

OCS @50!

By Ian Green, Chairman

2019 marks an important landmark for the Society as we reach our Golden Jubilee! In March next year we will begin a year of special activities and events to mark our 50th anniversary year.

Everyone involved in the Society over the years can be truly proud of the fact that we will have dedicated half a century to improving Oxford as a wonderful city in which to live, work, study and relax.

The Society was formed in 1969 by a handful of citizens worried about the erosion of the historic city's character. At that time the threat came from large-scale road plans which threatened to destroy considerable areas of housing and change forever green spaces such as Christ Church Meadow and Hinksey Park.

Right from the beginning the Civic Society has been non-political and non-profit making, and open to anyone who cares about Oxford and its surroundings.

Fifty years later, our aims and activities remain largely unchanged. We are still very much a citizens' membership group concerned with the quality of Oxford's built environment and its impact on people's daily lives. Our priorities are to protect Oxford's heritage, to appreciate today's city and



*Protecting our heritage: our first campaign was to save Christ Church Meadow and much of Jericho from a proposed road scheme
Photo courtesy of Visit Britain*

to shape its future. Environment, travel, planning and communities are key issues.

A changing city, a changing Society

Oxford has changed enormously in the last 50 years due to population growth and increasing ethnic and cultural diversity; growth of tourism; decline of the motor industry; growth of scientific and medical research and the biotech industry; changing commercial patterns; growth in student numbers; pressure on transport systems as more people live in surrounding areas but commute in, due to lack of affordable housing in the city.

All of these factors present enormous challenges. The Society has expanded its scope to include the future development of Oxford as a regional hub, with all the attendant issues of housing, transport and employment for the people of the county and beyond.

The anniversary year is a good opportunity to do some stocktaking – what has the Society become and how is it regarded? – and to consider priorities for the future. Here are some of the conclusions:

Over the last 50 years many local politicians and council professionals have come and gone, but the Civic Society has been a constant and steady presence, with a **long-term view** of the city and county's future, informed by our own long-standing experience of its past.

The Society has increasingly become involved with consultations on **high-level policy making and strategic planning** for central Oxfordshire. Both OCS and our Oxfordshire Futures Group are viewed by local authority policy-makers as **authoritative and respected contributors**.

We have had a positive influence on the **design** of new buildings and the **quality of the built environment** as a result of the work of our Planning Group.

OCS is increasingly **outward-looking**. Study visits to Cambridge and Freiburg, information exchanges, exchange visits with other civic societies across the country and increased involvement in Civic Voice have extended our perspectives.

Increasingly we are concerned with how Oxford functions as a **community** and how people can be enabled to live and work here more happily and effectively. Issues such as homelessness and inclusiveness are now on our agenda. We do this through our contributions to the Oxford Strategic Partnership, in our talks (on homelessness in Oxford for example) and through our support of multi-cultural events.

Our **programme** of talks and visits, the regular members' **newsletter**, our **website**, **Blue Plaques**, **OxClean**, **Walks in Oxford website** are all great strengths, helping people to enjoy Oxford, informing them about issues and raising awareness.

We have **unique strengths**. OCS is entirely volunteer-run, non-political, good at facilitating discussion between other groups who should be talking to each other but don't always (for example City and County/District Councils; bus companies and councils; both universities and local communities).

And beyond 50

Our highest priority for the immediate future is to increase and diversify our **membership**, both individuals and organisations. We see this as key to strengthening our voice, improving dialogue and boosting public participation in the making of decisions which affect us all.

The programme of walks, talks and visits is ever popular. This was the visit to Sydlings Copse nature reserve in June

Photo courtesy of Clive Booth



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OCS@50 - debating the big topics

OCS President Sir Clive Booth is organising one of the special features of our 50th anniversary year, a series of three public **debates on controversial issues** that deeply affect the future shaping of our city and its region.

The first of the debates will focus on whether we should prioritise the **Green Belt or new homes** to meet Oxford's chronic shortage of housing.

The pros and cons of a motorway-style **Expressway** running across Oxfordshire will be the subject of another debate. Finally we will focus on **pollution**: do we need urgent and drastic action in transport and roads policies to prevent a health catastrophe?

