

The Society at Work – by Stephen Brown, Vice Chairman

One year ago in this newsletter, our newly-elected President, Mark Barrington-Ward, reminded us that we were experiencing a key period in the development of Oxford. More recently, the celebratory 100th edition of this newsletter reflected on the origins of our Society as a campaigning organisation. Currently, the Committee feels that it is opportune for us to have a period of reflection and discussion to determine the way forward for the Civic Society so that it can serve our membership (and the broader community of Oxford citizens) even better.

A small working group has been set up with a limited life to make recommendations. Membership consists of me (*Vice-Chairman*), Tony Joyce (*Chairman*), Gordon Balme (*Treasurer*), Liz Grosvenor (*Membership Secretary*), Sheila Glazebrook (*Programme*), Alistair Lack (*Publicity*) and Pauline Martin (*Newsletter Editor*).

The Review Group has already held its first meeting and has now embarked on a brainstorming period where issues, concerns, suggestions and aspirations are being explored. I raise below some of the questions under active consideration:-

Future development plans whether at a local or regional level tend to be concerned with the quantity and location of provision. These are clearly important issues of concern to the Society. However, should the issue of quality (design and environmental sustaina-

bility) be something the Society is actively campaigning about?

I am reminded of John Ruskin, “*The measure of any great civilisation is in its cities, and a measure of a city’s greatness is to be found in the quality of its public spaces, its parks and its squares*”. If Oxford is to retain its unique heritage, how can the Society ensure the quality of our public spaces?

The city’s acute housing problems may (or may not) be solved through new building on brownfield sites and the less obvious, but increasingly prevalent, conversion of family houses to apartments. Although availability is important, maybe the bigger issue is about building quality communities where people can safely mix and co-exist, from choice.

How might the Society address the issues of Climate Change? Is this appropriate?

Why do members join the Society and what do they expect from it?

The Society is a forward-looking organisation run by motivated volunteers aspiring to meet the needs of the 21st Century whilst retaining the best of our unique heritage.

Please support this enterprise – write to the Letters Page; don’t miss the Members’ Meeting on Saturday 12 November and/or contact me directly at 8 Walton Street, OX1 2HG, tel 311535, email Stephentbrown@btinternet.com



Stephen Brown moved to Walton Street with his wife, Margaret, in 1997. He became an active Committee member prior to being elected as a City Councillor in June 2000. Representing North Ward, he became Chair of the North Area Committee for two years, before standing down in order to pursue his professional career. Last summer he completed an MSc in Urban Planning (Transport) at Oxford Brookes University, and is presently undertaking research on their behalf, most recently being involved with the South West Region Spatial Strategy. Stephen is Chair of Governors at St. Barnabas Primary School, Jericho and is Treasurer of OxPAT. (Editor)



Oxford Civic Society extends warmest congratulations and good wishes to Kate Miller and Tony Joyce on their recent engagement



Report from the Planning Sub-Committee

*Update on applications mentioned in recent newsletters – Plans were passed: for development of **British Legion Club House site, Hadow Road**, despite likely parking problems; after amendment, for flats on **The Plasterers Arms site, Marston Road**, and at **120 Marlborough Road**, for extension to the Library of St Antony's College at **66-68 Woodstock Road**; for two 3-bed houses and 6 flats behind **52-56 Windmill Road, Headington**, although initially refused, (with 1 parking space each for the houses but none for the flats, which are excluded from the Controlled Parking Zone).*

*Plans were refused: for the **St Barnabas Church site**; for fifteen 2-bed key workers' houses at **8 Headley Way**; for redevelopment of sites in Botley Road at the **River Hotel**, the **Westgate Hotel** and **1-3 Mill Street**; and for 74 students' rooms at **108 Cowley Road**.*

*Plans are still not determined for the site behind **40-49 Juxon Street**, currently for three 3-bed houses, revised from 6 flats.*

*March brought an outline application, initially refused but still under debate, for development beside the railway line in Littlemore, on the **Dominion Oils site**, for at least 106 small dwellings. A third application to demolish **47 Oxford Road, Littlemore**, and replace this charming old cottage by four new houses, was refused and this has now gone to appeal. A proposal to demolish **22 Summerhill Road**, and*

replace by a 3-storey block of flats, was made and withdrawn in response to objections.

