

How to solve the housing crisis?

By Peter Thompson, Chairman



These new homes in Headington replaced a single large house but such measures cannot meet the demand for affordable housing

Effective local government reorganisation is critical if we are to solve the housing crisis.

I have long argued the need for all local authorities across the county to get their acts together and manage their responsibilities more effectively. The cogs are well and truly grinding and there are now two proposals for reorganisation. At stake, if the Cambridge example is anything to go by, is at least £900 million of government funding. Our deliberations on these proposals can be followed on the website.

Reorganisation has implications across major social, economic and environmental issues. Housing is a thread running through many strands of public governance but perhaps most contentiously in relation to development. **How many houses are needed, who are they for and where should they go?**

The answers to these questions will affect individuals, families and communities; transportation – roads, cars and alternative modes; the Green Belt, our countryside and its landscape and ecology; and the genuine sustainability of our occupation of this speck of the planet's surface.

A fundamental driver of housing choice is the local economy. It is a sobering fact that Oxfordshire is one of few regions of the UK that contributes positively to the national wealth. Governments have

consistently failed to distribute the national economy more uniformly and any progress in achieving this will be slow. It is not surprising that we live in one of the most popular cities in the country.

Professor Danny Dorling argues in his book *All that is Solid* that, at least nationally, the crisis of housing provision has more to do with issues such as under-occupation than with inadequate numbers. In any event, the real crisis is the unaffordability of houses for even well-off households. A principal cause has been the belief that the market will deliver; but we now have the very belated acknowledgement that this hasn't worked: "Our broken housing market is one of the greatest barriers to progress in Britain today," says the Prime Minister (White Paper *Fixing our Broken Housing Market* – February 2017).

Housing is not simply an investment commodity; it is the cocoon in which children and families are nurtured; it is the habitat of communities; it is the security blanket which provides individual confidence. But house prices are high in Oxford because there are buyers not just wanting to buy, but able to pay – not the teachers, nurses, technicians or middle-ranking academics and managers on which the life of our city depends, but wealthy investors.

Professor Dorling cites 10 proposals for addressing the housing crisis; only one of them is to build more homes. Just building more homes is not the panacea some seem to believe. But it is the focus of enormous attention, from central government to the latest development-protestor. Much of the debate is hopelessly simplistic. "The country is being held back by a lack of affordable homes – the answer is to build on the Green Belt" ran a *Daily Telegraph* headline in December. True, this may be part of the answer, but real solutions are much more complex.

How many homes do we need?

Local authorities are required to carry out an assessment of need. In Oxfordshire, the five planning authorities collectively commissioned the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, or SHMA, a 188-page report whose conclusions are shown in the table overleaf.

The range of housing needed (column E) is not the sum of the three preceding columns; the 'range' is the assessment based on the analysis of the three factors considered; the dominant one being the number of houses required to meet the **affordable** housing need – not to accommodate demographic change, nor to service economic growth – in the case of all authorities, except for the Vale.

But the SHMA makes clear that the huge numbers assessed are the number of **all** types of housing which would need to be built to

A	B	C	D	E	F
	Demo-graphic base & shortfall	To support committed economic growth	To meet affordable housing need in full	Range: housing need per year	Total for period 2001 – 2031 (mid-point of range)
Cherwell	682	1142	1233	1090-1190	22,800
Oxford	782	700	2058	1200-1600	28,000
South Oxfordshire	552	749	965	725-825	15,500
Vale of White Horse	508	1028	683	1028	20,560
West Oxfordshire	541	661	685	635-685	13,200
Oxfordshire	3064	4280	5624	4678-5328	100,006

Taken from SHMA Table 90, p. 181

create the actual required number of affordable homes. Thus the numbers reflect the ineffectiveness of the mechanism by which house-builders can be induced to include affordable homes in any development project.

Oxford City Council, for example, has a policy requiring 50% of all sizeable developments to be 'affordable'; in practice this is never fully achieved, since developers plead non-viability of the project. The Council is accused of discouraging any development at all by trying to apply this policy. An alternative view might be that too much was paid for the site. In any event, this mechanism – an attempt to distort the market – is **hopelessly inefficient at delivering homes which people can actually afford.**

It is far too soon to know the effects of the February White Paper, but even Grant Shapps, a previous minister, was quoted as saying: "I don't suppose this will make much difference ...!"

Accommodating the number of houses needed is a serious and highly contentious issue. The assessment has been contested, but has been adopted by all the planning authorities, not least because the Planning Inspectorate has effectively ordained its validity.

Where to build new homes?

