



Reg Charity no 1116739

NEWSLETTER No 113

July 2009

ISSN 0308-9959

“Civic Society Initiative - a new national network” **by Vernon Porter, Hon Secretary**

“ The need for a vibrant civic society movement is greater than ever before and we are enormously grateful to the organisations that have rallied round with offers of financial and practical help. With the right support we can build a movement to support and champion community action for local places that is stronger than ever. ”
Griff Rhys Jones, Civic Society Initiative Launch, 1 June 2009

The Civic Society Initiative was set up to fill the gap left when the Civic Trust sadly went into administration following a period of over ambitious expansion. Its objective is to establish – within one year – a viable, long term structure and means to ensure that local civic societies continue to have a national voice and the professional support that they need.

On hearing of the demise of the Civic Trust, there was a groundswell of support for the civic society movement. **The Secretary General of the National Trust** led the search to find a solution and was quickly joined by the **Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE)** and **Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA)**. The National Trust has made one of their senior executives, **Tony Burton**, available to lead the Initiative and the CPRE and RIBA are donating office space and other support in kind. The guiding principle is to establish a bottom-up structure led by the member societies.

At the launch, **Griff Rhys Jones** made an appeal for the £50,000 of additional funds that are needed to fund the Initiative over this explorative year. Oxford Civic Society has provided an initial grant of £250 and will actively contribute to the planning of the future organisation.

Your Executive Committee believe that an umbrella organisation is vital. We wholeheartedly support the notion that the civic society movement needs a national voice. Many pressures felt locally arise from national government initiatives and need to be dealt with at a national level.

Whilst we are lucky to have experienced members within our Society who make a valuable contribution to statutory planning processes, we also believe that to be effective in the ever more complex and changing world of planning, we need to be able to call on further resources. We need a structure that harnesses and disseminates the expertise and experience available through the network of 750+ local Societies (250,000 members) – and, facilitates access to appointed professionals.

The need for professional support is particularly important at this time given the number of changes in the statutory planning processes: we now have **Spatial Strategies**, **Core Strategies**, and **Area Action Plans**. **SEERA**¹ has been replaced by **SEEC**² working with **SEEDA**³ in **SEEPB**⁴, but what exactly do they all do? In all situations, we have to work with Developers and Local Authority Planners who are salaried and trained professionals.

Over the next months, we need to contribute our vision of the structure of a future organisation that provides us with the support we need at a cost that can be afforded. I would welcome your thoughts and suggestions, by letter or by email to me, at info@oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk

Notes: For more information about the Initiative go to civicsocietyinitiative.org.uk

¹ SEERA, South East England Regional Assembly

² SEEC, South East England Councils

³ SEEDA, South East England Development Agency

⁴ SEEPB, South East England Partnership Board

Chairman's Commentary

Core Strategy: The Inspector, having accepted the city's Revised Core Strategy submission, is now examining this in public at a series of hearings between 16th and 29th July. The various interested parties have submitted a mass of written evidence in response to a range of questions which the Inspector has posed under the main topic headings. We have endeavoured to assist various residents' groups with their submissions, and will be monitoring the proceedings.

Highway Improvements: Work is now nearing completion in **New Inn Hall Street**, and in the repaving of **Beaumont Street**, which admirably sets the scene for the reopening of the Ashmolean Museum in the autumn.

The new bus shelters are in place in **St Aldates** and **Castle Street**, ready for the relocation of the Queen Street bus stops on July 19th.

The go-ahead has been given for the final phase of detailed planning for the **London Road** improvements through **Headington Shopping Centre**. At present, these plans are restricted to the comparatively narrow London Road corridor alone, whereas the shopping area extends significantly into the various side streets, and notably down **Windmill Road**. Funds should be found to complete the shopping area improvements in one operation. If this is not achieved, the contrast between the new London Road and its shabby surroundings will be stark indeed. The need here is far greater than in parts of the city centre which the county is proposing to refurbish under the Transform Oxford proposals

Public Conveniences: The deficiencies in the city's provision of public conveniences, whether for visitors in the city centre, or for residents in other areas, are legendary.

