



# A focus on the future

## *Annual review 2013*

### 2013 in a nutshell

2013 may go down in history as the year that a single development – the Roger Dudman Way student blocks – stirred a public outcry. But our main focus was a wider one – no less than the future of our city and its region.

With Oxford poised to benefit from a 'City Deal' from the Government, it was timely that we were invited to sponsor four *Oxford Futures* debates. These brought together many notable experts, local planning officers and politicians to discuss the issues. We agreed with the many experts involved that a key issue is to get local authorities to work creatively together to plan development in the whole region. A report due in March 2014 will form the basis of future campaign work.

Elsewhere we had a positive impact on our city and enabled members to appreciate it more fully through a lively programme of talks and visits.

We sought to influence a wide range of issues in scores of meetings with City and County planners, councillors, local groups, transport providers and others. **Planning** issues featured heavily on this agenda. As well as commenting on major projects and suburban development, we supported four local groups setting out on Neighbourhood Planning. We continued to campaign for more joined-up planning of **transport**, particularly relating to the Westgate development.

**OxClean** was again a great success, both in sprucing up the city and in taking the message to schoolchildren that litter is not acceptable. Our thanks go to all the hundreds of volunteers who took part in our activities.

The **Streets for People** team focused attention on **walking** in Oxford, as a means to enjoy the city. Working with the Pedestrians Association and Ramblers, they compiled an online list of walks to be launched in spring 2014.

The Society's **walks, talks and visits** were as popular as ever, giving members fresh insight into their city and region. Visits ranged from the Oxford Bus Company to Bartlemas Chapel.

We continued to support the **Oxfordshire Blue Plaques Board**. This year the Board placed five plaques, one of them marking the Old Marston house where Cromwell conducted negotiations to end the siege of Oxford.

In the autumn we conducted a **survey of our members**, to test opinion on priorities and assess what we could improve. The findings showed a contented membership and many ideas for topics to tackle!

Greater use of **social media** enabled us to get our message across to more people, including non-members. Our **Twitter** account and three websites gained new followers.

We again encouraged **street parties**, such as this one in Argyle Street, partly as a means to change attitudes to what streets are for, and partly to build stronger local communities

Photo courtesy of James Sutton





## Oxford at a crossroads

**2013 has certainly been another busy and eventful year.** It marked the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our book *Visions of Oxford in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, and, coincidentally, we started the year with what became a series of events under the banner of '**Oxford Futures**'.

We have realised that whatever we do to influence development and design of individual sites, just how our city performs, what it looks like and how good it is to live or work in depends on rather more strategic issues. A determination by Government to bolster the economic potential of the region means '**growth**' is inevitable. What this means, how it can be achieved, and what its implications might be were explored in depth at the four events we supported. The concluding **Oxford Futures report** is to be launched in March 2014. It is packed with sound ideas whose implementation would, we believe, enable the Oxford region to fulfil its potential and become an even better place. We are delighted that a start has already been made in adopting some of the proposals.

Meanwhile, the major development proposals put forward for **Westgate**,

**Oxpens**, the **station** and **Barton** have required an enormous input, which will continue throughout 2014.

In all of these developments it is ever more clear that **transport** issues are critical. Traffic congestion is the biggest obstacle to economic progress, and transport is also our members' biggest *bête noir*, judging from the responses to our survey. We lobby continuously for action, whether for a proper **transport interchange** at the new station, or for road improvements which will encourage **more cycling and walking**. However, change requires altered mind-sets, not only for us travellers, but also for the designers of our infrastructure. We still have a long way to go to approach the solutions which have made places like Freiburg, in Germany, so attractive. A fundamental, sadly still lacking, is a realistic, **long-term strategic transport plan for our region**, properly integrated with the development of housing and employment sites.

**Our principal resource is people.** We are hugely fortunate that we have dedication, determination and expertise

among the members of our **interest groups**. Increasingly, we are regarded as a voice of reason, and **increasingly we are being listened to**. We have pursued positive steps to cultivate relationships with the bodies which control the future of our city and its region, and we believe that these will bear fruit to make a 'better Oxford'. We always welcome new active members.

I must thank **Kate Joyce** (Planning Secretary), **Gordon Balme** (Treasurer) and **Tony Roberts** (Webmaster) for the huge efforts they have contributed over many years and who have now retired. I must also thank those who have taken their places: **Richard Dodd**, **Tony Turton**, others who have joined particular interest groups, and especially **Nicholas Falk**, who has been the inspiration behind the Oxford Futures programme. We look forward to 2014 with enthusiasm!