Oxford's boundaries are too tight and its available sites too few to accommodate more than around 11,000 homes, leaving an 'unmet need' of perhaps 17,000. A 'duty to cooperate' requires adjacent authorities to provide a number of homes, additional to their own assessment, to assist their constrained neighbour. After lengthy negotiation, three of Oxford's surrounding authorities agreed to provide 9,350 more houses to contribute to the city's

need. (South Oxfordshire has agreed to contribute, but not to the numbers apportioned to it.)

Of course, assessing just where all these houses should be put should involve properly-coordinated strategic planning. Instead, we have five uncoordinated Local Plans and no strategic plan for transport which bears any relationship to the potential locations for all this housing.

The Green Belt is 'under threat', but so too are swathes of rural landscape outside it. The vastly-increased population deserves better access to

better countryside – and better green amenity space. (See Clive Booth's article on page 3 on building in the Green Belt.)

Properly-planned, regulated and designed development and transport infrastructure could do this; it could make life better than the congested, unaffordable, polluted, fossil-fuel dependent, highly-unequal lifestyle we enjoy now. Other places are already achieving this better vision, or at least moving towards it. But it is all fantasy if we cannot even establish the vision, fix the management and find the leadership needed.

This comes back to re-organisation. Do both current proposals signal belated recognition of the need for cooperation and strategic vision? Petty squabbling is not a way forward for an Oxfordshire of which we can all be proud. Hopefully, there is more to it than just £900 million.

We have now set up a Housing Group to study the issues and lobby for sensible policies. If you would like to contribute to the discussions please contact me.

Peter is stepping down as Chairman at the AGM – see the Annual Review on pages 11-16.



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DON'T FORGET!

AGM Wednesday 29 March 2017

Magdalen College Auditorium

Speaker Carole Souter

Heritage at the heart of growth

All welcome: see agenda on page 7 and

Annual Review 2016 on pages 11 – 16

How to build in the Green Belt

Clive Booth, Planning Group



Oxford from Boars Hill : not all Green Belt is as sensitive as this

Photo courtesy of The Oxford Times

Our Planning Group has recently been considering whether Green Belt policies solve our problems or merely add to them.

Green Belts are not new. In 1580, Queen Elizabeth I forbade any new building within three miles of the gates of London – to prevent the spread of plague and ensure the supply of food stuffs. By the 1930s the motivation for establishing a London Green Belt had changed. The London County Council wished to create a ‘girdle’ of public open spaces accessible to people living in the highly urbanised centre: its Green Belt legislation was enacted in 1938. In recent decades, the emphasis has changed again, away from public enjoyment of open space to preventing urban sprawl and preserving the setting of historic towns.

According to *The Economist*, if general inflation had risen as fast as house prices since 1971, a chicken would now cost £51. The failure over decades to build enough homes has many causes, but the inadequate supply of land is an important one – land prices are about a third of new housing costs. In an effort to increase the supply of building land, the Government has set targets for local planning authorities for new homes to be provided up to 2031. The need for new homes in Oxford has been assessed as 28,000. Only a quarter of this is to meet expected economic growth: three quarters are for affordable homes.

Where policies collide

How many of these homes could be built within the city’s tight boundaries? An independent study has shown that, even if Southfield Golf Course were built on, Oxford would still need large numbers of houses to be built beyond its boundaries to meet Government targets. The targets have critics aplenty, but suggesting that jobs should be moved to other parts of the country ignores past failures to achieve this. The many high-tech employers in our area locate here and not elsewhere for very good reasons.

As our Chairman has indicated in his commentary, the district councils have been asked to make up the balance. The dilemma for them is that the sites that contribute most usefully to meeting the city’s needs are bound to be in the Green Belt, as close as possible to the city and accessible to its main employment centres. This is where the Government’s Green Belt and housing policies collide.

How can the desirable aims of the Green Belt and the housing needs of a city like Oxford be reconciled? One often overlooked

fact is that local planning **authorities have powers to designate new Green Belt**. My view is that they should use this power to adopt a ‘no net loss’ approach, so that when areas of the Green Belt are taken for housing, other areas are added to compensate. To keep the issue in perspective, even if the Government’s targets were realistic, the area of land needed outside Oxford would be about 370 hectares (914 acres), about half of 1% of the total 66,868 hectare (165,230 acre) area of the Oxford Green Belt.

Location, location ...

When considering where to locate sustainable housing developments to meet Oxford’s needs, various criteria suggest themselves. Some parts of the Green Belt which clearly satisfy the policy criteria of preventing urban sprawl and the coalescence of adjacent urban areas should certainly be out of bounds: the ‘Kidlington Gap’ would be one example. Nor should proposed housing sites compromise historic character, important recreational uses, high quality landscape or biodiversity.

