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NEWSLETTER No 108

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Ros Weatherall, Environment Group Secretary, Civic Society, writes:

Growing concern over the untidiness of Oxford and the poor image we present to visitors has been highlighted nationally by such organisations as English Heritage and CPRE, as well as journalists such as Jeremy Paxman. Responding to our members' concerns, the OCS working group **Cleaner Greener Kinder Oxford** decided to follow an Australian example and plan a community effort to collect litter, next March, in partnership with the City Council's City Works department.

The aim is to get local community groups, residents associations, schools, businesses – any group that is prepared to spend a couple of hours during this three-day event (armed with litter-picking equipment and bags) to collect all the litter in an area of their own choice.

Our defined objectives are: (i) building civic pride, (ii) improving local environmental quality, (iii) sustainability, ie lasting changes to current practice. We hope this will prove to be a step towards changing behaviour, demonstrating that people in Oxford can all share responsibility for the problems and can take positive action to prevent the build-up of lit-

Colin Bailey, Head of Operations, Oxford City Works, writes:

We all can think of things that we would like done differently, or better, in the area in which we live. Every community has different issues to face, and different approaches for dealing with them. It is all too easy to feel that it makes no difference what you do, or that your views don't matter. Yet, across Oxford there are examples of how communities can start improving their 'quality of life' by joining together to get things done.

An Oxford Civic Society initiative to promote a cleaner, greener, safer environment is

*working in partnership with Oxford City Council to encourage communities, schools, businesses, colleges, residents' associations and environmental groups to participate in **OxClean***

Spring Clean 2008.

The partnership aims to kick start this initiative, by providing information and support that will help groups to work together in creating a better environment for the whole community.

It starts with the physical local environment – looking at the quality of the area in which you live, and assessing ways in which everyone can change it. It helps you to work out what can be done, and gives advice on how to get started and to make change happen.



ter and mess. Our steering committee is meeting regularly with City works, who will collect rubbish at the end of each litter pick, advise us on health and safety issues and help with printing and publicity. Publicity materials and guidelines will be made available on the **OxClean** website, and have already been mailed to over 300 local businesses and organisations.

Some groups in Oxford with experience of litter-picking have already pledged to participate on the chosen dates (*see information box, below*). We hope that most areas of Oxford city might be covered in the campaign. Hopefully, a successful **OxClean Spring Clean 2008** initiative will then become the model for future events.

Please give careful thought to the area in which you live, then register with us the concerns that you and others share.

Oxford City Council's role will be as a facilitator of rubbish bags collection, helping with the publicity launch and keeping it in the public eye. They will also offer advice and guidance to OCS who will ensure that each participating team is aware of safety issues.

By the end of the campaign, participants should experience a local "feel good" factor and maybe consider introducing other vital environmental campaigns within their communities. It is initiatives such as this that make real long-term differences in how our communities look and feel. Through community engagement it may be possible to create local pride and gain enthusiasm to run future campaigns to sustain these initial efforts.

The test will be whether residents feel that a cleaner, greener, safer environment for their neighbourhood has been achieved as a result of these initiatives.

TWO-HOUR LITTER PICK

Friday 14th, Saturday 15th, Sunday 16th March 2008

<http://oxclean.oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk/>

Register your interest via the **OxClean** website
or request a registration form and any
further information from the Hon Sec.

(Please enclose a stamped, addressed envelope)

A note from Tony Joyce, Oxford Civic Society Chairman:

Oxford Civic Society is delighted to have established this close working partnership with City Works – the first of many such associations, I hope.

The Society has a long and honourable history of individual initiatives to brighten the face of the city, but these have not previously developed into a continuous and collaborative programme with the aim of achieving enduring changes in behaviour and existing practices. Our *Cleaner, Greener, Kinder Oxford Group* now has the structure, with *City Works'* help, to make a real and lasting difference. Experience elsewhere tells us that this can be done.

Working together, we have now to find the way in which it can be realised in Oxford.

Chairman's Reports:

Bodleian Library Book Depository

By the time members receive this newsletter, the controversial planning application to construct a massive Book Depository for the Bodleian Library on Osney Mead will have come before Full Council for determination. It was *not* supported by the Central South and West Area Committee and only narrowly accepted by the Strategic Development Control Committee (6 votes to 5). This may not be the end of the story, however.

