

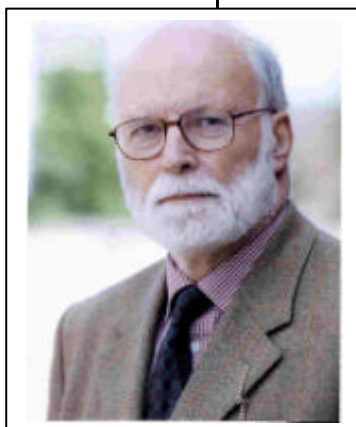
A TIME OF OPPORTUNITY

BY MARK BARRINGTON-WARD, PRESIDENT

I am honoured to become President of the Civic Society, and to be even more involved in its work, at an exciting moment in the city's planning.

The city council's intention to develop the remaining land in the Oxpens area and expand Westgate, and the county council's opening up of the historic prison and castle site, provide an opportunity to remedy some past blunders through improved urban design. There is also a last chance to find space for a new bus station to replace the inadequate Gloucester Green, linked to the railway station if that is moved, and possibly the concert and conference hall, which has been talked about for 60 years.

But if there are encouraging prospects, there are also dangers. The developer's original plan for the extension of Westgate was rightly rejected because it was too bulky. Some expansion of the central shopping area may be needed to enlarge choice. But over-expansion will intensify congestion, commuting and traffic. Ideally Queen Street should be pedestrianised like Cornmarket. A realistic plan is needed for handling the buses, the basis of the successful Oxford transport strategy. The West End, including Westgate, must be planned as a whole and not piecemeal – the mistake made in the 1960s. The developer's revised plans and the studies commissioned for the city and county councils will need careful scrutiny.



The city's economic future is the subject of another study due shortly. The long-established policy of restraining the city's employment growth has come under attack. Yet the city has a dynamic economy with the Government-backed growth of two universities, the hospitals and science-based industry, and the development of the tourist and conference trade. Unrestrained growth would increase the pressure on the historic city and its green setting, threatening what the world prizes. It would exacerbate the existing imbalance between housing, particularly affordable housing, and jobs. Oxford has virtually full employment and is not in need of job creation for its own sake.

The city cannot be viewed in isolation. The planning of land use, jobs and transport in the Oxford sub-region must be considered as a whole.

The basic framework of planning is under review with the current inquiry into the city's local plan and the inquiry next year into the county structure plan. The county's planning powers are about to pass to a remote South-East Regional Authority. The city council has followed its controversial proposal to build in the Green Belt with the even more disturbing suggestion to SEERA, reversing 50 years of planning policy, that central Oxfordshire should become a Strategic Development Area.

As well as the regular scrutiny of planning applications, there will certainly be plenty of work ahead for the society to do.



REPORT FROM THE PLANNING SUB-COMMITTEE

Three of the applications to which we objected in *April* were permitted: demolition of garage and replacement by a house at **4 College Lane, Littlemore**, insertion of double doors into the front elevation of **90 Walton Street** (the Victoria PH) where regrettably the drastic alterations proposed for the interior cannot be refused because, despite its interest, this building is not 'listed'; and the enlargement of the groundsmen's store in the playing field east of **Summer Fields School**, Summertown to create a 4-bed staff bungalow. Four applications were refused: the demolition of the Plasterers' Arms PH at **9 Marston Road**, to be replaced by 17 flats on 3- and 4-storeys; a badly designed plan for rear and side extensions to be used as a 4-bed house at **57 Long Lane**, where later amendments were also rejected; demolition of a garage on a small plot of land adjacent to **24a Albert Street**, Jericho was considered to provide insufficient space for a house; and demolition of **265 Woodstock Road** to be replaced by 9 flats has been stalled by active badgers in a set under brambles in the garden, but they will possibly tolerate cars parked in the bottom third of the garden!

Of applications made in *May*, 3 have been refused: box dormers on **54 Netherwoods Road**, Risinghurst, were too large; subdivision of the garden of **69 Sandfield Road** to accommodate 2 new houses was considered over-development; application was made but then withdrawn for change of use of **196 Iffley Road** from multiple occupancy to ground floor office, with 4 bed-sitting-rooms above. Several others await decisions: a 63-space car park is proposed at **Milham Ford School** accessed from Jack Straws Lane and Harberton Mead; the proposed demolition of **27 Northmoor Road** to be replaced with 2 very large houses; the proposal to build 10 houses in 2 terraces (but with very poor access) at **109 Oxford Road**, Old Marston; and a large house proposed on part of the garden at **189 Woodstock Road**.

