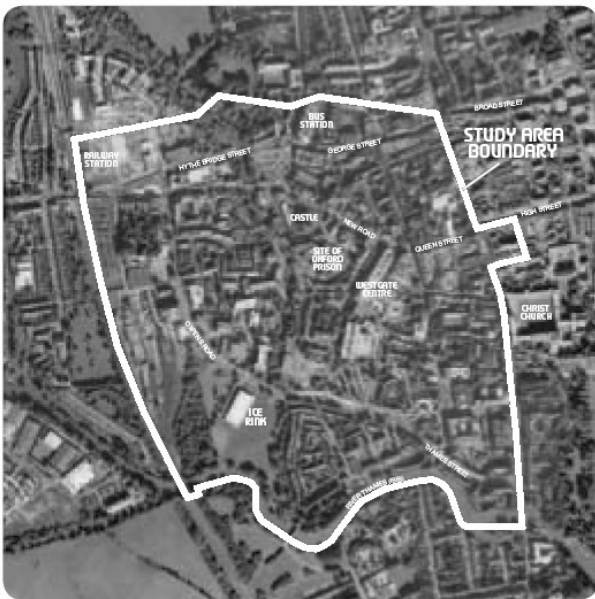


## Towards a new West End – Tony Joyce, Chairman

*Oxford West End is bounded by Cornmarket Street/St Aldates, the River Thames (Isis), the railway and the swathe of development north of Hythe Bridge Street/George Street (A4144). The Castle Mill Stream and its tributaries bisect the area.*

*Oxpens Road/Hollybush Row form the main through route and provide car access to the Westgate Centre and its car parks – in part, a key route to the City Centre for public transport.*



*Area Development Framework, March 2006*

Development of an Area Action Plan (AAP) for the city's West End is now well under way: consultation on a Preferred Options Document is complete and officers are now digesting the responses. It is hoped to submit an agreed document to the Secretary of State next summer, and have the Action Plan fully in place by October 2008.

This may seem a lengthy process, but its importance can hardly be exaggerated. The West End provides the last opportunities within the city centre to tackle some long-standing prob-

lems and it offers the prospect of some exciting new developments to complement existing facilities. The aim must be a city centre better adapted to the present and future needs of its citizens.

Of course, the implementation of any plan depends on the initiative of landowners (including the city council and some university colleges), but when adopted, the AAP will become part of the Local Development Framework, which is envisaged to take over from the Local Plan in controlling the direction of development. The AAP must insist at the outset on the highest standards of design – of spaces as well as buildings – and incorporate existing policies on building heights and sustainability issues.

What then are the city's most pressing needs?

**Housing** must surely be top of the list; here the challenge is to find the most effective balance between market, key-worker, affordable and social provision, not forgetting student accommodation. The relationship of flats to houses on city sites needs careful thought and good design, incorporating effective amenity space and access to green recreational areas, particularly for families. With housing comes the need for the appropriate infrastructure – local shops, post office, school places, GP's surgeries, perhaps more improved primary health facilities; and, for young people particularly, recreational opportunities.

This is where the future of the **Ice Rink** becomes so important. It might be refurbished as part of an expanded leisure complex, or it might be removed or replaced, but what it offers must not be lost to young people in the city centre.

**Traffic and Transport** problems must be another top priority. The decision to retain the existing railway station and extend it back across Botley Bridge into the Beckett Street car park has at least removed one major uncertainty, even if it has eliminated some exciting alternatives for the road network and bus station in the area. Access to this part of the city will always be limited by the railway, the river and the pinch points at Folly Bridge and Botley Road, so new developments should not stimulate increased car traffic, particularly at peak times, and parking provision will need to be carefully controlled. This must restrict the type of any new office development, which is nevertheless questionable in a city suffering from the present excess of jobs over living accommodation. In general, extra activity in the area should provide additional customers for public transport, to encourage extended bus routes and increased frequencies, particularly to and from the rail station. Route development is also the key to establishing the viable bus turning-circles necessary to achieve the pedestrianisation of Queen Street.