Faced with financial stringency, the City Council is contemplating cost savings by providing an even smaller number of public toilets, but of what is hoped might be a better quality, with perhaps more user-friendly opening hours. Other suggestions involve: charging for toilet use; the

provision of facilities by private contractors; and a Community Toilet Scheme in which local businesses receive incentives to open their toilet facilities free to the public. Public consultation is planned during July and August (hardly the best time for residents) to explore how far these proposals are acceptable. To register your opinions, consult the agenda of your August Area Committee and/or contact your Ward Councillors.

Tony Joyce, Chairman

New corporate members

We extend a very warm welcome to:

Harris Manchester College, which joins the growing number of Colleges who now support OCS. Their magnificent Chapel is already well known for its wonderful Burne Jones stained glass windows, which can be viewed by calling in to the Lodge in order to gain access. Regular Sunday Unitarian services are held there for the general public, as well as students.

Jeremy Mogford, who will need little introduction to members: he has many interests in Oxford, being the proprietor of the *Old Bank* and *Old Parsonage* hotels, *Quod Brasserie* and *Gee's Restaurant*, and has been a tireless campaigner for improvements to The High. Jeremy says:

"Having owned a number of businesses in Oxford over the last thirty years, located in the conservation area and mostly occupying listed buildings, I have always taken a keen interest in their architectural restoration and have enjoyed giving famous buildings a new lease of life. I am delighted to join the Civic Society, which I know has made an amazingly important contribution to the ongoing evolution of Oxford. The Society's influence in our city has never been more important, both to protect and allow sensible development. I look forward to lending our support and opinion wherever required."

We are always delighted to be introduced to a potential corporate member, so please let us know of anyone you might like to recommend. We will be pleased to make the telephone call.

Gordon Balme, Hon Treasurer (01865 511387)
Stuart White, University Liaison (01865 247669)

Report of the Planning Sub-committee

Update on applications mentioned in the March 2009 newsletter: Development of 2 flats and an office at **29 Wellington Street, Jericho** has been *permitted*. We still await the result of Oriel College's appeal on the refusal of their proposals for the **Bartlemas Nursery School** site. Following refusal of the appeal to build a house behind **21 Wolvercote Green**, fresh plans have been submitted. The proposal to demolish **268 Woodstock Road**, (formerly **The Lemon Tree Restaurant**), and replace it by three large houses, was *permitted* in May. Demolition of part of **11 Walton Well Road** and conversion to flats was *permitted* in April. Several other applications are still pending, for instance demolition of **26 Barton Village Road, Barton**. Possible development of a Shopping Mall is still pending on land behind the **St Aldates** street frontage. Land currently occupied by garages behind houses in **Cherwell Drive** and **Marston Road** might be developed by demolition of the garages and replacing them by a 2-storey block of small flats. Application has been made, but not yet determined, to demolish and rebuild most of the buildings on **Littlemore Peers School** site, and transform it to an Academy.

In *March* an application appeared for conversion of **229, 231 and 233 Cowley Road** to cramped and inadequate student accommodation, but this was soon withdrawn. Plans were submitted for demolition of most of the buildings on the former **Radcliffe Infirmary site, Woodstock Road**. The Main RI Building, St Luke's Chapel, the Outpatients Building, and the Triton Fountain and pool, are retained and they will be incorporated into new buildings for Oxford University administration and educational use, for which detailed plans are awaited, other buildings on the site having already been reduced to brick dust mountains. **Keble College** has plans to expand into a new quadrangle built on the sites of the former **Acland Hospital, 36 Woodstock Road** and **25 Banbury Road**. 249 student rooms have been proposed with space for teaching, offices and research, and parking for 210 cycles: details

are not yet agreed. In the **High Street**, four **Banners** to announce the entrance to the **Botanic Gardens** were applied for, and *permitted*.

April brought an application for a cancer-treatment support-centre on the **Churchill Hospital site, Old Road, Headington**, one of a series of 'Maggie Centres' being established around Britain. *Permission* was soon given for the unusual tent-like single-storey building on stilts, among the trees on quite a steep slope. Unfortunately space here is limited and care will have to be taken not to encroach upon the nature corridor alongside the Boundary Brook. **Ruskin College** has applied for complex demolitions, alterations and additions to **Ruskin Hall, Dunstan Road, Old Headington** in the Conservation Area: details and decisions are awaited.