Travel distances to Oxford employment sites should be minimised. Sites should either be close to public transport infrastructure, or large enough to justify investment in it: for example, former railway stations on existing routes could be re-opened or new ones created. Site locations should enhance sustainability (for example, of shops, schools, community centres or recreational facilities), being large enough to justify their own new social infrastructure or integrated with places already well provided for. Planning authorities should set tough criteria for housing density, also requiring properly-designed shared green spaces within new developments. They should use their negotiating power to determine where infrastructure for development is located to capture land value increases for public benefit. The process should not be led by the developers.

Recent independent studies have generated a rich source of material for assessing which parts of the Green Belt are vital and which less important. **The ‘no net loss approach’ can realistically be used to address Oxford’s housing needs on sensibly-located sites that satisfy the criteria I have suggested.**

Abingdon: a town in limbo?

Friends of Abingdon Civic Society



Much of Abingdon's traffic is forced into the historic town centre because of lack of alternatives

Have the planners overlooked the issues faced by Abingdon? The Friends of Abingdon put their case.

Abingdon was the county town of Berkshire until 1868, when it was replaced by Reading. Over the next 100 years Abingdon continued to develop and grow – it was the home of MG Cars and in the 1950s two estates for workers at UKAEA Harwell were built, resulting in an influx of scientists and others who were, and still are, very influential in the town's cultural and social life.

In the major local government and boundary changes in the early 1970s, Abingdon was pitchforked from Berkshire into Oxfordshire, which was not universally welcomed and still rankles with some older residents. It was designated a 'dormitory town', and expanded substantially to the north and east. In 1983, the parliamentary constituency of Abingdon was abolished and it became part of the new constituency of Oxford West and Abingdon – again, not a popular change.

Today Abingdon has a population of almost 35,000, making it by far the largest town in southern Oxfordshire, but there is a strong feeling that Abingdon is being sidelined in the ambitious plans in the Science Vale project and the Oxford City Deal. Despite its proximity to the main employment sites under these projects, Abingdon did not even appear on the map of Oxfordshire's strategic economic assets in the original version of the Strategic Economic Plan (SEP). This omission was challenged by the Friends of Abingdon and corrected in the 2016 refreshed SEP.

The pressures of growth

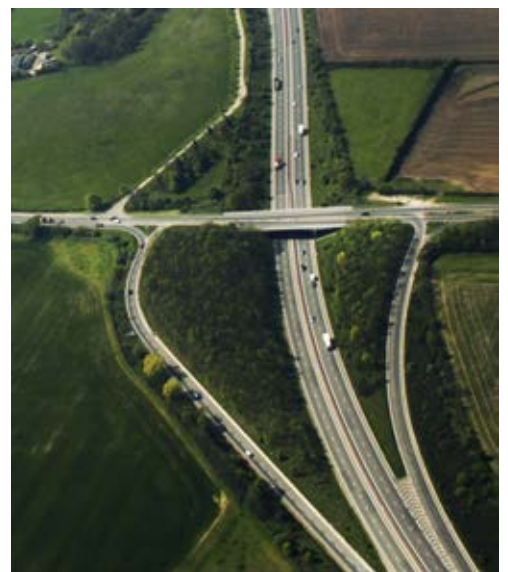
Over 1,000 houses are being planned for North Abingdon, and once the MoD releases the land at Dalton Barracks, there will probably be substantial development there too. These houses are absolutely necessary, but there are fears about provision of infrastructure, already overstretched in North Abingdon.

Above all, there are concerns about access to the A34 at the Lodge Hill junction. The junctions at Hinksey, Milton and Chilton have all been substantially improved, but Lodge Hill remains only half an interchange with no south-facing slip roads. All traffic from

North Abingdon going south on the A34 has to make its way to the Marcham interchange. Congestion is bad now – with 1,000 extra houses it can only get much worse if the Lodge Hill junction is not upgraded. Hopes were high that the funding for this would be allocated in the 2016 Autumn Statement, but it is now clear that this is not going to happen in the immediate future, if at all.

The main recipient of highways funding in our area is the Oxford – Cambridge Expressway, which may also bring problems for Abingdon. There are three proposed routes for the Oxford end of the Expressway. Will upgrading the Lodge Hill junction have to wait until a decision has been made about these and their effect on the A34 traffic flow? Whichever route is chosen, many Abingdon residents will still have to get on to the A34 every morning and off again every night. How long will they have to wait before Lodge Hill is upgraded?

Much of this could be alleviated if our County, District, and City Councils could agree an acceptable devolution plan for Oxfordshire, particularly if it involved a reduction in the number of layers of local government – three for those of us outside the City! Perhaps it's not just Abingdon but the whole of Oxfordshire that is in limbo.