If rejected, the application may go to appeal; if accepted, we hope it may be called in by the Secretary of State, on account of its significant impact on the historic views of the Dreaming Spires. We have always considered that the University have been mistaken in insisting on such a huge building on this site. Views commissioned by *Oxford Preservation Trust* (www.oxfordpreservation.org.uk/planning.php) show a far greater impact than the university's photomontages imply, and we consider that the final effect, both from afar and closer, will in reality be even more damaging.

Other concerns centre on the way such a large structure (about the size of five Oxford ice rinks) may influence the drainage patterns in this very sensitive part of the flood plain, and on the eventual need for further expansion.

Would it not be better at this stage to find an alternative site that meets all these objections?

Bus Shelters

The City Council has been engaged in a lengthy negotiation with *Clear Channel (UK) Ltd (Adshel)* to increase and improve the bus shelters on the principal bus routes within the city. It is hoped that over the next five years the company will provide some 180 new shelters, all equipped to display real time information about the bus services when the County Council are able to install the necessary apparatus.

The company will regularly maintain and clean the shelters to a high standard. Conservation areas will receive a more sympathetic (and more expensive) design. In return, the company will have the right to arrange illuminated advertising on a proportion of the shelters, and has been seeking and receiving planning permissions for this.

The benefits of such an agreement are obvious, but the risks need careful evaluation. In the more commercial areas of the city, the addition of a few more illuminated advertisements, provided they are not offensive, is hardly an issue: in more sensitive locations, particularly in Conservation Areas, the impact may be detrimental. Some questionable site proposals have been withdrawn, but others, notably in St Aldates and Magdalen Street West, have so far remained as possible advertising positions.

It is important that, in the final agreement, the visual quality of this historic city is not compromised.

Tony Joyce

Report from the Planning Sub-Committee

Update on applications mentioned in the July 2007 Newsletter Report – Approvals came for **17 Bradmore Road**; houses behind **109 and 110 St Mary's Road**; new student blocks at **Brookes University Morrells Campus, John Garne Way**; **25 Valencia Road, Headington** for dormer, extensions and conversion to three flats; six 1-bed flats behind **98 Crescent Road, Cowley Marsh**. Although an application to retain **No 1 Lucerne Road** with one new house alongside it has been approved, the previous, refused application to demolish and build two pairs of semi-detached houses has sadly been allowed on appeal. **Warneford Hospital, Warneford Meadow and the Park Hospital** and the **Bodleian Library Book Depository** are all still under discussion. **45 Davenant Road, 37 Phipps Road** and **127 Banbury Road** were refused. Proposals withdrawn were for demolition of **29 Charlbury Road**, for enlargement of **42 St Clement's Street** and for a wind-turbine mast near the **Seacourt Park and Ride**.

In *July*, on **Jericho Canalside**, building was proposed of 54 flats in two 3-4-storey blocks crowded close to St Barnabas Church, blocking views of it. At **61 St Aldates**, it was proposed to retain the frontage, demolish rear buildings and to erect a 4-5 storey block for 54 students; a good position and concept but it should be 'adopted' by a particular college. At **The Mitre, High Street**, a window awning was proposed (boldly advertising 'Beefeater'), and was permitted in part. Another application for awnings came from **The Royal Blenheim, 13 St Ebbe's Street**, but this has been withdrawn. At **60 Pitts Road, Headington Quarry**, a new dwelling was proposed but soon refused, as out of style with the Conservation Area, infringing building line and obscuring line of sight at a corner.

In *August and September* a second house was proposed on the plot of **21 Wolvercote Green** – small, cramped, with minimal amenity space, it was refused. At **55 Westlands**

Drive, Northway, permission was refused for frying/grilling.

Owners of **62 Five Mile Drive** applied for extensions and a dormer; these would overlook neighbours and destroy the roof-line of the terrace. A third application to demolish **9 Kirk Close** and replace with two semi-detached houses, was refused, as out of character, causing traffic congestion and loss of the front garden to car-parking. **The Queens Lane Coffee House** at **40 High Street**, and **The Slug and Lettuce**, at **51-53 George Street** have both applied, and been refused permission, for tables and chairs on the pavement as space is insufficient. **Bus Shelters** with illuminated advertisements were applied for in **St Clements, Castle Street, Frideswide Square, Magdalen Street West, New Road, St Aldates, Botley Road** and many other sites.