In *May* we considered an application from **Brookes University** to demolish several buildings on the **Gipsy Lane Campus** and build a new **Library and Student Centre** to contain many other university facilities. The proposed building would have been 25m tall, 50m wide and at least 237m long, composed primarily of glass and bearing eleven 6m tall ventilation chimneys. Modifications are being considered. It would certainly be a striking feature of the London Road entry into Oxford, towering over houses in the Headington Hill residential area. At **Colthorn Farm, Old Marston**, a large barn-style house was proposed, which would be prominent here in the Green Belt.

Among *June* applications was one for outdoor seating at **209 Banbury Road, Summertown**, outside the Patisserie Pascale. This was accepted despite the rather crowded character of the pavement just here. The contentious issue of the future of **190 Iffley Road** has been revived, with the proposal that one of the three houses on the plot should be demolished, and the other two linked by a new building, and enlarged to accommodate 27 students. Details need attention but at least the historic house designed by the architect Frank Mountain would be retained.

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

New members of Executive Committee

It is a very real pleasure to introduce to members no fewer than four new colleagues, bringing diverse energies and talents which are most welcome:

Juliet Blackburn joined Executive last month, having lived in Oxford for some 25 years, working in business software and for the University



Library Service. Currently Chairman of the Oxford Consumers Group, Juliet takes a special interest in local affairs – particularly

transport related. As Chairman of Upper Wolvencote Allotments Association, she has organised an OxClean Spring Clean event there each year and, having a keen interest in Venetian style rowing, hopes to collaborate in a clean-up of the river and canal in the autumn. Juliet is also a welcome recruit to OxClean's Steering Group.

Richard Bradley joined Executive in April of this year. He and his wife moved to Oxford nine years ago, seeing it as a wonderful place to live and work – a very good decision for them both, it seems. Richard says: *"It's a city to be*

treasured. That's why we joined OCS: what better organisation could there be to keep the planners on their toes? My particular field of interest is transport, so I joined the Travel Group and now co-ordinate the Oxford



Streets for People campaign (see page 5). I'm also one of OxClean's School Visitors, working with Rosanne Bostock on the Schools' Anti-Litter Campaign (page 6). My professional background is IT management consultancy ... but enough of that!"

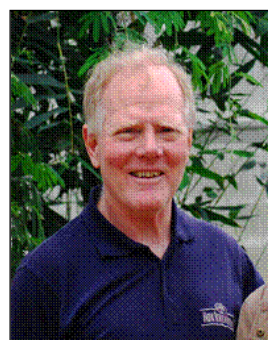
Ingrid Lunt has been a member of Executive Committee since April 2008. A psychologist by profession, Ingrid works for the University in the Department of Education. Her particular interest lies with the environment and also in getting the

University more involved in the city, with special emphasis on environmental and recycling issues. Ox-Clean's Steering Group was delighted that Ingrid felt she could join them; they identify very strongly with



her own aims in relation to the University and hope, with her help, to welcome some University college participants to **OxClean Spring Clean 2010** – Friday 5 and Saturday 6 March.

Peter Thompson came on to Executive in June of this year and is a welcome recruit to the Planning Sub-committee. He is a retired Chartered Civil Engineer, latterly involved in commercial property development. Peter and his wife have lived



in Summertown since 1980, where he has been concerned with the local community environment for many years – involved with numerous developments there in a bid to achieve improvements in design.

Peter firmly believes that we have responsibilities to the next 10 generations for what we leave behind! Accordingly, he has been very concerned with the Core Strategy proposals developed by the City Council Planning Policy team, both locally and in regard to some of the fundamental principles. He is an active member of the Oxford Preservation Trust, and of its North Area Committee.

News of Oxford Streets for People

In the March newsletter (issue 112) we announced that Oxford City Council had asked OCS to organise this year's **Oxford Streets for People** campaign. The purpose of the campaign is to remind people that streets are valuable social spaces with many functions, not just for through traffic. We are also aiming to convince planning authorities to alter street design, over time, by 'building in' this multi-function aspect.