*Lodge Hill intersection on the A34
Photo courtesy of The Oxford Times*

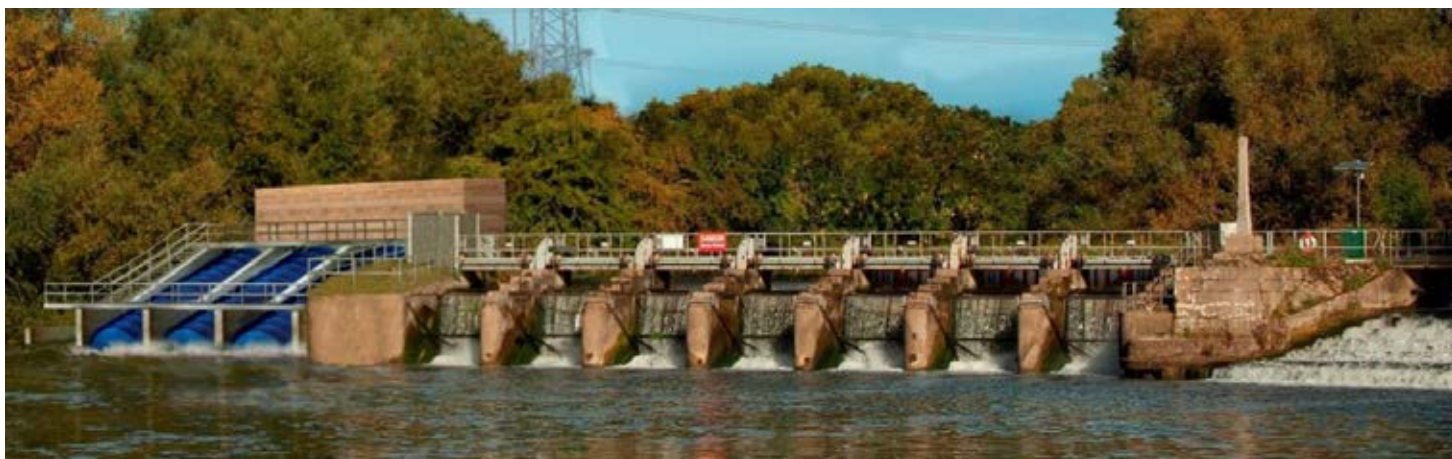
A brief history

Abingdon-on-Thames has a strong claim to being England's oldest town. When the Abbey of St Mary's was refounded in the mid-tenth century the town already had 1,000 years of history behind it. For the next 500 years, until the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1538, Abingdon Abbey was a centre of cultural and religious excellence, known and respected throughout Europe. The market town on the opposite bank of the River Stort prospered, although the townsfolk and the Abbey did not always see eye to eye.

In 1556 Abingdon was granted a Royal Charter by Mary I, incorporating it as a borough able to govern itself and raise money by levies on trade and markets. In subsequent centuries Abingdon became a prosperous market town with a strong mixed economy.

Local action on climate change

Chris Church



The Sandford Hydro, a Low Carbon Hub initiative, will be generating power by summer

Image courtesy of Low Carbon Hub

A changing climate is becoming a fact of life. Can Oxford lead the way in finding and adopting solutions?

The alarming arrays of indicators that show how the world is warming make it hard for even the most professional climate denier to claim that nothing is happening. Indeed the denier 'pitch' is now shifting to peddle ideas such as 'there's nothing we can do so let's not even try'.

The world is trying. The UN Paris climate agreement came into force last autumn as China, the USA, the EU and many other nations have ratified it. The USA stance is wavering under President Trump but individual states are making real progress. Some may say 'too little, too late' but any step in the right direction – as long as it is just the first step of many – is to be welcomed over inaction. Most scientists are clear that if we act now and act fast we can escape the more serious impacts of a changing climate.

But with this global commitment comes another concern. 'If the politicians are doing something, then we don't need to act' has always been a dangerous if seductive approach to life. Action is needed in every home, town and city to turn paper commitments into sustained and sustainable change. And across the world it is cities and their public administrations that often are leading the way.

The Norwegian capital Oslo has recently committed to a new plan that aims to reduce emissions by 50% in four years. Their 'climate budget' is one of the world's most radical experiments to slow global warming. It sets out annual goals to choke off emissions from cars, homes and businesses in the capital, and adds to a scheme announced last year to ban private cars from the city centre. "We'll count carbon dioxide the same way as we count money," Vice Mayor Robert Steen said of the targets for 2020, with direct links between carbon and expenditure.