*In April, the application was passed for a new high-level fascia sign on the **New Testament Church of God, Cowley**; this is a handsome façade, with interesting brickwork and herring-bone window-bars. An ingenious, perhaps over-ambitious, proposal at **140 Headley Way** was passed, to build two 2-bed terraced houses as well as a 2-storey side extension. A proposal was granted permission in part, to hang about six long colourful banners on lamp-posts at each of the six radial roads ('gateways to Oxford') advertising festive events arranged by the *Oxford Inspires* scheme.*

*In May, further development on the elaborate **Hawkswell Farm site, Kings Cross Road-Portland Road**, was proposed as an annexe to the attractive farm-house, one of the oldest houses in Summertown. At **8 Charlbury Road**, exceptionally large extensions were proposed. At **37A Jericho Street**, it was proposed to replace garages by a block of 6 flats, to be car-free by design.*

*Applications in June included one to develop a studio at **14 Blenheim Drive** by extending it and adding a large pitched roof; this was passed a month later. Application to develop at **351 Woodstock Road** was passed in early July; this involves demolition of the house, to be replaced by a block of 8 flats, with a house accessed from Wyndham Way in the garden. An application was also made to demolish **2 Blenheim Drive** and replace it by four 4-bed houses.*

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

Transport Notes

Those of you who use the trains will have realised by now that I was wrong in saying, in last November's Newsletter, that there would now only be one timetable each year, starting in December. Like many others, I was misled about this and I apologise, although I think the intention is eventually to have a basic year-round timetable. It could take some time for all the operators to achieve this. In the meantime, there is little change to the Virgin Cross Country trains servicing Oxford. The restrictions

applying to the two peak mid-morning trains from Bournemouth on summer Saturdays, which meant Oxford passengers had to change at Reading, have been reinforced by the simple expedient of running these two trains non-stop from Basingstoke to Birmingham! This applies until 17 September and is, I think, the first time any passenger train through to Oxford has not stopped here. The same thing applies in the opposite direction to the train that reaches Bournemouth at 16.15, but from 24 September this will still depart from Oxford at 14.14.

Those travelling to Oxford station by bicycle will soon be able to park their machines securely in lockers for a small fee, another encouragement to leave the car at home.

Turning to buses, it is very unfortunate that Oxford Bus Company has found it necessary to split the No 2 service in order to achieve greater reliability. So the no 7 Stagecoach service is now the only way for Headington passengers to go direct to the North of the city centre and for Summertown travellers to get to the Carfax area, or indeed, for either to travel from one end to the other. So far, Stagecoach has not said that this service will also be split. If the traffic congestion in Headington can be reduced, OBC may be persuaded to reconsider in the future. In the meantime I am suggesting to them that their No 2 service should extend to the Rail Station instead of terminating at Debenhams.

It is also disappointing that OBC have found the evening Park and Ride buses to be uneconomic. Subsidy from the County Council will maintain a skeleton service every thirty minutes from the city centre to both Peartree and Thornhill, while Redbridge and Seacourt will be served by additional stops in the X3 and 4 services respectively. It is, of course, the same County Council that intends to make Park and Ride even less attractive by providing free on-street parking in the evenings!

The old 'Ring-a-Ride' buses that were confined to journeys within the city have now been replaced by 'Octabus', a joint venture between the County, Oxford City, Vale of White Horse and West Oxfordshire to cater for journeys across all three districts. The new service is branded

'Dial-a-Ride' and can be ordered by phoning **01865 744478**.

Following the report showing that bus usage has declined in Oxfordshire by 3% between October 2004 and March this year, the County Council is promising 'strong measures' to persuade people back on to the buses. Perhaps someone should point out to the Leader of the County Council that offering free parking in Oxford in the evenings and on Sundays is hardly the right way to go about it. It is also time to give serious consideration to better bus links to the Oxford Business Park, which will shortly be home to a significant number of employees moving from Summertown and the City Centre. These could be integrated with services to the hospitals.

David Townsend, Transport Secretary

Community Groups

Liz Grosvenor is the Society's Membership Secretary, a post she took over from Julia Carlisle in March of this year. Most of her working life has been involved in finance including 18 years with Midland (HSBC) Bank and as Accounts Manager for a Property Managing and Lettings company in Oxford.



Liz is also the Society's new **Community Groups Liaison Officer**. Her aim is to bring together as many as possible of the Community Groups/Residents' Associations in Oxford into a working partnership with the Civic Society. She will be making contact shortly in order to establish links and hopes to attend local meetings in order to explain how the Society could advise and help residents to further their concerns. **Please get in touch with Liz on 01865 765453 or membership@oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk or write to her at 15 Lime Walk, Headington, OX3 7AB to confirm up-to-date contact details for any Residents' Association in your area.**