October brought a repeat of an application refused in 2006, to demolish three houses at **190 Iffley Road** one of which is of value, designed by the well-respected architect, Frank Mountain: the proposed 5-storey building for 50 students would be a poor replacement. Conversion of **Talbot Lodge, 12 Linton Road**, to seven flats involves drastic alterations and extensions to a fine house. At **41 Fern Hill Road, Lye Valley**, loft rooms with dormers to front and rear are too cramped, with not enough head height over most of the floor-space.

Telephone kiosks with scrolling advertisement panels are proposed in **Summertown, Banbury Road**: one outside **Prama House, No 267** has been allowed, but another outside **Marks and Spencer, No 246** has been withdrawn. Behind **113-117, Old Road, Headington**, a 1-storey 2-bed house is proposed with access between **Nos 113 and 115**, an unwelcome precedent for back-garden development, compromising privacy, causing disturbance, and without much garden space itself.

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

Transport Notes

Instead of the usual catalogue of changes to local bus and train services, I thought that, at this time, I would write about a significant moment in Britain's railway history – the time when we join the rest of Europe and Japan, in having a truly high-speed railway. That is, one where trains run at 186 mph (300 km/h).

Although the first section of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, now known as High Speed One, has been open through Kent for 4 years, the 14th November this year saw the completion of the project when Eurostar transferred their London terminal from Waterloo to St Pancras and section two of HS One, thus reducing the journey time between London and Paris to 2¼ hours (and 2 hrs to Brussels). This achievement finally lays to rest the late President Mitterand's jibe that *"after a high speed run through France, you can enjoy the scenery as you potter through Kent"*!

But perhaps an even greater achievement has been the complete refurbishment and conversion of St Pancras station to *"the finest station in the world"*, in the words of Guillaume Pepy, the Chief Executive of French Railways. Praise indeed from a Frenchman – although his opinion may have been influenced by the fact that trains from Paris would no longer arrive at Waterloo!

We should never forget that none of this would have been possible if plans to close and demolish the station in the 1960's had succeeded. We have John Betjeman and his fellow-campaigners to thank for the fact that we can enjoy the experience today after he succeeded in getting St Pancras station listed Grade 1. The closure proposal was subsequently abandoned.

The original train shed, by William Barlow, has been converted and an extension added to provide the longer platforms needed for Eurostar trains, together with two new side sections for Midland Mainline

trains and for the new high-speed domestic trains to serve Kent from December 2009. This will also be the station for the 7-minute shuttle service to Stratford during the Olympic games in 2012. The undercroft, originally used to store barrels of beer from Burton-on-Trent, is now home to the Eurostar ticket hall and lounges together with a selection of high-quality shops and restaurants. There is also the longest champagne bar in Europe at platform level.

George Gilbert Scott's magnificent Gothic hotel at the front of the station, more recently named St Pancras Chambers, is currently undergoing restoration and conversion; the one-time servants' quarters are to become luxury apartments. A new, prestigious hotel development is being constructed behind Scott's building, alongside the train shed.

The idea has been to make St Pancras a "destination" in its own right, somewhere to shop, eat and drink, or to find comfortable accommodation, as well as to catch a train. The departure boards will now display, as well as the familiar Bedford, Kettering, Sheffield, etc, the more exotic place names of Avignon and Bourg St Maurice.

An idea, perhaps, for a visit? To look at the station, I mean, not necessarily to Provence or the French Alps.

David Townsend

Streets for People Day, 22nd September

Oxford was one of many European towns and cities to mark 'Streets for People' Day. Previously known as *Car Free Day*, the change of title reflects a more positive emphasis on streets as public spaces for the benefit of residents, drivers, pedestrians and cyclists. We were grateful for Oxford City Council's organising role.