The main focus of our campaign is *Oxford Open Streets 2009* on or around the weekend of Saturday 19 & Sunday 20 September, when community groups are encouraged to 'open' their streets for residents' parties, to make use of streets for public events, or to hold events which promote the case for design change. A number of groups have already promised to organise events. Full details (updated regularly) are on our website oxstreets.org.uk – what groups have done in the past, and are planning to do this year; how to hold an event, and whether you need insurance.



We urge all OCS members to lobby friends, neighbours and local groups for your own event in a nearby street. Then please contact us: via our website, email info@oxstreets.org.uk or telephone - 01865 762418.

To celebrate our campaign, we are delighted to introduce members to *Oxford Walk & Talk 2009*, concentrating on city centre streets and open to everyone:

**Oxford Walk & Talk 2009
daily, Wednesday 16–Tuesday 22 Sept
from 12.15 onwards
central meeting point in Bonn Square**

A series of themed, city-centre 'walkabouts' celebrating our glorious city and for all to share and talk about what they discover:

Gargoyles & Grimaces	Wednesday 16 th
Fossils & Foliage	Thursday 17 th
Spires & Choirs	Friday 18 th
Taverns & Tearooms	Saturday 19 th
River & Stream	Sunday 20 th
Clocks & Barometers	Monday 21 st
Morris & Motors	Tuesday 22 nd

- A route map and itinerary will be made available daily, and published on our website oxstreets.org.uk
- Come along to our meeting point from 12.15 onwards (choose a time that suits you best)
- Bring friends or colleagues if you wish, or join the next small group to stroll off – walk & talk with them
- Any queries by email to info@oxstreets.org.uk or telephone **01865 762418**

**Help make our streets friendlier,
more pleasant, and safer**

The use of our streets for public events is a great part of British culture and we hope to make street events a widespread and regular feature of

communities throughout Oxford. The benefits are many: greater community spirit, increased road safety, greater sense of belonging. Do initiate something in your neighbourhood, join in and have fun!

Richard Bradley, Project Co-ordinator
tel 01865 762418

OxClean is hard at work

We have established a very useful contact in **Carl Room**, franchise holder for McDonalds' three Oxford restaurants and as anxious as we are to make the city a tidier place. He will actively support Oxclean's **Don't Drop It** campaign (you will see our roundel on their doors) and will sponsor some aspects of **OxClean Spring Clean 2010**. This is all very encouraging.

We are also in ongoing dialogue with Oxford City Centre Manager **Alistair Ferrier**. The



list of issues under discussion includes the provision and management of litter bins, collection of trade waste, cigarette butts and chewing gum.

Oxford City Council licenses street traders, so we will find out how to get those polystyrene burger boxes changed to something more environmentally friendly and perhaps less visible.

Finally, Oxford's water courses visibly suffer from litter, which needs to be collected before the winter floods carry it up into the trees. The River Thames Society and other groups with river interests (rowing and sailing clubs, fishermen, boat owners etc) are planning an autumn clean-up on the river and canal, with the help and support of the Environment Agency – probably in October. If you have a boat and are interested, watch our website or contact info@oxclean.org.uk

Ros Weatherall, Acting Chair, OxClean

OxClean Schools' Anti-Litter Campaign

This annual campaign now embraces all of Oxford's 5 secondary and 31 primary schools. It involves an ad hoc termly visit to each site, unannounced, from one of OxClean's 4 school visitors

(Richard Bradley, Vanessa Kenyon, Liz Storrar and me) in order to grade the school grounds.

The primary schools maintain a generally high standard, with increasing numbers of litter bins and more children involved with litter-picking.

This year we are awarding the Secondary Schools' shield (previously held by Peers School) to **Oxford Academy**, which has always been well cared for with plenty of bins and high standards of cleaning. Despite rebuilding work on site, it is still totally litter-free with more pupils involved in keeping it so, and the school has managed to persuade City Council to install two new bins at the end of their access road.

Cheney School gets a Certificate for Maintaining a Very High Standard. Considering the small site, the large number of pupils (1,500) and the public thoroughfare by the sports field, their maintenance is impressive. **Cherwell School** is improving with more litter bins and more pupil involvement, but there are still problems with their playing fields. **Oxford School**, previously Oxford Community School has problems and lacks enough litter bins. **St Gregory the Great** is a new school with many new wind-proof litter bins, but faces ongoing problems.