Yet many transport questions remain to be answered. First is the future of tourist coaches. Can these be detained at extended Park + Ride sites, with shuttle services to the centre, as at many other heritage cities, or do they need central drop-off and pick-up points – if so, where? Second, what is the future of Gloucester Green Bus Station? It is in urgent need of improved facilities and access, and a better taxi linkage; but if it is to play a fuller part in the local bus network it can hardly retain all its long distance coaches. Could some of these also operate out of extended Park + Ride sites, as at Cambridge, thus freeing the centre of their impact? Do we really need to retain coach parking on the valuable Oxpens site, when there are so many exciting candidates for its redevelopment? Further exploration of these matters seems urgent as the possible approval of the Westgate Development with its large travel generation, draws closer (see Letters Page).

The AAP consultation has aroused or rekindled debates on many other issues:

**Frideswide Square:** A re-examination of traffic, cyclist and pedestrian flows here is now overdue. **Combined City and County Offices** could have an attractive new setting which releases a number of existing sites for redevelopment. Good public transport links from all over the city (and county) would be essential. Further planning would be easier if the unitary authority issue were settled.

**Good quality hotel accommodation** in the city centre remains short, both to anchor more of our too-fleeting tourists, and to support a more active term-time conference trade. A West End location would provide ready access from the rail station and perhaps an attractive riverside setting.

Larger conferences too could support the move to establish the major **Concert Hall** which Oxford so richly deserves, the large auditorium doubling as the central conference venue. The AAP suggests such a development, but of only some 600-seat capacity - hardly an increase (though possibly more comfortable!) on the existing Sheldonian or a re-vamped Town Hall. Detailed study of the feasibility of more ambitious projects is another urgency.

**Worcester Street Car Park**, so valuable for its central position on the bus priority route, as a gateway to the city, particularly the Castle site, and at the end of the canal, presents many exciting opportunities. A Canal Basin, though difficult and expensive to achieve, could be very attractive, as would any feature associated with the canal in a new mixed development. Whilst some public parking may need to be retained within this, the site seems far too important to be given over just to parking or an equally dreary bus facility.

These are by no means all the proposals for the area, and much further analysis and feasibility study remains to be completed. Then comes the difficult question of how much can fit into the area, and overall the major problem of accommodating it in what is verging on flood plain - the perennial Oxford conundrum!



## Charitable Status for the Society

The Special General Meeting of the Society held on 11 October 2006 agreed both of the Resolutions put before it: firstly, that the new Constitution, based on the Civic Trust Model Constitution, be adopted; secondly that the Society should apply to the Charity Commission for it to be granted Charitable Status. Some questions were raised about the possibility that Charitable Status might restrict the Society's ability in the future to campaign on a particular issue. The meeting was assured that this would not be the case.

The application to the Charity Commission was submitted on 17 October and was approved by them with effect from 10 November. We will be writing to members about Gift Aid Declarations in our first mailing of 2007 (see the item on Gift Aid in the lead article of the July Newsletter, no 104). However, it is worth reiterating now how beneficial the signing of a Gift Aid Declaration by members will be for the finances of the Society: our general expenses continue to rise, postage costs are a recent example, and we must be in a position to fund any new initiatives arising from the recent re-structuring of the Society.

*Gordon Balme, Treasurer*

## Report from the Planning Sub-Committee

*Update on applications mentioned in the July 2006 Newsletter report:* Plans were refused for conversion into flats of **95 Green Road, Risinghurst**, and **111 Godstow Road, Wolvercote**. A similar proposal for **The Old School, Wolvercote**, is still undecided. Proposals were permitted: in July, to demolish **No. 2 Hernes Crescent** and replace by 7 flats; in October, to build 8 houses and 9 flats on land south of **Lamarsh Place, off Botley Road**.

In *July* at **2 Hendred Street**, the Co-op Funeral Services applied to alter the entrance porch, for which permission soon came (despite lack of respect for the rather charming façade). For **No 1 Lucerne Road** a series of applications and refusals began, for demolition and replacement by two pairs of semi-detached houses each with 4 bedrooms and a

study, involving carving the garden into narrow strips; since the house itself is attractive it should perhaps be retained: the decision has not yet been made. Hard standing for car parking with loss of landscaping vegetation in the front garden was proposed at **8 Norham Gardens** but we are glad to say that it was refused. A large box dormer across the rear of **53 Rosamund Road, Wolvercote**, was permitted despite our objection.

