

A year of celebration?

Annual review 2012

The highlights of 2012

Our **Streets for People** campaign enabled Oxford to stage a record number of street parties, some marking celebrations of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee and the London Olympics. The **OxClean Spring Clean** brought out thousands to clean up the city. There was cause for celebration that we were able to influence several proposed new developments and we welcomed announcements of investment in rail infrastructure and links. But the planning system itself came under threat, with the risk that insensitive development can nibble away at our city.

With Oxford set to benefit from huge investment in rail infrastructure, our **Transport Group** actively campaigned for consideration of moving the **station** to the Oxpens, where there is scope to develop a transport hub. We believe we have successfully made the point that the station needs to be fully integrated with other forms of transport, wherever it is located.

We commented on many **national and local planning issues** and in June ran a well-attended seminar on what the new **Neighbourhood Planning** powers might offer. Some local communities began work on their plans this year.

But the enactment of the **National Planning Policy Framework** was a concern, with its risk that many protections have been swept away. Equally worrying was the Government proposal to relax **permitted development rights**, which we vigorously opposed.

Our **OxClean** initiative was a great success, with more than 2,000 people taking part in the March **Spring Clean**, the fifth of its kind. We continued to work with schools to get the message across that littering is not acceptable.

The **Streets for People** project not only encouraged street parties – a

record 85 this year – but also supported city-centre improvements. We had a significant input into the **Wayfinding** project, the installation of new signage and interpretation panels.

A record number of places were taken on our **walks, talks and visits**, all organised by the **Programme Group** to enable members to appreciate our city fully. Visits ranged from ever-popular college tours to new developments at Rose Hill.

We **redesigned** our **literature and three websites** to reflect our ethos and the use of new media. We hope this will help more Oxford citizens to learn about our activities and, of course, join our ranks.

The Museum of Oxford officially re-opened in June after our campaign to save it from closure. Some of our members are active volunteers, helping users to get the most out of their visit.

We continued to support the **Oxfordshire Blue Plaques Board**. Among seven plaques this year, the Board honoured Prime Minister H H Asquith at his country home in Sutton Courtenay and Ronnie Barker in Church Cowley Road.

We collected two **awards** for our contribution to the civic movement from **Civic Voice**, the umbrella group for societies like ours.

Oxford Spires Academy was one of 36 schools that took up the OxClean Spring Clean challenge. Oxford City footballers helped to launch the event





Planning for change

The Society has had another busy and successful year, as is evident from the reports opposite from our various groups. Two of these, the Transport and Planning Groups, suffered the sad loss of David Townsend and Chris Rayson, who had both contributed a wealth of wisdom and experience for many years. We shall miss them.

Perhaps the most obvious change for the Society was the comprehensive updating of our **websites and publicity** material. As a forward-looking organisation this was a necessary step to ensure that our public face and communications are consistent with our culture and the new media opportunities. We are immensely grateful to those who brought about the transformation.

As usual, issues of the built environment occupied most of our attention. Something that became increasingly clear was the inextricable and increasing inter-dependence of planning and transport issues. We had some success in shaping the agenda for the **new railway station**, having lobbied for its relocation to Oxpens where it would enhance access to the Westgate site.

The **National Planning Policy Framework** (NPPF) was adopted in April, aimed at simplification of the planning system. However, 10 months on, consultation was held on how much of the welter of previous planning guidance documentation needs to be retained. We opposed the Government proposal to relax the current limits on **'permitted development'**. We thought the proposal implausible in its justification and potentially disastrous in its effects.

Locally, we played an active role in the **Barton Area Action Plan** and the **Sites and Housing Development Plan** Document. These were duly adopted, after protracted public examinations. Perhaps the greatest controversy was the graduate accommodation blocks nearing completion at **Roger Dudman Way**. It remains to be seen how the University and City will respond to collective demands for drastic alteration. We attended presentations on a number of major development proposals, such as the new science museum, firm plans for which should emerge in 2013.

Neighbourhood Planning, a concept introduced by the Localism Act and the NPPF, became reality, with a number of communities starting work on plans, and we watch with interest.

The **street parties** for the Jubilee will remain as the highlights of last year for many communities, and recognition that city streets should be places for public enjoyment seems to be gathering momentum. We coordinated our efforts with other organisations in promoting this.

Finally, it was another wonderful year for the breadth and depth of the events **programme**, with record interest in our walks, talks and visits.