There are many other positive examples. The C40 Cities 'Climate Leadership Group' is a network of the world's megacities taking

"Action is needed in every home, town and city to turn paper commitments into sustained and sustainable change. And across the world it is cities and their public administrations that often are leading the way."

action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It is based in London where it was set up in 2005 by then-mayor Ken Livingstone and has a website full of positive examples of change. The finalists for their upcoming awards (www.c40.org/blog_posts/35-finalists-chosen-for-fourth-annual-c40-cities-awards) show an astonishing variety of innovative approaches to creating sustainable low-carbon cities. Rachel Huxley, their Research Director, spoke at a meeting in Oxford on 6 March about how Oxford could play a high-profile role in this work.

What does a low-carbon future mean for Oxford?

For starters it means recognising the need for more systemic change. We've made a good start: our transport system is well ahead of many, with electric taxis coming in and hybrid buses, although we have a long way to go to even ensure our air quality meets WHO standards, much less cut our emissions by 50%. We have one of the more progressive community energy programmes in England based at the Low Carbon Hub. But our housing stock is (like much across the UK) still not fit for purpose in a low carbon society and this leaves thousands of local people in fuel poverty with their poorly-insulated homes wasting money and causing need-less emissions.

An important first step will be to stop things getting worse. Oxford's strong growth is causing many environmental problems and the advocates of the 'growth at any price' attitude seen in the recent SEP 'refresh' admit that their plans offer little or nothing to earlier aspirations for a low-carbon city. We need to move from innovative small-scale projects to an integrated city-level climate budget and plan, backed with resources and real commitment.

Our academics make it clear that a low-carbon future is an urgent priority and technically feasible. The obstructions are partly political and partly related to our own concerns about change. Oxford has a long heritage and in many cases a strong track record in resisting change, but if we now want to ensure the future of that heritage we need a much smarter approach to growth and development. Oxford Civic Society can play a key role in this new approach.

Chris Church is Director of the Community Environment Associates consultancy and chairs the Oxfordshire Climate Action Network – www.facebook.com/groups/oxfordshireclimateaction/

Access to the new Westgate Centre

Andrew Pritchard, Transport Group



The London cable car is not just a tourist attraction but also a new crossing of the Thames. It is integrated into the transport infrastructure and used by local people.

Could we use a similar means to reach the Westgate Centre?

Photo courtesy of Travelstart

As the concrete and steel framework of the new Westgate begins to be clad with bricks in preparation for the opening in October this year, serious thought is at last beginning to be given to how the extra shoppers and staff will reach it.

The County's decision to close **Queen Street** is causing headaches for the bus companies, as this is a key turnaround for several routes. An earlier proposal for a turning circle at the Tidmarsh Lane/Park End Street junction has been ruled out by Nuffield College, who own the extra land that would be needed.

Alternatives suggested are the rail station forecourt (no stopping), a Frideswide Square roundabout, the Hythe Bridge Street/Park End Street island site, running along the High Street and turning at the Plain, and more turning at the Oxpens or at Butterwyke Place (already very busy). All these alternatives will lead to increased congestion. The problem is not being made any easier by the revelation that, on the corners of the new Norfolk Street/Castle Street route there will be only 60 cm between passing buses. Coaches will not be able to pass each other at all on the two right angle bends by the new John Lewis store.

This same road is designated as a **cycle route**! Apparently the separation of cycle parking stands at the Westgate has been reduced from 1.2 to 1 metre, making them less user-friendly. We suggested that some untaken shop units could be converted to provide a proper cycle store/repair shop.

A suggested partial alternative to a bus-based solution is to have **autonomous pods** linking the station and the Westgate, but this is only a concept. With the likely retention of the temporary Oxpens car park, it is difficult to see how car traffic can be reduced, even if the expansion of the Seacourt Park & Ride site goes ahead.

Clearly some radical thinking is needed, and we believe that an outline survey of **alternative transport modes** is called for. This should include innovative solutions such as trams, monorails and ski-lift/aerial gondolas, which might provide useful input for the County's Oxford Infrastructure Strategy. A further survey of selected modes as applied to Oxford would be needed to follow this up.

Of roundabouts and railways

Now that work on the **Wolvercote and Cutteslowe roundabouts** has finished, it appears that traffic flow at the latter has been eased,

but that at Wolvercote is worse.

We welcome the arrival of **Chiltern Rail services** to Oxford Central, and understand that the removal of the canopies on the bay platforms and platform 3 is only temporary, due to delays in getting planning permission. However, the lack of canopies at Oxford Parkway can only lead to increased dwell times when it is wet, as passengers will be discouraged from spreading along the platforms before boarding.

The next phase of **East-West Rail**, to Milton Keynes, Bedford and Aylesbury, is to be built by a new company, East-West Rail Ltd, in Control Period 6 (CP6, 2019-2024), and not by Network Rail, in an effort to keep costs and progress under control.