In *August* and *September*, permission was refused, for the second time, to demolish **9 Kirk Close** and replace it by two 4-bed semi-detached houses. Accommodation for 363 students was proposed on the site of **Dorset House, London Road, Headington**, in large 3 and 4 storey blocks; the plans attracted many objections and were withdrawn in October. In **Iffley Road** a proposal was made to demolish three houses and build tall student blocks, but in November it was refused on the grounds that one of the houses, **No 190**, is of architectural interest and an important feature of this Conservation Area. There was good news that another Iffley Road house, **No 17**, has been saved on Appeal and should be restored; for three years there has been a series of proposals to demolish it and replace it with a block of flats. A further Iffley Road saga concerns **Stapledon House, Nos 214 to 230**, belonging to Exeter College, who suggested a large student development in the back gardens, but nothing further has been heard of this.

*October* brought a proposal, now permitted, for use of the basement of the **Central Post Office** in **St Aldates** as a bar/restaurant, accessed from the street by way of a light-well with steps, railings and a gate. On about nine other objectionable applications, decisions are still anxiously awaited. These include proposals from the Mental Health Trust in Headington for unrealistically large developments on the **Warneford Hospital** playing field, the **Warneford Meadow** and the site of the **Park Hospital for Children**. For **Nos 22 and 35 Meadow Prospect, Wolvercote**, applications were made to extend to the rear and side right up to the boundary, so closing the gap between houses and preventing access between

front and back gardens. Happily, a proposal in the Conservation Area at **26 Lathbury Road** for demolition of an unusual and attractive family house in a fine garden, to be replaced by five tall pseudo-victorian houses, has just been *refused*.

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

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**Editor's Note** - the Society has recently produced a set of **Guidelines on Planning Applications** in which all 8 stages of the application process are succinctly outlined. Designed to complement planning services and to help any Oxford residents involved in planning matters, the paper is available on request from the Editor, or at [www.oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk](http://www.oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk) ▶ **Planning**

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### Transport Notes

For those of you too young to benefit from free local bus travel, changes are imminent on the ticketing front on Oxford Bus Company buses. The long awaited 'Smartcard' is undergoing in-service trials by volunteer passengers and, if all goes well, it should be introduced generally before Christmas. Called '**The Key**' it is basically a plastic version of the current Freedom Cards, available as a Zone Pass, a 12-journey Route Pass or an Any-5-Day Carnet. Only one product can be held on any one 'Key'. After registering for the card on forms that will be available on buses and at Park & Ride Sites, 'The Key' will be obtainable from a new OBC shop at Debenhams (replacing the Gloucester Green office), or on line, or by phone. Since it will not be available from drivers, boarding times should be speeded up.

In preparation for this change the fare zone boundaries have been modified, Zone A now covering the whole of the city plus Kennington, Botley and Cumnor. We will watch this new system with interest and must hope that it will bring the expected benefits. It should help to maintain the increase in bus passengers – up 8% this year – which trend has resulted in double-deck vehicles being reintroduced on the 35 route to Abingdon via Kennington. These are low-floor buses and, together with the other low-floor single-deckers, will mean only two services will still be using

buses with steps by early next year – numbers 4 and 8. The OBC fleet has also been declared the lowest emission fleet in the UK.

Lastly on buses, the bus route through the JR site is now open and the new passenger terminal building at the Redbridge P&R site should be open by Christmas.

SEERA (The South East England Regional Assembly) has just recommended an £88 million package of transport spending for Oxfordshire, which will include capacity enhancements at Oxford rail station. It is hoped to have a new platform operating on the long-stay car park south of Botley Road by 2009 which will later have an extra track on the east side when Oxford is re-signalled in 2015. This will enable London trains starting or terminating at Oxford to keep clear of through services on platform 1. It is also hoped to bring the Goods Loops north of the station up to passenger standard to improve flexibility for trains on the Cotswold and Bicester lines. Incidentally, there will again be extra trains on Saturdays and Sundays between Oxford and Bicester during the six weeks prior to Christmas. It is now looking very likely that the Bicester line will at last become part of the long awaited East-West Rail Link from Oxford to Bedford and, maybe, eventually to Cambridge. So much new housing is proposed along the route that a £10,000 levy on each house built will go a long way towards funding the line.