I must thank all those who made it such a busy and stimulating year for the Society.

*Peter Thompson
Chairman*



Down your street – local planning issues

The **Planning Group** continued its regular examination of all the planning applications and we wrote 173 letters of comment, the second highest ever, often with objection to plans which we found unacceptable. The total number of applications over the year was about 2,960, somewhat fewer than in 2011, which had about 3,200.



The types of application showed little change, although those for complete **demolition and rebuilding** seemed to continue to rise in number, and numerous applications to add **extensions** to houses proliferated still more. These are an understandable outcome of pressure on space within the ring road.

The realisation of Brookes University's ambitious plans for the **Headington Campus** (pictured left) continued on schedule, and there were plenty of other University and College applications, usually preceded by presentations and discussions which can be very useful both to the Group and, we hope, the applicants.

The pressure to increase purpose-built **student accommodation** was very evident, as was the continuing growth of the language schools and other

educational facilities for 16 -18 year old foreign students.

We **commended** some developments, including a city centre shop front and an eco-refurbishment of student accommodation in Summertown.

The Planning Group now has seven willing members, so if someone cannot attend we are still flexible enough to spread the load. Our planning meetings on alternate Wednesdays are friendly, stimulating and interesting occasions.

Copies of all our letters are published monthly on the Society's website, and on the city's website for each application until it has been determined.

Kate Joyce, Planning Group Convenor



Oxford Streets for People

We continued our focus on encouraging **street parties** as a means to engender community spirit, promoting the idea of the street as an active place, and seeking to improve things for those on foot. Oxford now has a national reputation for street parties; it has helped the Society broaden its remit into community matters and helped us build on our relationship with the City Council.

It was a bumper year for street parties, with at least 85 taking place. Our work in encouraging the City Council to make road closures easy has played a big part in this success.

We played an active part in the City Council's **Wayfinding** project (the signs/information boards in the city centre). We also undertook an audit of **street clutter** near the new signs in an attempt to reduce it. Our recommendations were accepted but so far we have been unsuccessful in getting them implemented.
Richard Bradley, OxStreets Coordinator

OxClean Don't Drop It

In March, 127 community groups and schools took part in our annual **Spring Clean**, fielding over 2,000 people. This more than matched the record total of 2011. An impressive cross-section of Oxford communities took part, from mosques to tennis clubs, brownies to allotment holders. Between them the groups collected over 1,000 bags of rubbish and recyclables. The adoption of new 'grot spots' meant we saw clean-ups of places like river banks and parks.

We also continued our work with **schools**, assessing the cleanliness of their grounds and raising awareness of the litter problem. Oxford Spire Academy topped our Roll of Honour this year.
OxClean Team



A north Oxford street party

Shaping our transport policies

2012 saw the announcement of massive new **investment in railways** and recognition that **Oxford's station** will need to be enlarged and improved. The focus of our work was to argue the case for relocating the station to Oxpens, where there is scope for an integrated transport hub and commercial property adjacent to the planned Westgate development. We commissioned Arup to update a report on this option. To date we have not won this argument but we believe we have established the principle that the station needs to be fully integrated with other forms of transport.

We responded to the **Great Western Franchise Consultation** and to the **County's Draft Rail Strategy**, and, with other groups, began discussion of how St Giles' could be improved.
Andrew Pritchard, Transport Group Convenor

Walks, talks and visits

It was a bumper year for our events **programme** with over 1,000 places taken on the 19 talks, walks and visits we arranged to enable members to learn about and enjoy their city.

Talks remained popular, whether architectural (The future of Oxford,

and New architecture), or historical (Canon and Chemist, and the life of Lord Nuffield). James Erskine, of Creation Theatre, reminded us that Oxford is a centre for the arts, while Chris Day charted the long, often stormy Town and Gown relationship.

Equally popular were a variety of **walks** and many of them had to be repeated up to three times to satisfy demand. We explored Summertown; learned about the advent of the railways; heard about Gloucester Green and the Beaumonts; the development of the Cowley Road and then Rose Hill. In an Olympic year, a towpath walk reminded us that Oxford is a home of rowing and we also ran a tour of the Iffley Road sports complex.