We learned from Network Rail at Swindon that **electrification** from Didcot to Oxford has been pushed into CP6, but it will then have to compete with other schemes. A new **platform** to the west, involving the demolition of the Youth Hostel, is pencilled in for CP6-CP7. Network Rail has no money for a new station. They are concentrating on existing assets rather than new developments.

The best way to see Oxford

.... is on foot for we have such a wonderful variety of urban and semi-rural scenery, with a river and canal for good measure. In case you've not seen it, try out our **walks website** where you'll be able to find the perfect walk for you. The site lists over 70 selected walks by theme (such as historic, science, waterways). Many of the routes are only a click away, some involve buying a guide in one of our bookshops.

The website is a joint initiative by the Society, local Ramblers group and Oxford Pedestrians Association. www.oxfordwalks.org.uk
Additions and corrections are welcome – please contact us (see back page).



Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 29 March 2017

Please join us for the pre-AGM talk at 7pm and the AGM at 8pm

The Society's 47th Annual General Meeting will take place at Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street

The pre-AGM talk 'Heritage at the heart of growth' will be given by Carole Souter, Master of St Cross College and former Chief Executive of the Heritage Lottery Funds.

Refreshments will be available from 6.30pm.

Please bring this newsletter with you. Our report to members is given in the Annual Review 2016 on pages 11-16.

Minutes of the last AGM and the full accounts for 2016 are on our website and will be displayed at the meeting.

Agenda

- 1 President's opening remarks
- 2 Apologies for absence
- 3 Minutes of the 2016 AGM
- 4 Matters arising from the minutes
- 5 Chairman's report
- 6 Treasurer's report and accounts for 2016
- 7 Reports of Working Groups
- 8 Vote of thanks to the retiring Trustees
- 9 Election of Officers for 2017-18
- 10 Election of Committee members for 2017-18
- 11 Any other business which has been notified

Vernon Porter, Hon Secretary, info@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

Your letters

We had two responses to the letters in the last issue of *Visions*.

Caroline Compton writes:

I like the shiny, bright red block of student accommodation in Thames Street. It is a refreshing change from the all too safe style of building which has been the norm in Oxford over the years. Buildings in Thames Street don't impinge on views of Oxford.

Rosanne Bostock writes:

With regard to Ian Green's letter, Oxford could indeed accept higher densities in the city centre. Above the shops in Cornmarket, The High and Queen Street, there is a great deal of space that could be used for student accommodation and flats. Having more people living in the city centre would revitalise the Covered Market which struggles to survive.

I recently heard about a scheme in the Netherlands which intermingles student and pensioner accommodation. Apparently this works well, providing low-cost housing for students in exchange for their support for the older residents, who greatly enjoy having young people around them. This could be tried out in Oxford.

Transport congestion would be so much easier if there were small shuttle buses in the city centre on mini circuits, say from the station up George Street to Carfax and back down Queen Street. A similar circuit could run up The High, along Cornmarket and back through The Broad and Holywell and round The Plain, connecting with the buses to Cowley and Headington. It would also help if only the coaches to Heathrow and Gatwick left from Gloucester Green, with the Thornhill Park and Ride enabling people to catch the Tube and Oxford Express to London, also the 280 to Aylesbury.



Pete Finn posted a comment on our website on the proposals to change the junction between Parks Road and Broad Street by building a raised table and removing the traffic lights.

I have no problem with these proposals, but something needs to be put in place immediately to indicate that none of the roads now has any priority.

As a cyclist I traverse this junction several times a week and the principal vehicle traffic (Parks Rd-Broad St) conflicts with any cyclist trying to access the minor arms of the crossroad. Sadly taxi drivers are the main offenders and approach the junction at speed with no indication that they might yield to anybody halfway across.

Booking form

Spring /summer 2017 ticketed events

Closing date for applications: **Friday 24 March.** Please enclose:

- 1 cheque/s payable to Oxford Civic Society, one for each event
- 2 one stamped, addressed envelope for all tickets

Member's name.....

BLOCK CAPITALS PLEASE

2nd member's name (if applicable).....

Address.....

.....

.....

Postcode Telephone

Email

Event	No. of tickets	Amount enclosed
For events at more than one time, please cross out any dates you cannot do or indicate your preference		
Wolfson College – a visit Tuesday 25 April at 2pm @£8	
Aston's Eyot nature reserve – a visit Tuesday 9 May 6pm@£8	
Witney – a walking tour Wednesday 24 May at 10.30am Wednesday 7 June at 10.30am@£5	
Headington Quarry – a walk Wednesday 14 June 10.45am@£5	
Bartlemas Chapel – a visit and talk Saturday 17 June 2pm@£8	
Exeter College Cohen Quadrangle – a visit Wednesday 12 July 10.30am@£8	
Worcester College gardens – a visit Thursday 27 July 2pm@£10	

Note: Tickets are allocated soon after the closing date but if you miss it, it's always worth asking if there are places left. Cheques are banked three weeks after ticket issue; after that no refunds can be given.