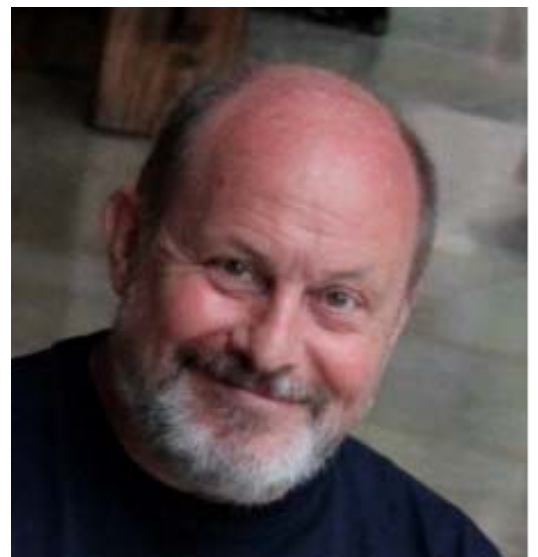
The debates will be held in the city centre and will be open to all. We will announce further details in the March issue of *Visions* and on our website and Twitter account.

Our new **Student Ambassadors scheme**, in partnership with Oxford Brookes University, will see students promoting the values of the Society to their peers while taking up opportunities to meet local politicians and other influential people. They will be able to see at first-hand how policies are developed and decisions are made.

A lot of our work is behind the scenes, in the OCS working groups. We hope, through the 50th anniversary celebrations to make our activities and successes better known. We aim to inspire more people and organisations to become members, as we continue to take on the sometimes daunting but always exciting task of helping to shape Oxford's future.

If you're not already a member and are reading this - please join now! (See the back page to find out how.)

Ian Green
Chairman



Two cheers for Oxford North?

Clive Booth, Planning Group

The Planning Group believes this proposed large development has some good features but has serious reservations about other aspects of the plans.

One of the most important developments in Oxford for many years is the subject of a planning application submitted at the end of July to the City Council. Formerly known as the 'Northern Gateway' it has been renamed 'Oxford North'. The core of the site, which is mainly owned by St John's College, lies within a triangle formed by the A40, A44 and A34 near Peartree, but substantial parts also extend beyond those roads. We have been actively involved in making representations about Oxford North for the past six years.

Many of our members believe that Oxford North represents a lost opportunity to help relieve Oxford's housing crisis. During the consultations in 2014, it was argued that the site could accommodate as many as 2,000 homes. How has it happened that fewer than 500 are now proposed? The answer lies in a combination of government and city policies which, despite the housing need, prioritise places providing employment over housing.

In particular, the authorities see the concept of a 'knowledge spine' running from Harwell to beyond Bicester as key to the future economic success of our region, and the Oxford North site is one of the few readily-available areas offering scope for the high-tech industries that will be crucial. With up to 4,500 workers potentially commuting to the site, the consequences for more congestion and pollution are obvious. However, the die was cast when the planning inspector approved the mix of housing and employment in her report of June 2015. The battle has now moved on to pressing for a sufficient proportion of those homes that are to be provided to be 'affordable'.

The developers do deserve credit for the five rounds of consultation they have run to date and for taking on board at least some of our comments. For example, we welcomed the inclusion of three parks and much greenery in the scheme but expressed concern that these areas could end up as unloved brown spaces. The developers replied that the site's occupiers will be required to pay into a fund which will ensure that they are properly managed for the long term. We are also pleased that the designs include low carbon and sustainable features, some of which are leading-edge.

Getting the details right

There is however much further to go. The present plans do not sufficiently recognise the importance of walking, cycling and public transport to the success of the scheme. Some of the detailed designs fall well short of good practice and do not even meet local authority policy requirements.

Many potential cyclists and walkers will be deterred by the obstacle presented by the five-arm Wolvercote Roundabout, and cyclists seeking to move between Oxford North and Oxford Parkway station will have to make a long detour via Five Mile Drive. We know that the developers are keenly aware of these deficiencies and we hope that they will work with the highway authorities and adjacent landowners to solve them.

We are also concerned that if, as is likely, the development of the commercial buildings is slow, occupants of the housing will not be screened from the noise and pollution emanating from the main roads as was intended.

The plans make a genuine effort to improve those lengths of the A40 and A44 that pass through the site by landscaping and traffic controls. Those measures might just result in a better environment, although the proposals do not go as far as to achieve best practice. We are concerned that the facades of the new buildings lining the A40 and A44 may be featureless. The dreadful facades of the new Westgate Centre on Thames Street should be a warning of the mistakes that can be made!

The Society's observations are offered in a constructive spirit. It would be churlish not to acknowledge that Oxford North seems to us to include many attractive features and represents an enterprising interpretation of the 2014 Area Action Plan policies. You can [read our comments in full](#) by visiting the planning pages of the Society's website.



