

Visions and priorities

By Ian Green, Chairman

In 2019 we will celebrate our 50th anniversary. As your incoming Chairman, I see this coming milestone as an opportunity to take stock and re-assess our priorities.

The Society has achieved a great deal since it was founded in 1969 but the city and county face some major challenges over the next five to 10 years. How should the Society be shaped? This article sets out our current views and activities but **your views on our priorities will be most welcome.**

Coincidentally, Oxford City Council has recently prepared a draft vision of how Oxford might change and grow*. The 2050 time horizon is ambitious. The draft lists 15 characteristics for 2050 all of which assume continued growth while emphasising social and environmental sustainability. The City Council will refine this draft following public consultation. Such a vision is useful as a guide for shorter-term plans such as local plans, corporate plans and the plans made by other authorities which affect us - notably, but not exclusively, the transport plans of the County Council.

Of course the immediate priority for all of us is to participate fully in the **Oxford Local Plan** consultations, this year and next (see the back page). Among other things we need to consider how far this Local Plan, with a 2036 horizon, contributes to the achievement of the City Council's 2050 Vision.

Getting the governance right

Another immediate priority is wholehearted continued participation in the debate on Oxfordshire **local government re-organisation** and/or devolution. It was disappointing that Oxfordshire County Council and South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils submitted a proposal for a Unitary County Council (the 'Better Oxfordshire' proposal which abolishes the District and City Councils) to the Secretary of State, Department of Communities and Local Government.

We believe that much more thought is needed on this proposal and on the Combined Authority counter-proposal of the City Council, West Oxfordshire and Cherwell District Councils. Surely consensus across the County is essential before the Secretary of State is involved?



A spring visit to Witney was much enjoyed by members.

See page 7 for details of the autumn programme

Photo courtesy of Pauline Massey

Getting development in the right place

We are delighted that the Oxfordshire Growth Board has decided to prepare a **Joint spatial plan** for the County. This will help to determine how far the currently contentious economic growth targets of the Local Enterprise Partnership and the housing growth targets of the Growth Board can be accommodated without damaging the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Green Belt and villages with no wish to grow.

Such a spatial plan was one of the Society's recommendations in our 2014 report *Oxford Futures*.

We plan to collaborate in the preparation of the plan, perhaps by organising public meetings on agreed topics. Our **Oxfordshire Futures Group** leads our governance and *Joint spatial plan* work.

As a wholly voluntary organisation we depend on the enthusiasm of our **members** to run our activities and contribute to our thinking. With almost 1,000 members we are in a healthy position but we always welcome new members (including corporate members) and enthusiasts willing to join our working groups – or even start a new one.

Please help us to attract new members by spreading the word to neighbours and friends. If you're interested, join one of our working groups and help shape the city's future or support our communications and 'back office' work. Our activities are fun as well as fulfilling!

A strategic approach

In the City's neighbouring Districts and in Oxford, we continue to advocate **co-locating employment and housing development** and linking both with infrastructure capacity – especially **transport infrastructure** – as an absolute necessity. In addition we need to continue to press for strategic transport planning solutions that do not involve more roads. The putative Oxford Metro rail line from North Kidlington to Milton Park and Didcot Parkway, with possible additional use of the Cowley line, now used by BMW, for passenger traffic is a perfect example of a non-road initiative which deserves a hearing. Our **Transport Group** leads on this.

The cohesive development of the **western area of the city centre** is another example of the need for joined-up planning. The Westgate redevelopment will be completed in October this year and the developer is linking the retail and entertainment uses of the Westgate with the Castle. Nuffield College and the City Council are ready to finalise the revised Master Plan for the Oxpens development site and a new draft Supplementary Planning Document for the station area has been prepared. Nuffield College is preparing plans for Hythe Bridge Street and Park End Street, while the University will be developing the area it owns in the Osney Mead Industrial Estate.