*Peter Thompson  
Chairman*



## The good, the bad and the ugly – planning issues

The tall white student blocks built in **Roger Dudman Way**, adjacent to and very visible from **Port Meadow**, were described in the *Oxford Times* as 'like building a skyscraper next to Stonehenge'. The Society was far from alone in being overlooked in the consultation process. Many of those most closely affected were left in complete ignorance of the project until building began. A report commissioned by the City Council from an independent reviewer, Vincent Goodstadt, was published in December. If adopted, its recommendations should ensure that such projects receive early and very public scrutiny in future. It remains to be seen what measures will be taken to reduce the impact of the development on the views from Port Meadow.

The experience of other major planning applications has on the whole been

more satisfactory. Although objectors have had mixed success, promoters' efforts to consult us and the public at an early stage have at least enabled people to make their views known. The proposed 'Magnet' science centre next to the Castle Mound is one example where public concern led to a radical redesign – though the project has now been abandoned. On Walton Street, the enlargement of the former **Ruskin College** and the startlingly modern **Blavatnik building**, received approval, while on Pusey Street, the overbearing **St Cross** project did not. We sympathise with City Councillors who have an unenviable job in trying to weigh the evidence for and against each project!

In size, the related developments of the **Westgate Centre**, **Oxpens** and the **railway station** dwarf all else. We

have campaigned vigorously for a genuinely integrated approach to create a shopping centre which does not look like a fortress, a station that is a genuine transport hub and an Oxpens that is a good place to live in, linked by roads that are not permanently clogged, and safe routes for pedestrians and cyclists. We will not give up!

An outline planning application for the very large housing development at **West Barton** was approved. Disappointingly, it was completely silent on the pedestrian and cycling routes that could and should link the new community to the rest of Oxford.

The group also commented on 136 local planning applications.

*Clive Booth for the Planning Group*



## Shaping our transport policies

The four **Oxford Futures** events held over the year provided a platform for our group and others to highlight the importance of transport to the future of our city and its region. The point was well made at the debates: transport and new development, such as housing, need to be considered together.

This year we sought to influence three key things: the location of a larger **railway station and transport hub**, the **transport impacts** of the plans for Westgate, Oxpens and the station, and more consideration for **cyclists**. Our arguments for a new station at the Oxpens have yet to be seriously considered, but we appear to have convinced the authorities that easier transfer for passengers between trains, buses, coaches and cycles is essential. On cycling, we made little direct headway but it is gratifying to see that the City and County plan to give cycling higher priority in their transport policies.  
*Andrew Pritchard, Transport Group Convenor*

## OxClean: Don't Drop It



Our sixth annual **Spring Clean** brought out hundreds of residents and 70 community groups to spruce up our city. Once again we were supported by an impressive cross-section of local communities, from churches and mosques to Scouts and wildlife groups who collected over 1,000 bags of rubbish and recyclables. Other litter picks took place throughout the year.

We also worked with **schools** to assess their premises and raise awareness of the litter problem. Oxford Academy won our secondary schools shield this year.  
*OxClean Team*



*The scale of the Roger Dudman Way blocks can be seen from the railway lines. Their impact on Port Meadow, to the right, created a public outcry* Photo courtesy of JP Bowen

## Streets are for people

2013 was the fifth year of our *Streets for People* programme which seeks to promote the street as an active place and to improve things for those on foot.

We continued to encourage **street parties** as a means to engender community spirit. In last year's review we expressed disappointment that, having carried out an audit of city centre **street clutter**, our recommendations were accepted but not implemented. We are pleased to report that they now have been!

Our main focus in the year was to compile a guide to 'interesting' Oxford **walks**. Many fascinating walks have been documented but it is not easy to locate them. Working in partnership with the local Ramblers and the Oxford Pedestrians Association we identified over 70 walks and have listed them in a website, *Walks in Oxford*, which will be launched in March 2014. We look forward to your feedback.  
*Richard Bradley, Oxford Streets for People Coordinator*

## Walks, talks and visits

Just short of 900 people enjoyed the 28 talks, walks and visits we arranged this year. **Talks** remained central, whether architectural (the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter), historical (Oxford in the Civil War, Turbulent Times at Cowley) or environmental (wildlife in the Lye Valley).

Equally popular were a variety of **walks**, some of them repeated up to three times to satisfy demand. Members explored 'the Oxford Green Ditch', 'Film Lover's Oxford', Gloucester Green and Central Oxford. A sculpture cycle ride round the city was a 'first' for us.

**Visits** ranged from tours of Greys Court, Nuffield Place, Wytham Woods, Pegasus Theatre and Bartlemas Chapel – all proved popular, as did Harris Manchester College and the Oxford Deaf Centre. The year ended with excursions to the newly refurbished University Church, St Mary's, and the Oxford Bus Company.  
*Alastair Lack, Programme Group Convenor*

## Getting our message across

The Communications Team produces the Society's **newsletter** *Visions* three times a year, manages our three **websites** and **twitter** accounts, including OxClean and Streets for People, and organises publicity for talks, walks, visits and events. Our followers on Twitter roughly doubled over the year to 350.