*The architects' impression of the A44 (between the Peartree Park and Ride and Wolvercote roundabout)
Photo courtesy of Fletcher Priest Architects*

First reactions to the Expressway

Ian Green, Oxfordshire Futures Group

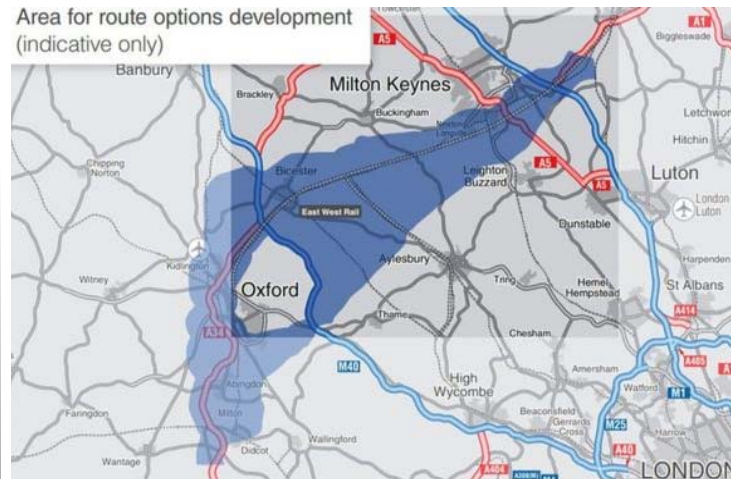
The Oxfordshire Futures group is one of many which are concerned about the proposed new Expressway, a road route connecting Oxford and Cambridge.

In September the Government announced its preferred corridor for the new Expressway. Broadly the route will be aligned with the East West rail route, passing from Abingdon to the M1 at south Milton Keynes via Winslow in Buckinghamshire. It is not yet known whether the road will pass to the east or west of Oxford. The proposal is exercising the minds of many of our groups as well as local communities that could be affected and local wildlife organisations.

Among the reports to the most recent meeting of the Oxfordshire Growth Board on 25 September was one which included a series of factors which need to be taken into account in the next stages of Expressway consideration. One of these factors struck our observer in particular: it concerned the pre-eminence of the East West Rail link – the report noted that the Expressway needs to be integrated with this, making sure it supports the rail link and does not undermine the use of or case for it. The East West Rail link will also connect Oxford and Cambridge, in stages, and work is already under way on the sections between here and Milton Keynes and Bedford (as noted in our last edition, page 7).

A major concern is that the Expressway route carries a higher risk of undermining East West Rail by performing too similar a function along a closely parallel corridor. We need an option which would complement or feed the railway (if we need this Expressway at all). It is disappointing that this factor was not mentioned in the Growth Board's letters which have been sent to the Department for Transport and to Highways England.

An additional factor that was mentioned in the letters is the need for certainty and early clarity about decision and



The proposed Expressway corridor

Image courtesy of Department of Transport

process – especially important in Oxfordshire because of our work on the Joint Statutory Spatial Plan in planning for future growth. It seems that the Expressway planning process ignores the planning processes of the Oxfordshire local authorities. This makes no sense at all.

A full public consultation is due to take place next autumn.

A farewell to Patsy Dell

Patsy Dell, Head of Planning, Sustainable Development and Regulatory Services, left the City Council in mid-October. The Society very much appreciates Patsy's contribution to shaping Oxford's future and in particular the way in which she has endeavoured to engage communities in the planning process.

We have enjoyed working with Patsy and wish her health, happiness and success in the future.

Calling all activists! AGM 2019

Our Executive Committee and working groups warmly welcome new members.

If you could help us into our next 50 years, please consider joining the Executive Committee. Do get in touch for an informal chat. Nominations for the committee should reach me by 19 March. Items for the **AGM agenda** should also reach me by this date.

Our informal and friendly **working groups** are currently looking at planning, transport, housing, communications,

OxClean and the programme of events – read about them on our website or get in touch for more information. We also need capable admin people to support some of our membership functions. (For contact details see the back cover.)

The **AGM** will be held on **Tuesday 2 April** – read more about the evening's programme on page 7.

Vernon Porter, Hon Secretary

Transport and the Local Plan

Andrew Pritchard, Transport Group

Transport Group members are responding to the draft Local Plan and also looking at what can be done to manage tourists more effectively.