An overall transport plan which integrates these various developments is essential: nearly 50 years on we are still lobbying for a workable city centre transport strategy. This is a high priority and as the Society is a member of the West End Area Steering Group we are in a good position to work with key stakeholders. Our **Centre-west Group** focuses on this.

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Homes for all

Our recently formed **Housing Group** has started its work by providing detailed comments on the Government's consultation on the Housing White Paper. The Group will continue by contributing comments on the housing options set out in the draft Local Plan (see the back page).

And business as usual!

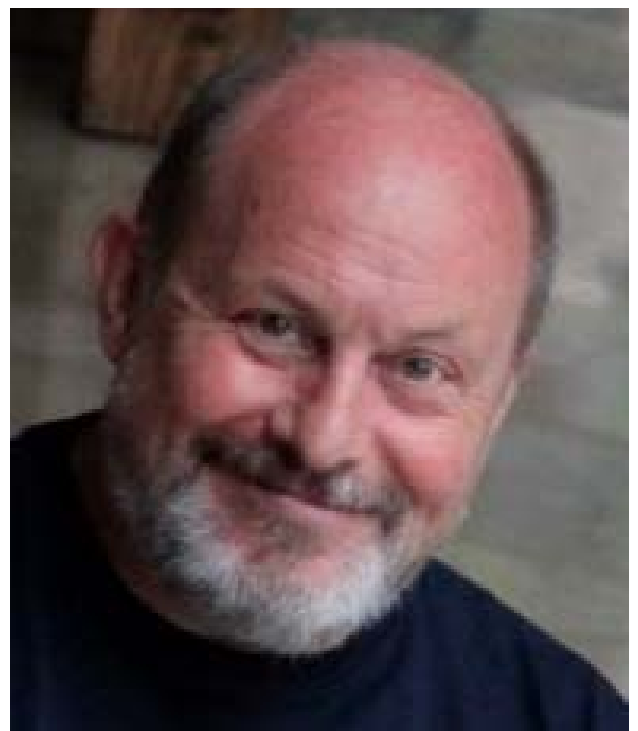
Other essential activities of the Society continue alongside these special priorities. The Society's **Planning Group** meets fortnightly to review applications for planning permission, of which there will be up to 1,500 this year. The Group expects to comment on several hundred of them.

The **Programme Group** continues to delight and inspire us all with its year-round programme of Oxford-themed talks, walks and visits aimed at encouraging an awareness and understanding of our city. We plan to intersperse these events with talks on the key activities of the working groups, as requested at the last AGM.

Our support to **OxClean** and the annual Spring Clean is unwavering and we aim to do more throughout the year. Similarly we support the **Oxfordshire Blue Plaques Board** and the **Museum of Oxford**. And behind the scenes we have people managing our membership, supporting the Executive Committee and dealing with our communications.

Your views matter. If you have thoughts on our priorities or want to get involved please email me at chairman@oxcivicsoc.org.uk or phone the 'office phone' (run by volunteers) 075 05 756 692.

Ian Green, Chairman



* *Oxford 2050: A vision for a successful and sustainable city for everyone* is available on the City Council website www.oxford.gov.uk

OCS people

A new team at the top

At the AGM in March we said farewell to three outstanding supporters and welcomed some newcomers. We owe them all a great debt of gratitude.