The main event was held in Broad Street, where a sizeable crowd enjoyed a good selection of stalls and various forms of entertainment from poetry reading to roller skat-

ing. Five OCS members helped on the day, as did representatives from organisations such as *Oxford Pedestrians* and *Cyclox*. Several other areas of the city organised events, such as a street party in Highfield, a voluntary toll on motorists entering Wolvercote, stalls in North Parade, and speed reduction awareness in Headington Quarry. The two local bus companies also took part, providing free travel for accompanied children.

Streets for People Day now seems to be established as an annual event. Maybe next year even more of Broad Street can be dedicated to promoting our streets as public spaces.

Richard Bradley, Environment Group

Members' Views

(1) A good attendance for the *Members' Meeting* in the Town Hall Long Room earlier this month led to a lively debate and exchange of views. Discussion initially concentrated around the street environment in Oxford, covering issues such as cleaning of drains, litter, bus services and the maintenance of roads especially where they have been dug up by utilities. The coming *Ox-Clean* initiative (see pages 1 & 2) was generally welcomed as a first step in tackling the litter problem.

Some planning problems were also explored – conflicts of land use, the possible contraction of the Oxfordshire Studies Centre, the New Theatre, the Jericho canal site, and how Oxford might retain its wide range of independent shops. Opinion was divided on whether the future expansion of Westgate would provide more opportunity for small and independent shops, or would destroy those that currently survive.

A note from the Hon Sec – As discussed at this meeting, we have in the past used 'post-a-pothole' postcards to mail details of problems to the appropriate authority

Now, the County Council offers a broader service over the Internet called '**report it on line**': go to www.oxfordshire.gov.uk (tel 0845 310 111) to report potholes, unlit street lights, dan-

gerous pavements, etc. You can also report fly tipping, graffiti, abandoned vehicles, and many other nuisances.

Where applicable, the County will pass the report onto other authorities such as the City Council who run a complementary service, '**report a fault**': go to www.oxford.gov.uk (tel 01865 252900).

(2) The Autumn meeting of *Community Groups* in October created a familiar forum for local concerns to be aired and shared. Subjects raised in the course of this session included 20 mph zones, the Ice Rink, encroachment of the green belt and increasingly high-density development, particularly in North Oxford, with the demolition of houses for flats. (Detailed notes are available on www.oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk – see *Local Groups, Activity page*.)

Whilst such concerns should usefully be taken up with local Area Committees and local Councillors, the broad readership of this newsletter is often a helpful place to publish an issue. The Editor welcomes contributions.

Liz Grosvenor (Membership Sec), & Ros Weatherall (Environment Group Sec)

Oxford's Primary Schools

A small team of Oxford Civic Society members have made an initial visit to most of Oxford's 30 primary schools. We felt it a privilege and pleasure to see how well the children and the grounds are cared for. Those that are Eco schools stand out as not only being very clean and litter conscious, but they are also actively concerned about recycling, turning off lights and machinery and, for the future, the possibility of solar panels, general environmental awareness and a lighter carbon footprint.

We feel that these schools must be encouraged and we plan to emphasise to their summer leavers that this good work must be carried on in Oxford's secondary schools.

Rosanne Bostock, Richard Bradley, Marie Ruiz, Liz Storrar (Environment Group members)

Playgrounds

On hearing in the summer that Oxford City Council proposed to close down 14 playgrounds around Headington, Blackbird Leys and Wood Farm, an Environment Group party visited all of them. It was clear that they had been allowed to run down over a period of at least 10 years, and equally clear that the neighbourhoods need this open amenity space. We spoke to some mothers but they were understandably more immediately concerned about the damp in their houses.

Rather than being redeveloped for more housing, the City Council has agreed to leave these areas as they are – apparently hopeful of funding from local Area Committees or, just possibly, Lottery funds.

Please keep an eye on play areas in your area and let us know what, if anything, is happening? A tree (which costs £150 to buy, plant and maintain for a year) and a bench could make these spaces so much more pleasant. Perhaps someone is mindful of a special memorial to a departed relative or friend?