Send this completed form to:

Alan Hobbs
66 Southfield Road
Oxford OX4 1PA

OCS Calendar

'Cut out and keep'

March – July 2017

**ticketed events*

Tuesday 28 March* 2pm

Thursday 30 March* 2pm

Tuesday 4 April* 10.30am

Friday 7 April* 2.30pm

Nuffield College's island site, a visit

This event is sold out; ask about cancellations

Wednesday 29 March 6.30pm for 7pm

Heritage at the heart of growth, a talk by

Carole Souter, followed by the AGM, at

Magdalen College Auditorium

Thursday 6 April* 9.45am

Harwell Campus Rutherford Lab, a visit

This event is sold out; ask about cancellations

Tuesday 25 April* 2pm

Wolfson College, a visit

Tuesday 9 May* 6pm

Aston's Eyot nature reserve, a visit

Tuesday 23 May 7.30pm

Learning from Cambridge, a talk at the

Ship Street Centre (The Bastion)

Wednesday 24 May* 10.30am

Wednesday 7 June* 10.30am

A walking tour of Witney

Wednesday 14 June* 10.45am

Headington Quarry, a walk

Saturday 17 June* 2pm

Bartlemas chapel: a visit and talk on

Oxford's Conservation Areas

Wednesday 12 July* 10.30am

Exeter College Cohen Quadrangle, a visit

to the former Ruskin College, Walton Street

Thursday 27 July* 2pm

Worcester College gardens, a visit led by

Simon Bagnall, Head Gardener

***Contact for booking/tickets only:**

Alan Hobbs

66 Southfield Road, Oxford OX4 1PA

Tel: 01865 248 105

If you have booked but can't attend,

please contact Alan Hobbs.

We always have a waiting list



Programme

Spring and summer 2017

Open talk – all welcome

No pre-booking, free of charge – help us to recruit new members by bringing a guest

Learning from Cambridge: Tuesday 23 May at 7.30pm at the Ship Street Centre (The Bastion)

Please note change of venue: now at Magdalen Auditorium, Longwall Street

Last year a group from the Society went on a study visit to Cambridge to see what it might have to teach Oxford about the strategic planning of a city region. This report on the findings and discussion will be led by speakers from both cities.

Members-only walks and visits

Tickets are needed for these events: bookings by 24 March

Wolfson College: a visit

Tuesday 25 April 2pm

In 2016 Wolfson College, Oxford's largest post-graduate college, opened a new entrance and academic wing designed by Berman Guedes Stretton Architects. This links the Leonard Wolfson Auditorium with the original Powell and Moya buildings from 1968, on the bank of the Cherwell. The visit will include a tour of the fine gardens and an opportunity to see the College's art collection. Tea/coffee will be provided at the end of the visit.



Aston's Eyot nature reserve: a visit

Tuesday 9 May 6pm

Aston's Eyot nature reserve is a little-known part of East Oxford between Meadow Lane and the River Thames which is home to a great variety of wildlife and plant species. Owned by Christ Church, it is maintained by the Friends of Aston's Eyot, a group of energetic local residents, who will tell us why they took on the task and what they achieved. We recommend stout walking shoes.

A walking tour of Witney

Wednesday 24 May 10.30am

Wednesday 7 June 10.30am

Witney is a historic market town with a long heritage of woollen mills and blanket production. This guided walk around some of the historic streets will include a visit to the Blanket Hall, the headquarters of the 'trade association'. Our guide, Richard Martin, has been involved in the business for many years.

Headington Quarry: a walk through Oxford's industrial village

Wednesday 14 June 10.45am

Local historian Barry Carter will lead this walk through Quarry's distinctive streets and alleys to understand how the impoverished

hamlet became the 'village suburb' of today. We will encounter intriguing reminders of the old trades and sturdy independence together with work by distinguished architects, men of letters and notable local people.

Bartlemas Chapel: a visit and talk

Saturday 17 June 2pm

Bartlemas was the site of the medieval leper hospital and some of the original buildings survive. This visit to the chapel and grounds on Civic Voice Day celebrates the 50th anniversary of the Civic Amenities Act which first introduced the concept of Conservation Areas. Following the tour, there will be a talk about the effectiveness of Oxford's 18 Conservation Areas, of which Bartlemas was the first. Note: the potholed track is unsuitable for wheelchairs.