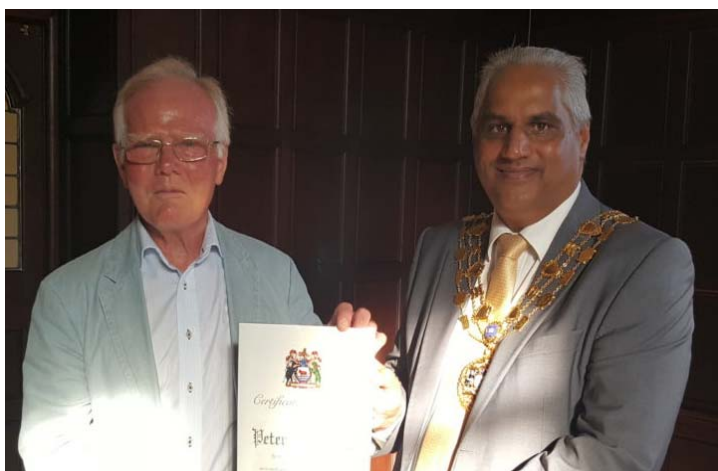


Sir Hugo Brunner stepped down as our President, having served in the role since 2010. Formerly the County's Lord Lieutenant, he has an extensive knowledge of the city and county and was a wise and humorous contributor to Executive meetings. A passionate supporter of OxClean, he always joined in our litter picks. He was also the founder chairman of the Blue Plaques Board.

Sir Clive Booth, formerly Vice Chairman, became our new President. Clive has been involved with the Society for many years and co-ordinates the work of our Planning Group. As he says, planning matters to people, whether that's domestic applications or major development.



Peter Thompson retired as the Society's Chairman after seven years in the role. In that time Peter became the public face of the Society and contributed enormously to our growing reputation as an influential group of well-informed, independent thinkers who put the citizen first. Peter was recently awarded a Certificate of Honour by the City Council for his outstanding contribution to the city. We are delighted he is continuing his involvement with the Executive Committee, the



Peter receives his award from Cllr Altaf Khan, Sherriff of Oxford

Programme Group and the new Housing Group.

Our congratulations and thanks go to **Eda Forbes** who also received a Certificate of Honour from the City Council for her

work as the Secretary of the Blue Plaques Board.

We are sad to lose **Tim Treacher** from the Executive Committee. He will be much missed for his good humour and wit as well as his knowledge but we are delighted he continues to support the Programme Group.

Ian Green was elected as the new Chairman after serving for three years on the Executive Committee. Ian is a professional planner, running his own consultancy that specialises in urban and regional planning. He does much of this work in South East Asia and often reads our committee papers on a plane home! He has lived in Oxford for over 45 years.



Jonathan Scheele became our new Vice Chairman. He moved to Oxford in 2010 after 36 years working for the European Commission in Brussels, Geneva and Bucharest. During his time in the Commission Jonathan handled a range of policy areas, including transport infrastructure planning and smart transport.



New faces

Professor Tim Wilson was elected to the Executive Committee. An Emeritus Fellow of Balliol, he has recently retired from the Ashmolean Museum where he was Keeper of the Department of Western Art. He chaired the group that attempted to restore Oxford's canal basin, now the

Worcester Street car park.

Professor Margaret Maden

became a Vice President, joining Tony Joyce in this honorary role. She has had a distinguished career in education. At Keele University she headed the Centre for Successful Schools and she was an Hon Fellow at the University of Oxford Department of Education. Locally she chaired a residents' association (SENDRA) and was a school governor.



Our Chairman says, "The Society is in a strong position for moving forward but we also have great strength in our membership and we urge others to get involved".

You can read more about the full Executive Committee on our website: www.oxcivicsoc.org.uk

Your letters

Your views on housing

Fiona Rossington writes:

Thank you for your comprehensive and well thought out article about the housing crisis (*Chairman's commentary in the March issue*).

My husband and I are members of the Society but we live in Chipping Norton. The town has had its projected new housing numbers increased dramatically, but many of these houses are to meet the needs of people who will work in Oxford. As you point out, to make this work there need to be plans for transport. At present the A44 is not as bad as the A40 at rush hour but with more houses in Woodstock and Chipping Norton this will change.

In addition the infrastructure in Chipping Norton is struggling to cope as the town grows. Drains overflow in West Street.

Do you feel that if the local authorities combine things will improve? I had felt that at least West Oxford District Council knew where C N is and was a bit in touch with us.

The root causes of our problems may be many, but two strike me. Firstly the nation's obsession with home ownership and the continual rise in house prices (I am as guilty as the next person). Nowadays it is the best place to put your money, so people from other countries are buying here and in London, simply to make money.

