network, providing a real-time interactive, online map which visualises river and stream levels in and around Oxford. This pilot of an IoT application in Oxford shows how technology can be a part of flood defence systems anywhere. (www.nominet.uk/emerging-technology/internet-of-things-tools/iot-registry/)

The creation of this extensive local early-warning system brings practical benefit for residents in flood-prone areas. In time the data collected by the new system will inform a greater understanding of the interaction of water flows between Oxford's many streams and rivers. This improved understanding will inform urban planners and help target scarce funds in improving resilience to flooding.

Controlling costs

Utility companies, water, gas and electricity, have long wanted to drive down costs through remotely-read meters. Complementing this, government is pressing for better resource management – leading to lower use of energy and water, thus helping reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Importantly, we can – through an informed change in consumption – seize an opportunity to lower the cost of our utilities bills. (www.uswitch.com/gas-electricity/guides/smart-meters-explained/)

Managing parking

Something I've spoken about frequently is the imperfect way parking is allocated in Oxford. Westminster City Council is using IoT to monitor real-time parking availability. In parts of central London, monitoring is by individual parking bays. Information is made available to drivers via a free mobile application. This advises drivers where parking is currently available – and where no parking is to be had. This reduces delay, frustration, congestion and harmful emissions. Importantly, the application increases productivity – much to the benefit of local businesses. (www.westminster.gov.uk/parkright)

Measuring air quality

The levels of pollutants from motor vehicles in Oxford mean that parts of the city miss EU targets for air quality. Congestion is a regular problem. A buoyant tourism market adds to that congestion, with further disruption of traffic flow – amplifying exhaust pollution. Oxford's narrow inner city roads create pollution traps, concentrating emissions in places with heavy foot-fall. IoT devices can measure pollution, alert people to risks and raise possibilities of diverting traffic through road active signs and mobile device applications.

Mid-priced air quality sensors are small enough to be deployed cost-effectively and accurate enough to be reliable. From £100 per device they could be put on buses, bikes and even a child's buggy. A fleet of devices crossing the city could identify the location and time of pollution hot-spots not detected by static monitors. Over time, mobile monitoring would result in data that better define our pollution problem in terms of place, time and range of pollutants. So, for example, cyclists carrying a device might reconsider how they get to work to reduce exposure to pollutants. (www.wearesalt.org/the-new-project-using-boris-bikes-to-map-air-quality/)

This article is a brief summary of the possibilities and some of the things already happening. It's written in a personal capacity. You can keep up to date on progress in Oxford via www.oxfordsmartcity.uk

Van Coulter is City Councillor for Barton & Sandhills



Time to grow UP?

One of our members, retired economist Charles Young, makes the case for building upwards to mitigate our housing shortage.

It is a long-standing urban myth that Oxford is the least affordable city in the UK. In fact, the median Oxford house sold last year for just under 14 times median Oxford gross earnings, compared to 14.5 for greater London and just under 16 for Cambridge.

But whether we are the least affordable or second or even third least affordable, it is very clear that the shortage, and consequent high cost, of housing constitutes Oxford's toughest challenge. Oxford has a high proportion of workers in health and education (17% of the workforce, more than double the national average). The high cost of living in the capital is partially compensated by a London allowance, but in the other cities where housing costs have raced ahead of the national average (Cambridge, Oxford, Brighton), no such compensation is available. Consequently there is every incentive for talented workers to look for jobs elsewhere, knowing that their pay will be the same and their housing costs lower.

One of the most alarming manifestations of this is the threat to educational standards. Teachers can't afford to live here. Oxford, of all places, is dragging down the country's average educational attainment: only 51% of pupils in Oxford's state schools got grades of A*-C in their GCSEs in 2010-2014, compared to a national average of 59%.

The big commute

Another result of the inadequacy of housing is the traffic congestion that besets the city. At the heart of the problem lies the imbalance between housing and employment in the city. Between the 2001 and 2011 censuses, Oxford gained 14,000 jobs, and it has added another 7,000 since. In 2011, just under 100,000 people worked in Oxford, of whom about 58,000 also lived in the city. (There were a further 12,000 who lived in Oxford, but worked elsewhere, probably mainly in London. That figure grew from 10,000 in 2001 – the influx of London workers choosing to commute from Oxford has certainly been a contributory factor to the surge in house prices, but is easily outweighed by the



Forward to the past: this 1936 block in Observatory Street is an example of the type of housing that can help provide the greater population density that Oxford needs

growth in employment in Oxford). That leaves more than 40,000 people needing to commute in every day – hence the traffic congestion. Many of these would no doubt prefer to live in Oxford, but cannot afford to.