For **Spring Clean 2010** we will be encouraging all schools to take part on 5 March, but also to hold assemblies, debates, discussions, a litter art show, etc, to raise awareness of littering.

Councillor Susanna Pressel, as Lord Mayor in 2008-9, launched a secondary schools' competition on "**The Psychology of Litter**". Oxford Civic Society and the City Council are contributing to the prize pool of £100 whilst The Oxford Times is offering a guided tour to the winner/s.

We have recently extended our campaign to include the 6th Form and Language Schools in the Banbury Road, where we are building good levels of understanding. Each school has committed to the display of our Voluntary Code of Practice; OxClean's **Juliet Blackburn** will visit regularly – and unannounced, of course!

Rosanne Bostock, Campaign Co-ordinator

Transport Notes

The changes being made to the **700 bus service**, originally Water Eaton P&R to the JR Hospital, will no doubt be a relief to those who have long bemoaned the loss of the direct Summertown to Headington route via the city centre. The 700 route will, by the time you read this, have been extended at both ends. It now starts in Kidlington and runs to Water Eaton, Summertown and via Marston Ferry Road to the JR as before. From the JR it returns to Headley Way, London Road, Gipsy Lane to serve Brookes University, into Roosevelt Drive, round the Churchill loop, into the Nuffield and along Windmill Road, London Road, Osler Road to the JR and back to Kidlington. So, Waitrose in Headington can now be reached easily from Summertown, if circuitously! In order to cope with the increased demand, the old midi-buses are to be replaced by 70-seater double-deck vehicles, running every 15 minutes Monday-Friday and serving all stops en route. I am indebted to **Mr Dilwyn Roberts**, of **RH Transport**, for this information.

Another major bus route change concerns the Oxford Bus Company service to **Didcot** – previously an extension of the 35 to Abingdon, every 30 mins. To improve reliability, the 35 now stands on its own and a new X2 service runs to Didcot via the A34 to Abingdon, then via Stratton Way rather than High Street, every 45 mins.

Both of our main bus companies have achieved **fleet improvements** ahead of schedule: all buses in the OBC 'City' fleet are now low-floor with easy access for wheelchairs and buggies, whilst Stagecoach is replacing its 'Oxford Tube' fleet with coaches that have engines using the latest exhaust treatment technology – giving emissions even better than the Euro 5 standard which is not yet mandatory in the UK.

More trains are now running between Oxford and Bicester Town (alongside the Bicester Village shops). There are 11 return services Monday-Thursday, 12 on Fridays and 13 on Saturdays. Also, thanks to a County Council grant, there are now 9 return trips on Sundays – the first for

many years. An off-peak fare of £2 return is available. This journey will be considerably quicker when Chiltern Railways' improvements scheme to upgrade the line and provide an alternative route to London is realised.

And on the subject of upgrading railways, the temporary timetables are now available covering the closure of the Cotswold Line for double-tracking, and showing substitute bus services.

David Townsend, Transport Secretary

STOP PRESS: The County Council has now issued the definitive list of revised city centre bus stops, following the removal of stops from Queen Street, effective Sunday 19 July. The main change corrects an anomaly I highlighted in March: both services to **Rose Hill** will now depart from Bonn Square, outside the Co-op Bank in place of the Headington services, which will now use a stop in Castle Street. The **300 P&R** service to Redbridge will now continue to serve the stop in St Aldates opposite the Post Office [DT]

Report of the Travel Behaviour Group

The County's third Local Transport Plan (LTP3) will be prepared soon, covering its transport spending plans to 2016. LTP3 will need to express a longer term vision for the development of travel in the county. It must address the government's national transport goals: embracing economic competitiveness; tackling climate change; contributing to better safety and security, health and longer-life expectancy; promoting greater equality of opportunity for all; and improving the quality of life. The Society has been invited to join a panel for regular consultation, as the Plan develops.

If you would like to assist the Society in making its contribution to this important plan, please email environment@oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk We are keen to represent members' views about the development of travel in, to and from the city.

Paul Cullen, Travel Behaviour Group Convenor

Pedal Power!