Only one of the *June* applications has been de-

cidated: the refusal to allow demolition of 8 garages and subdivision of gardens of **52-58 Windmill Road**, Headington, for 5 houses. Amendments are being considered for **574 Banbury Road** where the proposal is to demolish and build 3 blocks of 15 flats and maisonnettes (a World War II pillbox on the east corner of the plot would be conserved). Amendments are proposed for plans to demolish the Club House, and replace with a new 2-storey one, at the **Royal British Legion Club**, Hadow Road, plus a block of 11 flats plus five houses and 46 parking spaces.

We await many decisions with particular interest: on **The Fox PH** site, Barton, the pub would be demolished and replaced by 49 flats in a 3- and 4-storey building with 51 parking spaces. A block of 6 flats is proposed on part of the gardens of **40-49 Juxon Street**, Jericho – an unfortunate intrusion on St Sepulchre's Cemetery. Plans for **1 Ferry Hinksey Road** include conversion and change of use to 3 flats, involving excavation of a bedroom beneath the kitchen. It is proposed to replace **86 and 88 Old Road, Headington** by a block of 18 flats with 18 parking spaces, likely to exacerbate already difficult traffic conditions. A proposal to increase parking space on land to the rear of **58-62 St Aldates**, already twice refused, has been returned for the third time. At **11 Rupert Road**, Lye Valley, extension and conversion into 4 flats is proposed. Final decisions have not been made for developments in Jericho on the site of **Lucy's Eagle Iron Works** and near **St Barnabas Church**.

*Mark Barrington-Ward, Kate Miller,
Chris Rayson, David Townsend*

TRANSPORT NOTES

Following strong objections from passengers, *Oxford Bus Company* has restored the No 16 bus to the Abingdon Road and Donnington Bridge Road en route from the city to Cowley. Also restored is the service to Herschel Crescent. Another, less controversial, change involves the X13 service from Abingdon now running along

London Road instead of Marston Road, thus serving Brookes University on its way to the JR (although not all day during the Abingdon Road roadworks, which should end early in September). Consequently, the old 13 service is restored to Marston, again as a response to passenger pressure. Well done OBC!

Following the withdrawal of the No 2 bus from Cutteslowe estate, the No 17 *Thames Travel* service to Jericho has been extended to Templar Road, again restoring a much-needed service – albeit not so frequently. Finally, on local buses, the No 107 *Thames Travel* service from Didcot no longer serves Headington Quarry, but terminates in the City centre and is also renumbered X42.

The new direct coach service from Oxford to Paris may appeal: travelling overnight on Thursdays, Fridays, Sundays and Mondays, the journey will take 10 hours including a ferry crossing and costs from £49 return. Coach travellers will also be pleased to know that luggage trolleys are again to be made available at Gloucester Green; they will be provided free to the City Council by the advertising company whose promotions they carry.

Guided Transit Express – the GTE project appears to have come to an end following an adverse consultant's report on its viability although the County Council's executive member for Transport still has hopes for a reduced scheme.

City Centre traffic – the 20 mph speed limit in the City centre should be in force soon. As it will rely on drivers obeying the signs and an AA spokesman has admitted that most drivers won't, it remains to be seen how effective this can be. *David Townsend*

OXFORDSHIRE BLUE PLAQUES

The total number of Blue Plaques erected in the city and the county now stands at 21, with the latest commemorations to be found at these locations:

16 James Street, Cowley, where **William Morris, Lord Nuffield**, lived with his parents and made bicycles before going on to greater things. His philanthropic gifts amounted to £30m – equivalent to £700m today – donated to charities, hospitals and Nuffield College. He set up Britain's largest charitable trust, the Nuffield Foundation.

The Oxford University Sports Ground, Ifley Road, where **Roger Bannister** ran his famous mile in 1954. Sir Roger himself unveiled the plaque before going on to receive the Honorary Freedom of the City in the Town Hall.

Foxcombe Hall, Boars Hill (now the Open University), to commemorate **Ripon Hall**, the Anglican Theological College, housed there 1933–1975 before merging with the college at Cuddesdon founded by Bishop Wilberforce. The event formed part of the celebrations organised by Ripon College to mark 150 years of England's oldest and most famous theological college.