Secondly we have an obsession with not increasing council tax. We can't pay for new methods of transport or policies to ensure there is housing for middle income workers without the money coming from somewhere. What about building more houses or flats for rent? Could I be suggesting 'council houses'.....?

News round up

OxClean scores again

OxClean's Spring Clean in early March was the tenth such event and another resounding success.

More people than ever before turned out to pick litter over the three-day period. Our two depots were constantly busy handing out litter-picking equipment and taking it back for the next group of users. Not even a rain-storm (on the first day) deterred some enthusiasts!

The biggest need was for litter pickers - we had a record number of requests this year (944). Despite the big numbers involved, many regular volunteers have commented that there is less litter than formerly. The area around Kassam Stadium, previously described as a 'grot spot', was this year reported as clean. The City Council's StreetScene team reported that volunteers had collected 1.7 tonnes of recyclables and 2.4 tonnes of landfill, 40% down on last year. Is the message slowly getting through that litter just isn't acceptable?

More than a litter pick

OxClean is about much more than clearing up, it's also a wonderful opportunity to bring communities together to do something useful and fun. This year we had teams from the Ramblers, Oxford University Press, Headington School, Linton Road Residents Association, and a Multi-faith group from East Oxford to name but a few. Community groups in Rose Hill even made a video about their litter pick which you can see on [YouTube](#). A big thank you to everyone who took part.



Children love taking part in the Spring Clean

A BIG new future for our museum

Exciting plans are afoot to quadruple the present exhibition space in the Museum of Oxford.



The plans to expand and redevelop the Museum are proceeding apace, with the architects and designers now working on the details of the layout and content of the greatly increased new area. This will include flexible displays, new interpretation using

digital media and a new state of the art learning space with resources for schools.

A 'Museum Makers' area will provide space for researchers to work, while open workshop spaces will enable local community groups to get involved in creating exhibitions. There will be a new shop and reception desk, accessible from the entrance of the Town Hall, and improved facilities for the museum's more than 100 volunteers. Read more on the [Oxford City Council](#) website - search for Hidden Histories.

A Museum of Oxford Development Trust has now been established to support a funding application to the Heritage Lottery Fund, which is due to be completed by the year end. It will also support the implementation of the plans once the HLF grant and other required funding has been secured.

An inspector calls

Clive Booth

What is the most daunting challenge that a member can undertake on behalf of the Society? Close to the top of my list would be appearing at a public planning inquiry.

Fortunately, such events are infrequent but when they happen, they make demands upon the energy and stamina of members who volunteer to take an interest in planning matters.

As I write, the first stage of the public inquiry into an application to erect large student accommodation blocks on a very sensitive site in the Conservation Area between Magdalen Deer Park and Holywell Cemetery is under way. The developer and the land owner, Merton College, are appealing against the City Council's refusal to grant planning permission. It is rather unusual for colleges to be on opposite sides, but in this case Magdalen College is supporting the City Council's original decision to refuse planning permission.

Across a very large table in the sombre setting of the Town Hall's Old Library, the two sides face one another. This is a very formal hearing, with high-powered teams of lawyers representing the contending parties. In this kind of hearing, the lawyers are able to cross-examine witnesses and these cross-examinations can be excoriating.

We have been active at every stage of this planning application and our evidence can be read on the website (www.oxcivicsoc.org.uk). When the public inquiry enters its second stage at the end of September, a member will be in the hot seat giving evidence. It is some comfort to know that the presiding inspector's style is informal and friendly!

Not all public inquiries are of that kind. At the hearing on the Northern Gateway, for example, a wide range of community organisations, including the Society and the wild life trust, BBOWT, gave evidence in an almost conversational mode, with an inspector who was, once again, a model of patience and consideration.

The inspectors' decisions have to be taken within the context of government policy: I often wonder what they really think! We might not always like the outcome of such inquiries but at least the Society has its say.

How the Manor Place development might look

Photo courtesy of The Oxford Mail



Queen Street again!