The Civic Trust

Vice Chairman Stephen Brown has recently taken over from Ros Weatherall as Civic Trust Liaison and will report on news and develop-

ments in due course. Meanwhile, our members are encouraged to view the Civic Trust website, www.civictrust.org.uk, which acts as an umbrella organisation for Civic Societies nationwide. As a subscribing member, this Society can benefit by a £10 discount from our 2006 registration fee to the Trust for each of our own members registering for membership with the Civic Trust – in this way, new members will benefit the local organisation whilst supporting the national cause. **Write to The Civic Trust, Essex Hall, 1-6 Essex Street, London WC2R 3HY, email info@civictrust.org.uk, or telephone 020 7539 7900, for a copy of their membership leaflet “Our Surroundings Matter”.**

Publicity

The newly-formed Publicity Sub-Committee is looking for one or two new recruits. In particular, if you have a good knowledge of Oxford organisations and institutions and/or marketing and publicity skills, we'd love to hear from you. Much of our work is practical (eg distribution, informing media outlets etc). We meet three times a year, and keep in touch at other times through email and telephone. **If you feel you can help, please contact Alastair Lack at 83 Frenchay Road, OX2 6TF, or tel 01865 511326 or email candalack@btoopenworld.com**

Are you a keen photographer?

We are also seeking to form a panel of photographers, whose members would be willing from time to time to take photos of Society events and major projects – both for publicity and for the purposes of the Society's photographic archive. **Again, please contact Alastair Lack if you can help.**

Helping to make poverty history

Within the layers of Oxford's history can be found an innovative business working for the sustainability of people and planet. Oxford Fairtrade Co-operative Limited runs a fairtrade shop, fairtrade@stmichaels, located in the basement of St Michael at the Northgate, Cornmarket Street, with its well-known Saxon Tower. The company was set up two years ago by a group of six local women already involved in promoting fairtrade.

With a wide range of products available, the shop is open from 10am - 5pm, Monday to Saturday, and is accessed through the Cornmarket gate to St Michaels, across the courtyard and down the stairs. Its success to date demonstrates that Oxford's residents and visitors are keen for their purchasing power to help make global poverty even more of a historical concept than the millennium-old stones nearby!

OCS member, Mrs Margaret Brown

From the Archives

Ten years ago, on 4 July 1995, the Committee chose a new logo from a selection of three. The old logo (pictured left) had been in use since 1981. The newsletter of September 1995 commented thus:



REGISTERED WITH
THE CIVIC TRUST

“New Logo The Committee have approved a new Logo for the Society ...

Design fashion changes subtly over time and it is important to keep the Society's image looking up to the minute. We hope you like the new design.” This is the same logo that is in use today on the front page of this Newsletter.

Mrs Christine Butler, Society Archivist

Is it now appropriate to revisit that advice of 1995 and reconsider the Society's logo? Do let us know your thoughts. (Editor)

Addendum

Sadly, in our March 2005 commemorative issue, the biographical footnote to **Vic Berry's** article (page 3) was inadvertently omitted. In fact, Vic was the Society's first Planning Secretary in 1970, returning for a second period of office in the 90's and thus offering sterling service both to the Society and to the wider community of Oxford. He contributed to two of the Society's publications, being the author of *Summertown – an integrated community (1971)* and co-author of *Oxford's Waterways (1974)*, which would never have been published without the hard work and collaboration of Vic Berry and Chris Hawgood of the Oxford Preservation Trust. (Editor)

Saving our Trees

In the last decade, an increasing number of Oxford's trees have been lost to development. It is accepted that when blocks of flats or large groups of houses are built on what were once gardens of single homes that some trees must disappear under the bricks and mortar. However, many trees growing in the remaining parts of gardens are lost which could be saved. In some cases whole sites have lost all their most beautiful, mature trees for no apparent reason. Also, front gardens that were an important part of the street scene lose all their greenery to car parking spaces. Blocks of flats and also many large new houses seem now to be built without garages.

It is possible to ask for a Tree Preservation Order to be put on healthy trees in gardens that will form part of a new development. In many cases the request to preserve a tree or trees is a condition of planning permission. This, however, is not enough and only gives a feeling of false security. Not everyone realises that the planning condition no longer applies once the buildings are finished and the property sold to new owners. This is when the trees can be most vulnerable. It is better for neighbours who worry about the future of beautiful trees near them to ask the City Council tree officer to come to see the tree or trees at an early date. Without a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) it is possible that one's new neighbours will cut the tree(s) down without warning. Trees within a conservation area, however, are protected.

Tree Preservation Orders come under the City Council department known as 'Planning Control and Conservation'. They are skilled but very busy people and although they will come as soon as possible if a tree is actually being cut down without notice it may be too late when they arrive. They are inevitably held up a times. It is best to get a TPO put on as soon as possible even before a tree is threatened and before planning permission is granted.