Finally, another defunct part of our railway system could be restored to life if BMW succeed in their plan to bring tracks back into the plant at Cowley – something which the old Pressed Steel Company had between the thirties and fifties! This will keep yet more lorries off the road system.

*David Townsend, Transport Secretary*

**STOP PRESS** – I have just learned that, from Sunday 10 December next, the direct bus service from Abingdon to the John Radcliffe Hospital will be restored. This is due to an increase in demand connected with the transfer of Radcliffe Infirmary departments to Headington in January. A very welcome move!

## Community Groups

Our Autumn meeting for Community Groups took place on Wednesday 4th October at St Michael's-at-the-Northgate Parish Room.

There was a very good attendance and a lively discussion, covering:- the encroachment of student accommodation into residential areas in the city, and the development of the new tennis centre on the sports grounds in Iffley Road; the extension of properties for "buy-to-let" accommodation in terms of the impact on the environment and community, and also the designation of gardens as brownfield sites for development. The sale and subsequent development of **Warneford Meadows, the Warneford Hospital playing field** and **Park Hospital** was discussed on behalf of those groups in the area who are campaigning against the current planning applications.

There was concern over city centre cleanliness, parking and the CPZ scheme and the impact of hospital and university expansion on traffic, parking and the quality of life. The meeting concluded with a short presentation from the Oxford Pedestrians Association on their campaign, "*Life begins at 20!*", to increase the number of 20 mph areas in the city.

*For a more comprehensive record of the meeting see [www.oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk](http://www.oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk) ➤ Local Groups. To be part of this Forum, please send the contact details of your Residents' Association to Membership Secretary, Liz Grosvenor. Our next meeting will be held in the Spring.*

## Your choice of trees

No matter what you think of Frideswide Square, I am sure you will agree that the vibrant colours of the maples in front of the Said Business School are a joy to behold.

**The Forest of Oxford (FOX)** works with interested groups across Oxford to undertake and encourage tree planting and management throughout the city. The trees need not be big and sometimes they can be put in containers. Properly sited, they can enhance the beautiful buildings in our city. Imagine how some trees in Cornmarket might improve the ambience of

that bleak street; such a difference could be made in Broad Street by the delicate tracery of trees contrasting with the solid structures there. There are other areas and specific places where you might like to see trees planted – FOX would very much like to know your ideas and suggestions.

*For now, please pass on any thoughts and ideas to your local councillor. We hope to have prepared a list of specific contact details for the next newsletter in March.*

*Marion Macleod, OCS Liaison with FOX*

## Osney Island's late, lamented willows

The recent inquest into the death of a student who was killed by a falling tree four years ago has fostered a robust approach to tree management by Oxford City Council. The tough new policy appears to allow the City Council's tree officers to take any action that they deem appropriate, without consultation or following due process, even down to keeping proper records. That is the conclusion of the Osney Islanders who recently lost their campaign to halt the unannounced felling of 11 of the 17 willows that stood in East Street.

This was surely one of the city's most attractive riverside streets, properly deserving the protection afforded by Osney Island's conservation area status and Article 4 statutory protection?

Yet residents had no idea of the forthcoming carnage until notices were posted advising them of the suspension of parking in East Street. Upon enquiry, it was discovered that 11 trees were due to be felled. Work would commence one working day following the posting of the parking suspension notices.

Outraged, residents sought additional information – could they see a copy of the Council's report that assessed the trees? None was forthcoming. Did it ever exist? Surely a written record of the Council's own inspection ought to be on file to record what was found, especially after the inquest verdict? Accurate, appropriate and timely management of the city's trees is a matter of great concern to us all.

By now deeply suspicious that the Council's own tree report could not be produced, residents sensed that the Council had acted improperly and were felling all of the trees for reasons of overall economy, rather than considering less drastic remedies put forward by the residents – removal of three or four trees known to be diseased, replacement planting, and pollarding of the remainder.

Residents sought a stay of execution and a second opinion. At a very well attended public meeting with the councillor responsible for the department, residents voted unanimously in favour of a motion to take no immediate action until a second report into each tree's individual condition could be obtained. This was not to be. Despite a written statement by a tree-surgeon, paid for by the residents, that seven of the trees could be saved, and the threat of an injunction, work started next day. Eleven of the original seventeen willows were felled, rendering East Street a scene of stark devastation.