The current review of planning policy will need to find ways of facing this challenge, and preventing Oxford from becoming an enclave for the wealthy.

The policies that hamper us

Although the need for greater density has long been accepted, two existing policies act to reduce density and exacerbate the problem. The policy (CS28) that resists transfer of land from employment to residential use needs to be replaced by measures to promote the relocation of jobs from Oxford to outlying towns like Abingdon, Witney and Bicester where many of those who commute into Oxford live.

In addition, the balance of dwellings policy, which prevents developers in most parts of the city from concentrating exclusively on the smaller flats that are all that many buyers can afford, has no place in a city that is already amply endowed with expensive larger houses.

Expanding outwards into the Green Belt seems better than ignoring the problem, but cannot be a long-term solution. The only prospect of providing

accommodation at a price which the researchers, teachers and healers who make up the city's strength can afford is to increase density by concentration on well-designed medium-rise apartment blocks. Few of these exist at present – Belsyre Court, illustrated above, provides an example of what is needed. Some are planned for the new Barton Park development.

Who decides?

One issue underlies many of Oxford's housing problems. Those who already live in the city get to elect the Councillors who determine policy, while those who work here, but cannot afford to live here, do not. Consequently policies that keep housing scarce (and expensive!) are quite popular with much of the electorate.

While lip-service is always paid to the need for greater density, any project that provides it meets fierce opposition. Overcoming that opposition will test the political commitment of councillors to achieving their stated goals of reducing the need for travel, by putting the housing where the jobs are, and of increasing density.

Charles Young has developed his views at greater length in The city that won't grow UP, available at Blackwells bookshop, price £3.

Booking form: autumn ticketed events

Closing date for applications: **Saturday 13 August**. 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 at more than one time, please indicate your preferred time		
Shotover Country Park Saturday 3 September, 2.30pm@£5	
St Hilda's College Thursday 29 September, 2pm@£8	
Historic Thame Wednesday 5 October, 2pm <i>Bus 280 (to Aylesbury) goes to Thame from stops in the High Street and London Road</i>@£8	
The Queen's College Tuesday 8 November, 10am Tuesday 8 November, 10.30am@£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'

July – November 2016

*ticketed events

Thursday 28 July* **2.30pm**
Brasenose College, a visit
(this event is sold out)

Saturday 3 September * **2.30pm**
Shotover Country Park: a walk
with Mark Bradfield

Weds 7 September **7pm**
Music for healing, a talk by Arne Richards at Holywell Music Room

Weds 28 September **7.30 for 8pm**
Building Oxford's heritage, a talk by Phillip Morton at Magdalen College Auditorium

Thursday 29 September* **2pm**
St Hilda's College, a visit

Wednesday 5 October* **2pm**
Historic Thame, a visit

Tuesday 18 October **7 for 7.30pm**
The Oxford Trust and the Stansfeld project, a talk by John Boyle at the Oxford Story Museum

Thursday 27 October **7 for 7.30pm**
66 Men of Grandpont, talk and film by Liz Woolley at the Ship Street Centre

Tues 8 November* **10am & 10.30am**
The Queen's College, a visit

*Contact for booking/tickets only:

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

*If you have booked but can't attend, please phone Alan Hobbs.
We always have a waiting list*





Programme autumn 2016

Open talks – all welcome

No pre-booking, free of charge
Help us to recruit new members by bringing a guest

Music for healing

Wednesday 7 September

Holywell Music Room, Holywell Street [†]

Talk 7pm (note time)

Arne Richards is the Artistic Director of the Oxford Concert Party. He is also an authority on music for healing, taking him to Scandinavia, the Far East and Australia. His talk focuses on the therapeutic effects of music and the work he has done in prisons and other settings.