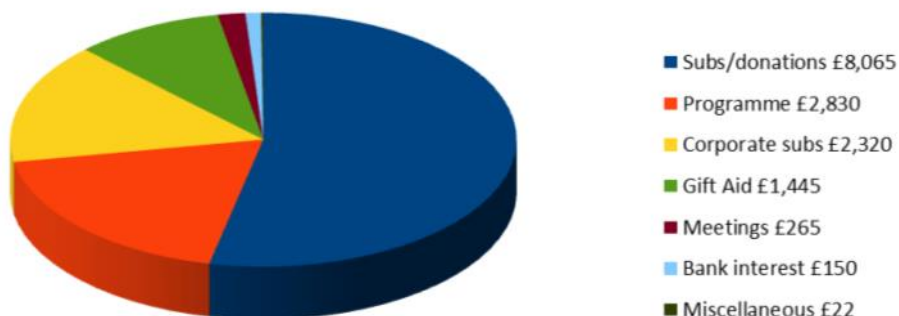
This year we supported the **Oxford Futures** events and began development work on two **new websites**, to be launched in 2014. Increasingly we used the main website to publish the Society's views on major planning and other matters and are now looking at ways of widening participation and debate. In the autumn we devised a **survey** to assess members' views of our work.  
*Communications Team*

## Our finances in 2013

In spite of reductions in both income and expenditure we maintained our breadth of activities and continued to support OxClean, Streets for People and the Blue Plaques scheme. We supported the Oxford Futures programme, while a donation in memory of David Townsend contributed to conservation work at the Bodleian Library.

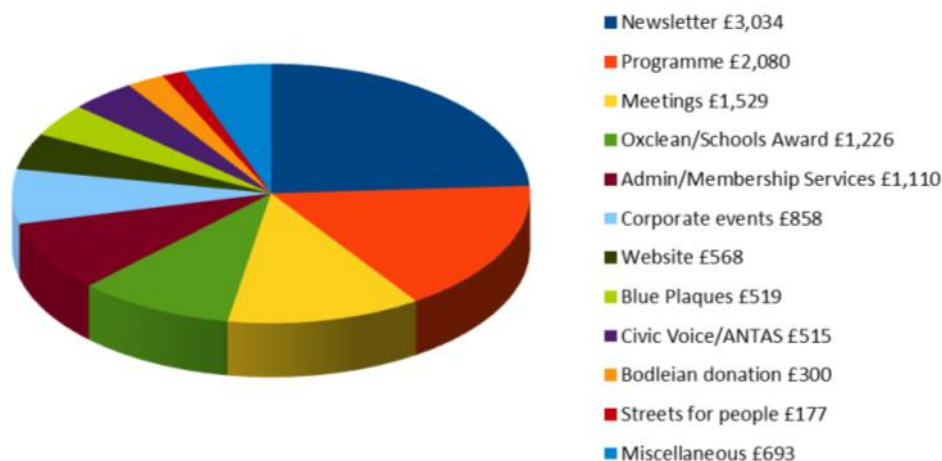
## Income

Our income of **£15,098** was £2,624 lower than last year.



## Expenditure

We spent a total of **£12,609** resulting in a surplus of £2,489.



## Assets

We held assets of £29,000, 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 and other issues as needs arise.

## Full accounts

The above is a summary of the accounts. Please contact the Hon Treasurer for a copy of the full accounts – [treasurer@oxcivicsoc.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@oxcivicsoc.org.uk)

## Treasurer's report

The surplus of £2,489 was achieved without increases to either subscriptions or to event charges. Our membership increased slightly, with almost 90% supporting the Gift Aid scheme.

The programme of events was well supported, a small surplus of £750 being offset by the programme of talks. These continued to be provided at no cost to members. Our support for OxClean required the purchase of new litter pickers at a cost of £1,000.

Increases in communication costs through website development work and a membership survey were offset by reduced administrative costs as the Society continues to operate ever more efficiently.

**Richard Dodd**  
Hon Treasurer



## Who's who/Contact us

### Oxford Civic Society

67 Cunliffe Close, OX2 7BJ  
075 05 756 692

[info@oxcivicsoc.org.uk](mailto:info@oxcivicsoc.org.uk)

[oxcivicsoc.org.uk](http://oxcivicsoc.org.uk) | [oxclean.org.uk](http://oxclean.org.uk) |  
[oxstreets.org.uk](http://oxstreets.org.uk)

**President:** Sir Hugo Brunner  
**Vice-President:** Tony Joyce  
**Chairman:** Peter Thompson  
**Vice Chairman:** Sir Clive Booth  
**Hon Secretary:** Vernon Porter  
**Hon Treasurer:** Richard Dodd

### Please join us!

New members are always welcome.

Contact our Membership Secretary:  
Liz Grosvenor  
[membership@oxcivicsoc.org.uk](mailto:membership@oxcivicsoc.org.uk)

Oxford Civic Society is a citizens' 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.