Exeter College Cohen Quadrangle: a visit

Wednesday 12 July 10.30am

Ruskin College's listed façade on Walton Street has been carefully conserved but the interior has been completely rebuilt. This is an opportunity to discover the modern student and educational facilities within the college.

Worcester College gardens: a visit

Thursday 27 July 2pm

The college has one of the largest gardens in Oxford with 26 acres including the playing fields. There is much to admire, from its exquisite planting to its lawns and lake. It has won Best College Garden in Oxford in Bloom more than once. The Head Gardener, Simon Bagnall, who transformed the garden, will lead the tour.



Blue plaques in 2016

Eda Forbes

The Oxfordshire Blue Plaques Board, which the Society supports, honoured a record number of the county's great and good in 2016. Eda Forbes, Secretary to the Board, reports.

The commemorations of 2016 boosted the number of women who have been honoured by the scheme. We began the season with a plaque for **Dorothy Hodgkin (1910–1994)**, crystallographer, the only British woman to receive a Nobel Prize for science. She lived at 94 Woodstock Road (1957–1968) where the Nobel telegram was delivered in 1964. Elspeth Garman, Professor of Molecular Biophysics and a leading crystallographer, gave a stimulating tribute, conveying the complexity of Dorothy Hodgkin's ground-breaking work. Hodgkin family and friends, including the actress Miriam Margolyes, were out in force for the event.

In July the focus was on **Sarah Acland (1849–1930)**, at 10 Park Town, where she lived 1901–1930. The daughter of the great Sir Henry Acland, she was an acclaimed pioneer of colour photography and created stunning portrait photographs of Gladstone, Ruskin and others who visited the family house in Broad Street where the Weston Library now stands. Dr Michael Pritchard, Director of the Royal Photographic Society, gave the address at the unveiling. Among those attending was Sir Henry's direct descendant, Lt-Col Sir Guy Acland, Bt.

In September we raised the profile of the distinguished poet **Anne Ridler (1912–2001)**. She shares the plaque at 14 Stanley Road with her husband **Vivian Ridler (1913–2009)**, fine letterpress printer and last in the tradition of great Printers to the OUP. Professor Michael Schmidt, poet and founder of Carcanet Press, publisher of Anne's *Collected Poems*, and Sir Hugo Brunner, publisher and family friend, paid tribute to the pair.



The plaque to Anne and Vivian Ridler in Stanley Road, East Oxford

In May a plaque for the extraordinary **Revd F E Robinson (1833–1910)**, doyen of bell ringers and founder of the Oxford Diocesan Guild, was unveiled at St Peter's Church, Drayton, by the Bishop of Dorchester. Robinson was the first to ring a thousand peals and zealously promoted bell ringing everywhere. This was a great local community occasion and attracted bell ringers from far and wide.



Continuing the theme of shared plaques, philanthropist **Raymond ffennell (1871–1944)**, was honoured together with **Hope, his wife, and Hazel, their daughter** at Hill End Centre for outdoor learning and education, created by them in 1926. More famous was the gift of Wytham Woods to Oxford University in memory of Hazel in 1942, for the express purpose of the preservation and research for which the woods have become so celebrated. Nigel Fisher, the Conservator of the woods, was among the speakers and the plaque was unveiled by Simon ffennell, great nephew, who spells his name in a less idiosyncratic way.

In June we commemorated a father and son on a single plaque: **Professor Sir Edward Bagnall Poulton (1856–1943)**, Hope Professor of Zoology (entomology) and evolutionary biologist, with his famous son **Ronald Poulton Palmer (1889–1915)**, charismatic rugby football hero, at Wykeham House, 56 Banbury Road, the family home 1881–1943 (now OU Careers Service). The speakers were Charles Godfray, the present Hope Professor, and the Hon Peter Jay, Sir Edward's great grandson.

The finale of the season took place at 5 Beaumont Street in October when we celebrated **William Wilkinson (1819–1901)**, the Witney-born architect whose distinctive gothic buildings are ubiquitous in the county and city. He notably designed the Randolph Hotel which celebrated its 150th anniversary in 2016, and was commissioned by St John's College to design North Oxford Victorian suburb. Professor William Whyte, Tutorial Fellow in History and Vice President of St John's, paid tribute to Wilkinson's extensive contribution to our architectural heritage.

OCS people: Janet Fenwick

Sadly we have to report the loss of another of those earlier members of the Society who helped to build up its strength and increase its reputation and influence.

Janet Fenwick joined the Committee in 1996 as City Centre Management representative. She took over as Treasurer in 1999 at a time when the Society's membership was growing rapidly, handing over to Gordon Balme in 2004. At the time meetings were held in members' homes and Executive Committee members of that era will recall her generous hospitality in Bainton Road.