Building Oxford's heritage

Wednesday 28 September

Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street [†]

Coffee/tea 7.30pm, talk 8pm

Symm and Company and its predecessors have been builders in Oxford for 200 years, working with such outstanding architects as Sir Gilbert Scott and Sir Thomas Jackson. The company's craftsmen have left their mark on many of our landmark buildings, from Exeter College Chapel to the Bodleian Library. **Phillip Morton**, the Managing Director, will talk about his firm's contribution to the city.

The Oxford Trust: science takes to the woods

Tuesday 18 October

The Oxford Story Museum, Pembroke Street [†]

Coffee/tea 7pm, talk 7.30pm

The Oxford Trust aims to encourage science and enterprise across Oxfordshire. The Chairman, **Dr John Boyle**, will talk about the Trust's exciting plans to rejuvenate the former **Stansfeld Outdoor Education Centre** and surrounding woodland in Headington Quarry. This will create a new Science Education and Innovation Centre, providing inspirational experiences for young people from across the county.

66 Men of Grandpont 1914-1918: talk and film

Thursday 27 October

Ship Street Centre (The Bastion), Ship Street [†]

Coffee/tea 7pm, talk and film 7.30pm

66 Men of Grandpont is an innovative community project commemorating the men named on the First World War memorial in St Matthew's Church, Grandpont. Local historian **Liz Woolley** talks about and shows her film that tells the fascinating story of the men, each of them researched by a team of local volunteers.

[†] wheelchair accessible venue

Members-only walks and visits

Tickets needed for these events:
bookings by **13 August**

Shotover Country Park: a walk on the wild side

Saturday 3 September 2.30pm

Shotover is the remnant of a once vast royal hunting forest. Not only has it had a fascinating history, it is also a wonderful open space of woodland and heath, noted for its geology, hydrology, plant and animal life. This two-hour walk, led by **Mark Bradfield**, Community Wildlife Officer (Oxon) for the Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust, will give you an insight into its history and ecology. Please note the walking is rough in places.

St Hilda's College: a visit

Thursday 29 September 2pm

Founded by the famous Miss Beale in the 1890s as a hall for women students, St Hilda's is undergoing a period of transformation. Dr Margaret Rayner, Emeritus Fellow, will talk about the college's history before leading a tour of the Garden Building, the library and gardens.



Historic Thame: a visit

Wednesday 5 October 2pm

The unspoilt market town of Thame is rich in history. **Rosalie Gibson and Maurice Kirtland**, members of the Thame Historical Society, will host this two-hour visit which will include the church, the museum and the town centre. Refreshments will be provided in the delightful Barns Centre at the end of the walk.

The Queen's College: a visit

Tuesday 8 November 10am and 10.30am

The college archivist, **Michael Riordan**, will talk in the Shulman Theatre about the history of this ancient college, rebuilt in the 18th century. The tour will include the hall and chapel.



OCS people – and more ...

An award for Sheila Glazebrook



We were delighted when Sheila received an award from the Lord Mayor for her services to the community. Since joining OCS in around 1983, Sheila has taken on a multiplicity of roles – Secretary, Treasurer, Membership Secretary and Programme Group Convenor among others. She has also worked tirelessly for other community groups. We are forever in her debt. Warm congratulations from us all!

Your chance to shape Oxford's future

The First Steps Consultation on the **Oxford Local Plan 2016-2036** is underway and runs until 5 August (online) or 12 August on paper.

This Local Plan will become the main planning policy document for Oxford, steering all future development.

This First Steps consultation offers the chance to give your opinion on the issues you think the Local Plan should address and how. The Council's website holds background papers on key issues, a sustainability appraisal scoping report, and a consultation booklet which poses some questions which can be answered online or on paper. See www.oxford.gov.uk/localplan

Letters to the Editor

We'd love to hear **your** views on any of the issues aired in the newsletter – and new topics too. This is one of the ways we can have a debate among ourselves.

Write to Hilary Bradley at the address shown or email your comments to her at newsletter@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

Please keep sending us your **photos** too. The one below shows members on a recent tour of the giant Diamond Light Source at Harwell.



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 Follow @oxcivicsoc

OCS is a society for people who care about Oxford, want to enjoy it more fully and help shape its future. Membership costs £10 (£9 by standing order) or £14 for two people at the same address (£12 by standing order). See the website for how to join, or contact Liz Grosvenor (address above) or join at one of our talks.

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