Rosanne Bostock, Caroline Roaf, Liz Storrar

Bluebell bulbs

When we visited **Rhodes House** in August some members told new gardener, *Neil Wigfield*, that they had some surplus bluebells. These would be welcome for a woodland area that he is developing. *Offers direct to Rhodes House, 01865 270902, please.*

Sheila Glazebrook

www.oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk

A familiar website address, we hope, and one that is firmly in your 'Favourites'? But if you haven't visited recently, do take a look very soon.

The site is now completely redesigned, reviewed and reconstructed with the emphasis on simplicity and the easy accessibility of up-to-date information. We are confident that it represents an important 'one-stop-shop' for any background information that

a user might seek. If, however, you find something missing please let us know by emailing webman@oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk

Note – Any member without direct access to the Internet can request printed OCS material by post from the Hon Sec (stamped, addressed envelope required, please). Editor

This year's Christmas card

"Steps at Radcliffe Camera" has sold exceedingly well, leaving limited supplies of Christmas and blank greetings cards still for sale – do order now, while stocks remain? To avoid disappointment, you might also enquire for the correspondence cards, to be personalised with your own seasonal message. Alternatively, limited stocks of previous years' Christmas cards are still available. *Order forms or enquiries via cards@oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk or to Sally Roberts, 1 Bridge Street, Osney Island, OX2 0BA (01865 721596)*

Vacancy, Cards Group

The yearly greetings card is always well received, and a welcome sight when on sale at meetings throughout the year. So we are all sad to say goodbye to *Sally Roberts* in her role as co-ordinator of the Cards Group after several successful years for our cards.

There is, therefore, an urgent need to find new helpers: to source suitable artwork for next year, or to undertake print production; to take orders and arrange their despatch; or to help with sales at meetings. Whatever your particular interest, please get in touch if you can do something towards helping us to maintain this charming tradition, by email to info@oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk

An invitation to all members

Founder member and first-elected OCS Chairman, Professor James Stevens Curl, is keen to extend to all current members the special pre-publication price (applicable until 31 January 2008) for his new volume, "Victorian Architecture, Diversity & Invention". Full details are to be found in the leaflet enclosed, at his special request.

Letters Page

To contribute, please write to the Editor at the address below, or email newsletter@oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk
Copy deadline for next issue is **Friday 7 March, 2008**

From **Alan Russell**, 72 Empress Court,
Woodins Way, OX1 1HG

A new concert hall for Oxford

Newsletter no 106 (March 2007) recalls the frequent mention made over the years of the crying need in Oxford for a new concert hall; but the Civic Society has not so far proved able to gain acceptance of any of the ideas put forward. The Nuffield car park has been mentioned as a possible site but would, surely, be too congested.

A riverside location would be preferable and, if discovered and developed at the foot of Jackdaw Lane, could become a key element in a long linear-park – Thames & Cherwell, running from Iffley to Marston. Such a facility would most helpfully relieve pressure on the ancient, splendid but small city centre.

If all bar a few single-decker buses could be removed from the High (using Donnington Road, Marston Ferry Road and if need be a tunnel instead) Oxford might yet rediscover something of its one-time focus on beauty, albeit on a more widely spread-out scale.

The Chairman comments: We continue to promote the case for a proper large concert hall whenever possible. One influence on planners' consideration of viability is the report: "*Market Feasibility Study of Proposed Oxford Conference Centre*", to be found on the City's website – www.oxford.gov.uk

From **Mary Hope**, 15 Bateman Street,
Headington (01865 766867)

London buses

While recent road works were carried out at The Plain, the majority of London and airport coaches used the Marston Ferry Road to reach the coach station. What a relief it was for our beautiful High Street not to experience so many of these monsters thundering through every few minutes.

Perhaps it is time to have a major rethink about how we can leave the city behind yet not feel we have added to the congestion in the city centre and the London Road corridor. Would it not be possible to consider joining and leaving these coaches out of town at a specially designated car park? Smaller buses as well as cars could transport passengers (plus luggage) from all quarters to meet the coaches so avoid filling up Thornhill Park and Ride with passengers intent on leaving the city rather than entering it.

Not only would the High Street find some relief but so would St Clements and Headington which are regarded as a major thoroughfare for these coaches rather than a place to live in some harmony and safety.

Editor's note: Mary Hope's letter was recently published in 'The Oxford Times'. She would now be interested in members' views.

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