Visits were eclectic, enjoyable and well attended. A behind-the-scenes glimpse of the Oxford Playhouse was followed by a visit to the Balliol College historic archive and the year ended with visits to The Queen's College and the less-visited Bartlemas Chapel.
Alastair Lack, Programme Group Convenor

Getting our message across

The Communications Team runs our websites, issues the newsletter, *Visions*, and supports the Society in getting its message out through the media and Twitter. Our main focus this year was a **redesign** of all our communications to present a more contemporary and dynamic 'look'. This included a complete overhaul of all three websites.

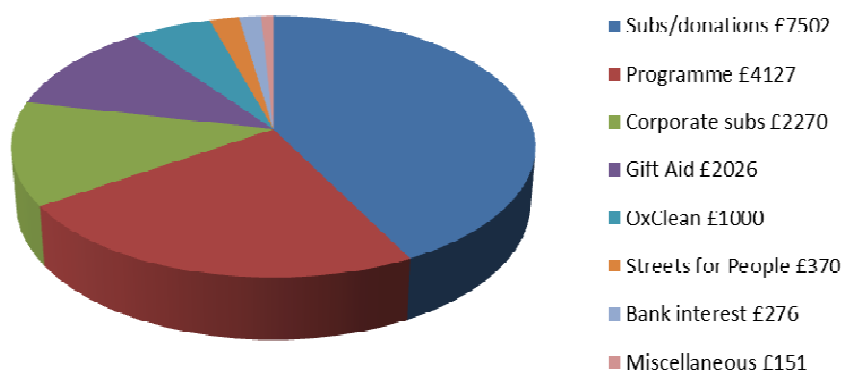
We owe a great debt of gratitude to Pauline Martin and Christine Thompson who project managed this work and who retired this year.
Communications Team

Our finances in 2012

We continued to support the OxClean, Streets and Blue Plaques schemes. Major expenditures were the redesign of our communications, including our three websites, and the commissioning of a revised report by Arup on the Oxford station redevelopment. These major items meant that for the first time in many years we incurred a deficit.

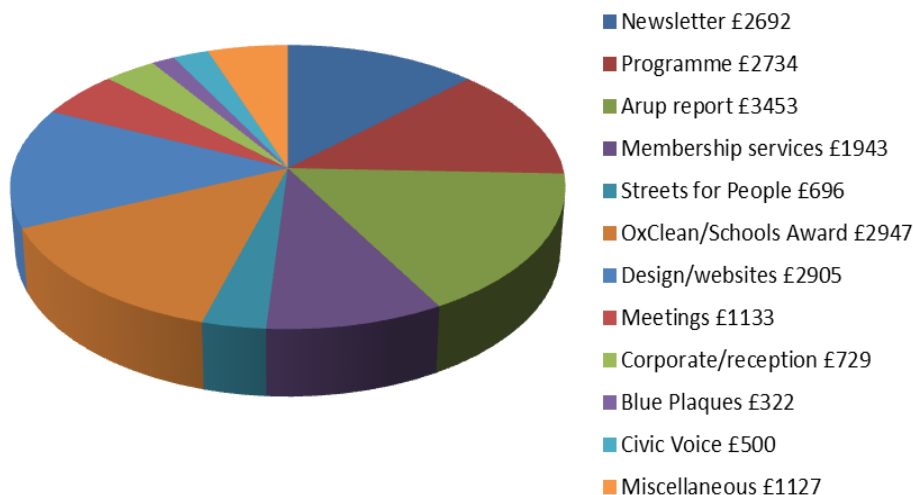
Income

Our income, at £17,722, was slightly lower than last year.



Expenditure

We spent a total of £21,181, resulting in a deficit of £3,459.



Assets

We held assets of £26,946, most of which is on deposit with the CCLA Interest Fund for Charities. Our policy is to hold in reserve sufficient to cover our liabilities and to enable us to take professional advice on planning or other issues as the need arises.

Treasurer's report

This year we used some of our assets to support two vital projects, as shown here. Costs have been carefully controlled and the Trustees are confident we have sufficient resources to support and extend our activities.

Gift Aid remains an important source of income, over £2,000 this year. If you have not yet gift aided your subscription, we urge you to do so.

We are not required to formally audit our accounts. Our Independent Examiner is satisfied we have met our obligations.

Please contact me if you would like a copy of the full accounts.

Gordon Balme
Hon Treasurer



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Please join us!

New members are always welcome.

Contact our Membership Secretary:

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Oxford Civic Society is a citizen's membership group. Our aim is an ever-improving quality of life in Oxford by working to influence planning, building, environment, public places, travel and community issues. We are a registered charity no.1116739.