Of course, if a tree in our city is genuinely dangerous then immediate action should be taken. Yet the Council's post-inquest policy, that seeks to remove all possible danger and all liability without allowing for debate, cannot be right. Osney Islanders hope that the City Council will learn to demonstrate that trees under its care will be managed, not massacred. Meanwhile, those who love Oxford's trees should be fearful.

*Richard Thurston, Chairman,  
Osney Island Residents' Association*



### **Environment Group**

The October meeting elected **Ros Weatherall** as Environment Secretary (or Convenor). There is a very long list of issues for this new sub-committee to examine – so three working groups have been defined. The first will look at **litter and recycling** to see what the Civic Society might do to improve the cleanliness of the city. The second is going to look at **public space**: we thought we might get involved in a review of the city's Public Realm Strategy

(published in 2000) but it now appears that this review is postponed until the West End strategy is further developed. The third group is concentrating on how people move about in the city, ie their **travel behaviour** – mainly issues about walking, cycling and buses.

*If you would like to be involved with one or more of the above groups, please make yourself known. Just contact Ros (01865 426805, [ros\\_weath@ntlworld.com](mailto:ros_weath@ntlworld.com)) who will put you in touch with the appropriate group. All three could use more people with ideas, enthusiasm and some time to spare.*

### **Litter – hardly a new problem**

As we know, the Society's recent restructure has recognised the need for a specialist group to consider the environment. The work of its **Litter & Recycling Work Group** is very much a continuation of earlier work done by OCS activists. Here is an extract from Newsletter No. 51 February 1989:-

*"On April 22nd there will be another 'Litter Blitz'. This date also coincides with the 'Spring Clean Day' in which the Civic Trust is urging us to participate as part of Environment Week. Heroic members of the Civic Society did play their part two years running in Litter Blitz, but it is enormously discouraging to see the area one has cleaned of its squalor just as bad in a few weeks' (or days') time."*

*Christine Butler, Society Archivist*

### **We couldn't have done it without you!**

(1) Grateful thanks to the 20 volunteers who helped us deliver 2,300 membership leaflets in the Cutteslowe, Sunnymead and North Oxford areas on the 8 & 9 November. Everyone enjoyed lunch beforehand in South Parade, Summertown, and we now look forward to an increase in membership as a result of all our efforts.

*Liz Grosvenor, Membership Secretary  
& Community Groups Liaison*

(2) Members receive their Newsletter in the post thanks to the help and support of a small group of people who gather to stuff a daunting pile of envelopes with the various enclosures. This easy, social gathering requires half a

dozen people with a morning to spare in March, July and November. If you could be 'on call' to help us out, please let the Editor know. We are always very grateful for an extra pair of hands and helpers get to take their newsletter home with them – a privileged advance copy!

*Pauline Martin, Newsletter Editor*

**\* \* In time for Christmas ... \* \***

(1) *The Village of Iffley* is the title of the illustration for our greetings card this year – notelet cards are still readily available but we have limited supplies only of Christmas and blank greetings cards. *Don't delay - send in your Order Form or contact Sally Roberts (01865 721596), sales@oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk. Full details at www.oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk* ➤ **Publications** ➤ **Cards**

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(2) Why not consider **Gift Membership** of the Society for one year as a present for a friend or neighbour? We will send a card indicating that their membership has come from you. *Further details from Liz Grosvenor, Membership Secretary – 01865 765453 or membership@oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk*

## *Your letters ..*

From **Peter Schofield**, Chairman,  
Apsley Road Residents' Association,  
19 Apsley Road, OX2 7QX (01865 557532)  
p.schofield@boltblue.com

### **Planning applications – a proposal for more supportive consultation**

*The following is a shortened version of a letter first published in the Oxford Times in December 2005:-*

*“Everyone involved in the planning process seems to share a fatalistic sense of intimidation because of the need to comply with Government-imposed targets and the threat of successful appeals against rejected applications. This is leading to a widespread attitude in the community that raising objections is a waste of time. This is not dispelled when the Planning Officer's report*

*and recommendation is sometimes circulated to the Area Committee before the deadline for submission of objections.*

*What is required is a method of scrutiny that will ensure a robust defence of the community's interests by the imposition of appropriate conditions which will stand up to appeal.*