Andrew Pritchard



Shared space working well in Queen Street

Photo courtesy of The Oxford and Chilterns Bus Page

The Transport Group continues to express Oxford's frustration at the closure of Queen Street to buses.

The Westgate Partnership (Land Securities and the City Council) proposals to close Queen Street "for an experimental period of 18 months" are somewhat surprising when various building requirements have already led to shorter closures on at least two occasions. We are concerned that no reasons were given for the closures, no indications are given of how the results will be monitored, or of how the changes will be paid for.

It seems perverse to be introducing these new restrictions before we have seen how public transport and the new road system will cope with the expected increases in visitors and employees when the Westgate re-opens in October. During the shorter closures St Aldates became even more jammed with buses, and the introduction of a new bus stop in the High Street outside the covered market produced further congestion.

Any relief generated by designating parts of St Aldates and the High as clearways from 12 noon to 8 pm on weekdays seems likely to be minimised by the extra bus stops. The restrictions could create problems for official events at the Town Hall and will ban disabled persons' vehicles from stopping in the clearways. The introduction of taxis into the southern end of Cornmarket Street suggests that one busy pedestrian area is merely being swapped for another.

Moreover the changes do little to support the County's policy to encourage cyclists. More bus stops will create more hazards for cyclists, as will the changes at the Worcester Street junctions, and it is not clear how cars will exit the Worcester Street car park. Moving the High Street pedestrian crossing to the Turl Street/Alfred Street junction would have helped those who wish to cross the High there. The changes in bus stops will be confusing. The current muddle underlines the need for a proper central bus station.

Booking form

Autumn 2017 ticketed events

Closing date for applications: **Thursday 17 August**. 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
The Islamic Studies Centre - a visit Please tick your preferred time Wednesday 20 September at 2pm <input type="checkbox"/> Wednesday 20 September at 2.45pm <input type="checkbox"/> @£8	
Seacourt Printers - a visit Thursday 26 October at 10am@£8	
The Mathematical Institute - a visit Friday 10 November at 3pm@£8	
The University Church - a visit Monday 13 November at 2pm@£8	

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'

September - November 2017

**ticketed events*

Wednesday 6 September 7.30pm
Housing: some alternative solutions, a talk by **Deborah Glass-Woodin** and **Fran Ryan** at St Edmund Hall

Weds 20 September* 2pm and 2.45pm
The Islamic Studies Centre, a visit

Tuesday 26 September 7.30pm for 8pm
The wildlife in our waterways, a talk by **Dr Jeremy Biggs** at Magdalen College Auditorium

Tuesday 24 October 7.30pm for 8pm
Housing books: Oxford's library buildings, a talk by **John Ashdown** at Magdalen College Auditorium

Thursday 26 October * 10am
Seacourt Printers, a visit

Wednesday 8 November at 7.30pm
Policing Oxford, a talk by **Supt Joe Kidman** at St Edmund Hall

Friday 10 November * 3pm
The Mathematical Institute, a visit

Monday 13 November * 2pm
The University Church, a visit

*** 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

Autumn 2017

Open talks – all welcome

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

Housing: some alternative solutions

Wednesday 6 September at 7.30pm
St Edmund Hall, Queen's Lane

Oxford's housing crisis affects us all. **Deborah Glass-Woodin** and **Fran Ryan**, of the Oxford Community Land Trust, will talk about community-led housing – what it is, why it matters and why we should promote it.



The wildlife in our waterways

Tuesday 26 September at 8pm (tea/coffee from 7.30pm)
Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street

Oxford is an important area for freshwater animals and plants as **Dr Jeremy Biggs** of the Freshwater Habitats Trust explains. He also considers whether the Flood Alleviation Channel presents a threat to wildlife or an opportunity to improve biodiversity.

Housing books: Oxford's library buildings

Tuesday 24 October at 8pm (tea/coffee from 7.30pm)
Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street

John Ashdown, the City's Conservation Officer from 1972–2000, looks at the library buildings of some 40 Oxford colleges and institutions outside the Bodleian. He shows how, over eight centuries, a kaleidoscope of solutions has been found to display and store books.