The **Museum of Oxford** will stage an interesting exhibition – *'Pedal power, a portrait of cycling in Oxfordshire'* – from 25 July to 17 October. On Tuesday 25 August, there will be a presentation

by **Douglas Pinkerton** on *'The historical development of early bicycles'* and on Tuesday 29 September, **James Styring** from Cyclox and staff from Oxford University's **Transport Studies Unit** will discuss the future of cycling.

Museum of Oxford's Volunteer Corps

Oxford City Council has now agreed on a way forward for the Museum of Oxford in the form of a re-structuring, supported by a volunteer service to be introduced from 13 July. All OCS volunteers have been contacted, and a small corps who were able to commit, attended an **Induction Day** at the Museum on Wednesday 8 July. This day took the form of a 'familiarisation' exercise, introducing the Museum Service, a detailed tour of the Museum, a question and answer session, and brief introductions to the different elements of the Museum's work.

But if it is to be properly supportive, the Volunteer Network *urgently* needs more people – even an occasional half-day – and there is an acute shortage of people for 2-hour sessions on Saturdays. If **you** can help in any way, please register your interest on site NOW at www.oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk or directly to the Museum of Oxford Operations Manager, **Vanessa Lea**, by email at vlea@oxford.gov.uk

The Chairman comments: At the Induction Day, the newly appointed Cultural Development Manager, **Colin Reid**, stressed the importance of the help we are giving to the Museum's continuing future, and the variety and interest of the tasks and input from our members. I sensed a team spirit evolving!

The Museum's drastically reduced budget for this year will allow it to operate ONLY if more volunteers can be found. There is currently no budget in place for 2010-2011.

To consider the long-term future, a working group of representatives from the City, the County, both Universities, OPT and OCS has been set up, and is commissioning an **Options Study** from a consultant expert. For news of progress, and to contribute further ideas, a joint **OCS/OPT Open Meeting** has been arranged for **Wednesday 7th October**. For details see the programme notes. **Please come along and demonstrate your support!**

Links with Oxford City Council

The Society extends a warm welcome to recently appointed city-centre manager, *Alistair Ferrier* with whom we have already held several encouraging discussions in pursuit of a wide range of issues. We particularly welcome his dynamism and pro-active approach.

From time to time the City Council undertakes formal consultation exercises – increasingly by use of on-line surveys. To register to take part, click on the **Consultation** button on the City website (currently towards the foot of their homepage). Then click on an ‘open’ consultation for further instructions.

Oxford Open Doors

This very popular feature in Oxford’s calendar takes place over the weekend of 12-13 September and involves more than 100 venues and activities this year.

Oxford Open Doors is organised by Oxford Preservation Trust in partnership with Oxford University in support of Heritage Open Days.

www.oxfordopendoors.org.uk

OPT urgently needs volunteer stewards to help them to run a successful programme. No prior knowledge of Oxford’s history is required, just a free half day and a friendly approach.

If you could help, please contact:

Mrs Holly Kilpatrick,
OPT Membership Administrator,
10 Turn Again Lane, OX1 1QL (01865 242918)
hkilpatrick@oxfordpreservation.org.uk

No more stuffing of envelopes!

We will all be forever grateful to the army of members who have helped us get mailings out to the Society’s membership over the years. Thank you! However, this issue of your newsletter comes to you, for the first time, through the mailing service offered by our printers – saving us a good deal of time and effort that is increasingly in demand towards other priorities.

Starting with the next issue in November, we plan to introduce other changes: firstly, we hope to trial a bigger newsletter, reducing the need for inserts (another important saving of costs and time). Secondly, we plan to offer a new email message service to those who request it, alerting members to the availability of their newsletter, programme details, booking form, etc. on our website. Whilst we will always mail out hard copy to those who prefer to receive materials in printed form, we know that we can save valuable costs, time and resources by using the technology that so many of us share.

Would you prefer to access your newsletter and other materials, via our website?

- ✓ If YES, please email **Liz Grosvenor, Membership Secretary** with the word **e-comms** in the subject line, at
membership@oxfordcivicsoc.org.uk
- ✗ If NO, please do nothing at all and we will continue to post materials to you, just as we always have done.

Pauline Martin, Newsletter Editor

Newsletter issued in March, July and November and published by
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