Trees that are suitable for TPO's are usually those that are visible from a publicly accessible place, the removal of which would cause significant harm to the environment. TPO's can

protect individual trees, groups of trees, areas of trees or woodlands. The Council has begun work on a programme to review its stock of protected trees. Some of these were designated for protection in the 1960's. It is intended to resurvey trees that have been protected by TPO's since before 1974.

We owe the mature trees, especially on corner sites in Victorian North Oxford, to the rules applied in the early days. When that suburb was developed the roads were made with curves, giving trees situated on them a special prominence, and tenants were asked to preserve their trees. Every leaseholder had to apply for permission even to lop a tree. Lady Osler, who lived with her husband, the famous medical man, Sir William Osler, at 13 Norham Gardens, once complained that "*it seems one needs an Act of Parliament to allow sunlight to our windows*". The rules may have seemed strict, but we owe the beauty of North Oxford to them.

Once a TPO has been granted by the City's Legal and Democratic Services department it gives notice of the order which prohibits any cutting down, topping or lopping of any of the trees described. Of course, before the order is confirmed anyone affected by it has the right to object, stating their reasons. Also, there are exceptions allowing statutory undertakers, for instance, to fell trees if they affect drainage or sewers, and fruit trees can be pruned.

Sometimes people who want to get rid of trees will tell the tree felling firm or neighbours that the tree is diseased and/or branches may fall and cause danger. It is still advisable, however, to ask experts to confirm this before the tree is condemned. Where a tree is already protected and cutting it down would need consent, then the tree officers examine for disease or danger and will not accept loss unless works are justified.

A tree may take 20 years or more to reach maturity, even longer to reach its full height. It can be cut down or mutilated beyond redemption in under an hour. We need to be alert in order to keep our suburbs green.

Ann Spokes Symonds, with help and factual input from Nick Worlledge, Oxford City Council.



Your letters page

To contribute, contact the Editor at the address shown below, or email ocsnewsletter@aol.com

Copy deadline for our next issue is Thursday 10 November.

from Dr Andrew Pritchard
3andrew3@tiscali.co.uk

Further reflections on transport issues

I must beg to differ from Mr. Townsend's views about Oxford's transport (Newsletter issue 100, March 2005). I do not see what is good about Oxford's world-renowned failure to solve our traffic problems. The introduction of Park-and-Ride systems in the 1970's achieved partial success for a time, but increasing commercial and university development in the centre of Oxford, and of the hospitals, have created burgeoning demand for efficient transport from outer regions and adjacent towns. Journeys of 2-3 miles from the centre to the ring road that take 30-45 minutes are a terrible waste of time, fuel and money.

The existing bus system is largely dysfunctional: most tickets are not transferable from one service to another; there are no system maps, and no interchange system, let alone the 1-hour ticket widely used elsewhere; journey time and bus lanes are wasted while drivers act as cashiers. Large areas of central Oxford are used as bus stations. Buses are major contributors of acid gas pollution that can be just as bad for children's lungs or our stone buildings as historical sources of pollution from horse-drawn transport and coal fires.

Bus pollution could be almost eliminated in central Oxford by having all transportation there by trams running north-south and east-west between Park-and-Ride sites. Buses to suburbs and towns would run from hubs along the routes. A one-way circular system in the centre, including the railway station, would allow trams to use existing roads, and provide easy interchange. Comprehensive traffic control would give precedence to trams at all intersections, thereby reducing the

cost and time of today's journeys, and helping to justify the capital cost.

Fossil fuels can be used much more efficiently and cleanly for generating electricity than in internal combustion engines. Some of our electricity is already generated from non-fossil sources, and Nottingham trams produce electricity during regenerative braking. Overhead wires will be much less intrusive visually than the existing plethora of street furniture and the rash of parked vehicles, uncoordinated in size, colour or shape, that also disfigure cities today.

I believe that there is a much better future for Oxford's transport, if we are prepared to invest in it.

✍

David Townsend, Transport Secretary, comments:

I am not sure what Dr Pritchard means by "... Oxford's world renowned failure to solve our traffic problems". I was under the impression that Oxford was, in fact, world renowned for its approach to solving traffic problems.

Those who propose a tram system for Oxford should explain how this would be financed, given that cities of the size of Manchester and Leeds are finding it difficult to justify expansion or introduction of tram systems; they should also show us their proposed routes. Trams along existing roads would not be suitable for Park and Ride as these need to be limited stop, express services and would not cater for ordinary passengers along their corridors.

NB Please let us have your views on transport in Oxford, however you travel – either for publication here or directly to the Chairman, if you prefer. (Editor)

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