Policing Oxford

Wednesday 8 November at 7.30pm
St Edmund Hall, Queen's Lane

Policing has never been so complex, as **Supt Joe Kidman** explains. In addition to dealing with traditional crimes, the police now have to tackle the growing threats of cyber crime, human trafficking and terrorism, in the face of growing pressure on resources.

Members-only visits

Tickets are needed for these events: bookings by 17 August

The Islamic Studies Centre

Wednesday 20 September 2pm and 2.45pm

The recently-opened Centre is one of Oxford's most striking buildings, blending elements of a traditional college with the classical styles of Islam. This visit will include a tour of the building and a talk on the role of the Centre within the University of Oxford.



Seacourt Printers

Thursday 26 October 10am

Global leaders in environmentally-friendly print standards, Seacourt Printers have won three Queen's Awards. This visit will show how inks, paper, renewable energy, use of water and waste have all been considered.

The Mathematical Institute

Friday 10 November 3pm

The new institute, on the Oxford Radcliffe site, is not just for teaching and research, it uses maths extensively in its design, not least in the famous Penrose Paving. Professor Colin McDiarmid and Dr Dyrol Lumbard will lead this tour and talk about the building and the work that goes on within it.

The University Church: nine centuries of history

Monday 13 November 2pm

St Mary the Virgin on the High Street is unique among churches in having been, at various times, the cradle of the university, a law court and the birthplace of one of our best-known national charities. This visit, led by Christopher Franks, will illuminate its architectural features and extraordinary history.

The Local Plan 2016 – 36

How we are responding to the consultation

A new Local Plan is in the making and we all have an opportunity to have our say. This is how our views are shaping up.

By the time this edition of *Visions* reaches you, the June/August 2017 public consultation on the preferred options of the Oxford Local Plan 2016 – 2036 will be in full swing. The City Council notes that the Plan will set out how “we want our city to look and feel; it will guide new developments to the right locations while protecting and improving the environment and people’s quality of life; it will deliver the new homes, businesses, jobs, shops and infrastructure needed to support the growth of Oxford over the next 20 years; and it will be used in determining planning applications and to guide investment decisions across the city”.

The Society’s various groups are commenting on all aspects of the draft Plan. In particular we are stressing the need for a clear vision for the city of the future and joined-up strategies for delivering it. This will be linked to a critique of the City Council’s draft Vision for 2050 (see the front page).

We are commenting constructively on traffic management and improved air quality and are encouraging radical solutions – including taking every opportunity to find non-road based public transport solutions. This is linked to comments on integrated development and transport planning: strategic transport planning must be developed hand-in-hand with land use planning, whatever the county-wide and local organisational arrangements are in the future.

We are also commenting constructively on the coordination of the new Oxford Local Plan with other local plans for the city-region (for example those in the Strategic Housing



How important is it to protect green spaces, such as allotments, in the city? The City Council would like your views on this among other issues

Photo courtesy of ODFAA www.odfaa.com



How high should new housing be built? These student flats, under construction in Headington, have five storeys

Market Assessment area, or in the Travel to Work Area). This will enable an agreed city-region development strategy, including provision of transport infrastructure and housing, which is genuinely sustainable and balances social, environmental and economic considerations. We suggest that these are ways in which the City Council’s aims for the Plan can be achieved.

The consultation period on the ‘preferred options’ ends on 25 August. The relevant documents are on the City Council website www.oxford.gov.uk/localplan. Look out for a short survey that is being delivered to every household.

OCS is a society for people who care about Oxford, want to enjoy it more fully and help shape its future. Membership costs £10 (£9 by standing order) or £14 for two people at the same address (£12 by standing order). See the website for how to join, or contact Liz Grosvenor membership@oxcivicsoc.org.uk or join at one of our talks.

Letters to the Editor can be sent to Hilary Bradley
newsletter@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

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