*In considering planning applications, members of the Area Committee, the ward councillors, act in a 'quasi-judicial' capacity. This ties their hands and neuters their primary role as councillors, which is to defend the interests of those who elected them. As things stand, there is no one to act as advocate for the objectors in this so-called judicial process. The applicant usually has the resources for professional assistance; the objectors are on their own, often ignorant of the niceties of what qualify as 'planning grounds'.*

*One or two ward councillors should have their hands freed to represent the objectors. It is absurd to require up to eight judges to determine matters within tightly imposed constraints. This would seem to be a much more positive approach to the role of public consultation. At present, the rather bland committee discussion that follows the officer's presentation can sometimes appear to take no notice of the objections. Objectors need informed advocacy. No one is better qualified to provide this than their ward councillors.”*

☞

From **Gillian Turberfield**, 60 The Cloisters,  
Pegasus Grange, White House Road, OX1 4QQ  
(01865 722562)

### **An appeal for action on The Westgate (Planning Application No 06/01211/FUL)**

#### **“ We still have time to make a difference”**

*Many people in the Civic Society, not least in our Committee, have followed the progress of the second set of Westgate development plans with growing concern. These propose an even bigger Westgate than the first application (rejected in 2002).*

*Because the City is part landowner of the Westgate site, it cannot approve its own application with it first being examined by the Government Department for Community and Planning.*

*The plans (bulky enough to fill a very large wheelbarrow) should be assessed before Christmas, but the Government's planning officers may well require more time before making their recommendations to the Minister (**Meg Munn** and*

not Ruth Kelly, as has been widely reported in the local press).

*This development, by the admission of our own planning officers, is meant to have a significant impact on our entire region, drawing in an extra 20,000 shoppers per day – many from the county towns. It seems extraordinary that such an important outcome on this very valuable site should be determined by less than half the full complement of city councillors (only those members of the Central South & West, and Strategic Development Control Committees). Why has there not been a meeting of the full Council?*

*If you have serious concerns about the Westgate, please write NOW to the **Caseworker** appointed to act for the Government Minister in this case:-*

Mark Newman  
Thames Valley Planning Team  
Government Offices for the South East  
Bridge House  
1 Walnut Tree Close  
GUILDFORD, Surrey, GU1 4GA

*Clearly state your particular concerns, quoting the application number, and ask for these plans to be called in for full public enquiry. (Please do not hesitate to contact me for more information.)*



From **Perilla Kinchin**, (01865 510411) or mail@whitecockade.co.uk

#### **“Seven roads in Summertown”**

*May I interest fellow members in a special offer on a new book, “Seven Roads in Summertown: Voices from an Oxford Suburb”, which paints a detailed picture of a small middle-class neighbourhood since its beginnings a century ago?*

*Based on interviews with residents of Lonsdale, Portland, Hamilton, Victoria, King's*

*Cross, Lucerne Roads and Hawkswell Gardens, it looks at houses and at lives both 'ordinary' and outstanding, at schooling, work, shopping, and above all at successful neighbourly relations.*

*The book is available to OCS members at the special price of £10 inc p&p (normally £12.99). Please send a cheque (regrettably, we cannot accept cards) to **White Cockade Publishing, 71 Lonsdale Road, Oxford OX2 7ES** or contact me directly by phone or email, as shown above.*



From **Kenneth Moore**, oxford@presstosprint.co.uk

#### **Signage on trees in Gloucester Green**

*Just recently around the square in Gloucester Green signs have appeared on the trees telling people they will be clamped if they park in the square. There are over 14 of these signs, attached to the trees by plastic straps. I believe the trees have preservation orders on them.*

*My question is – should these signs just be allowed to be put up without proper consent and if so, should they be allowed to be strapped tightly on trees which will grow and have these straps cutting in to them?*

**Editor's note:** The City Council officer concerned has since advised Kenneth that “.. these are not officially permanent signs so it doesn't matter”. Kenneth finds this response neither reassuring nor particularly helpful.

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**To contribute to the Letters Pages, please contact the Editor at the address below or by email –**

**ocsnewsletter@aol.com**

**Copy deadline for our next issue is  
Friday 9 March 2007**

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*Newsletter issued in March, July and November and published by  
Oxford Civic Society, P O Box 632, Oxford OX3 3AF (phone/fax 01865.764898)  
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