2 Bradmore Road, where **Walter Pater**, scholar and author lived with his sisters from 1869 –1885. Pater's religious scepticism and aesthetic values made a huge impact on his coterie and on later writers; he taught Gerard Manley Hopkins and Oscar Wilde. **Clara Pater** also is honoured on the plaque: she played a crucial part in the establishment of Somerville and LMH and became resident tutor in Classics at Somerville, one of the first 19C women to occupy such a position.

Eda Forbes

DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL OF THE TOWN HALL

Most of us will be familiar with the front-of-house parts of Oxford's Town Hall, and some will have met in a committee room or ventured into the public gallery of the Council Chamber, but fewer will know the Old Court Room with its barristers' and judges' rooms, and the associated police station and cells. Much of this extensive site (from The High to Blue Boar Street)

is a rabbit warren of offices, storage and miscellaneous spaces, now seriously under-utilised, and with the Museum of Oxford squeezed into one corner. Annual running costs to the City Council are around £450,000.

At our public meeting on 27 May, Councillor Maureen Christian outlined the City Council's aspirations to make better use of the site, providing some attractive modern additions to the social and cultural life of the city, and some compensating revenue from this major central asset. Alan Berman of Berman Guedes Stretton Architects then explained the Feasibility Study that his firm has completed.

The possibilities are most exciting. Because St Aldates slopes down from Carfax, a level entrance can be achieved from the High, through the present Payments and Parking Shop. Re-opening other entrances from Blue Boar Street would give access to lower floors, and the whole complex could become much easier to operate and visitor friendly. It could be possible to accommodate modern music and dance venues, exhibition and display spaces, better conference and meeting rooms and extensions to the Museum of Oxford, together with some retail and café facilities and a public information office – all without major structural alterations to the listed buildings or changes in the historic fabric. The main hall could be made more suitable for concerts, and the traditional civic functions would continue in a more accessible and welcoming way. The study suggests increased revenue of the same order as present running costs. The capital cost is estimated at around £9m.

Before a bid for capital assistance from the Heritage Lottery Fund can be put together, further development studies are necessary, and the new City Council has agreed that these should continue. For further details, use the links to Town Hall and Development on www.oxford.gov.uk or contact Jane Lubbock at the Town Hall on 01865 252218.

Tony Joyce

A CRITICAL LOOK AT OXFORD CITY CENTRE

1) Cornmarket certainly feels more established: the new perches are well used, but their stylish litter bins appear vulnerable. Other improvements are urgently needed – the ugly double telephone boxes are a blight and obstruction. Cycle racks have disappeared from Cornmarket whereas more are needed centrally. And ongoing maintenance is essential for the repair of damaged perches and the replacement of broken lights beneath the seats.

2) Bonn Square – The City plans to make Bonn Square more accessible and “a safer, cleaner and more attractive place that is open to everyone”. One proposal makes the Square level with the surrounding streets; an obvious cycling short cut, such use would destroy the Square's ambience. The other proposal maintains the elevated monument, with a ramped access at the rear of the site. This would offer more seating space, unavailable in the ground level scheme.

Currently, the space is unkempt and the frontage wall seating is today largely concealed behind a portable sandwich bar.

3) Broad Street – a place or a road? The foot traffic in Broad Street far exceeds the available pathways, mostly used by disaffected tourists. This public space urgently needs re-definition.

Paul Cullen

CITY CENTRE SIGNAGE REVIEW

Have you ever thought that there are too many road signs in central Oxford, and wanted to do something about it? We are organising a team of people to survey the central streets in August. If you would like to help and can spare a few hours then we would like to hear from you.

The County Council is responsible for City road signs and we have discussed our survey with them. We will be compiling the results into a report that we will present in the autumn.

For further details, please contact Ros Weatherall or Paul Cullen on 01865 426805, leaving a contact number on the answerphone if necessary.

PORTRAIT SCULPTURE EXHIBITION

The Summer Exhibition of The Society of Portrait Sculptors is showing at the Turrill Garden in Summertown, Oxford until 25 September. Participating artists are of international renown and their subjects as diverse as the materials used – from Freddie Mercury to Isaiah Berlin; from the ‘Silent Circle’ of small plaster figures, to the two life-size women engrossed in conversation. Many other unusual pieces are on display and most are for sale.

The award-winning Turrill Garden, came into existence in 2000 through the efforts of the local community. It provides a welcome retreat from busy Oxford, easily accessible via Summertown Library in South Parade. Opening hours: Mon & Fri: 9.30–5.30, Tues & Thurs 9.30–7, Sat 9–4.30. Closed Wednesdays.

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