Transport in the City Centre and the Local Plan

The Group is putting together a series of brief papers on various aspects of transport that can be submitted as part of the Society's response to the Local Plan. These cover:

- Congestion charging
- Workplace parking levy
- Zero Emissions Zones
- Phil Jones report on *Transport and the Public Realm in the City Centre*
- Travel demand management
- Schools and transport issues
- Bicycle routes
- Parking
- Deliveries including by bicycle.

These papers will be on our website when they're completed.

In a meeting with the University's Pro-Vice-Chancellor, David Prout, we learned that the University is not in favour of congestion charging. They already operate a form of workplace parking levy for some of their employees. They expect to provide housing for 1,000 more graduates by 2023, including one new college. We discussed the plans for their Begbroke site and the possibility of a rail station to serve it.

Managing tourism better

Concern about tourists and tourist buses continues to grow. We were very pleased to learn more about the activities of Experience Oxfordshire, which is the largest Destination Management Organisation after London, from Hayley Beer-Gamage. It is clear that Oxford is not performing as well as it might, with just 30% of visitors recommending Oxford after their visit. Experience Oxford is well aware of the coach problem, but was not sure how it could be solved. Although they do professional walking tours, they are undercut by amateurs who are free to offer competition.

At a meeting with Councillor Alex Hollingsworth we urged continued City support for the organisation and noted the active interest of the City Council Scrutiny Committee in tourist management. There is also a need for better control of the high numbers of summer school and language students. Group members' own experiences around the world suggest that tourist coaches can be much more tightly controlled and a potential source of income.

Re-opening of the Cowley Branch Line

At a meeting with a representative of Chiltern Railways, who are assumed to be the main interested party, we were told that, due to the imminent ending of their 20-year franchise, they will not be taking the lead in this proposed project. This is a big setback. Last year Chiltern ran a demonstration train along the line to support the case for re-opening it.



Could the Cowley branch line become a reality?

Image courtesy of Chiltern Railways

Innovation powering the Oxford-Milton Keynes-Cambridge Corridor

A number of our members attended this recent Transport Café meeting. A paper by Stagecoach put clients at the heart of connectivity. It was suggested that autonomous vehicles would make little difference: most of the claimed advantages could be achieved with existing car pools. We took the opportunity to point out that the current fashion for distributor roads in new developments produced negative effects for communities.

A new stage for Stagecoach

We meet the heads of Oxford's two main bus companies on a regular basis. Martin Sutton of Stagecoach is retiring and we took the opportunity to thank him and to meet his successor, Chris Coleman, on an informal basis. Chris has worked for Manchester Metro and RATP in Paris, and we look forward to continuing our close relationship and benefiting from his experience in the future.

Oxford West Central

At a meeting to discuss Nuffield College's proposals for development in West Central Oxford, including the station area, we learned that a final developer is likely to be announced shortly. The College welcomed our interest.

Booking form

Spring 2019 ticketed events

Closing date for applications: **10 December**. 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	Rank ☺
Culham Science Centre- a visit Wednesday 20 March at 6.30pm Please indicate whether you: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• need a lift• can offer a lift <i>Circle as appropriate</i> @£8		
Oxford's ancient water boundaries - a walk Monday 8 April at 2pm@£5		
☺ Events are sometimes oversubscribed. If you rank your choices in order of preference we'll try to ensure you get a place on your favourite. Tickets for these events will be posted in the New Year.			

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

If you have booked but can't attend, please contact Alan Hobbs.
We always have a waiting list.

OCS Calendar

'Cut out and keep'

November 2018 – April 2019

**ticketed events*

Wednesday 14 November 8pm

Citizens in crisis, a talk by **Al Bell** of Citizens Advice at Magdalen College Auditorium

Wednesday 30 January 8pm

Archaeological discoveries of the last 50 years, a talk by **Ben Ford** at Magdalen College Auditorium

Wednesday 20 February 8pm

'Heaven might be something like North Oxford', a talk by **William Whyte** at Magdalen College Auditorium

Thursday 7 March 8pm

Securing nature's recovery, a talk by **Estelle Bailey** at Magdalen College Auditorium

Wednesday 20 March* 6.30pm

Culham Science Centre, a visit

Tuesday 2 April 7pm

OCS@50: half a century of changing Oxford, a talk by **Liz Woolley** - venue to be announced

This is followed by the AGM at 8pm

Monday 8 April* 2pm

Oxford's ancient water boundaries, a walk led by **Mark Davies**

Wednesday 17 April, 8pm

Ghosts, science and ghost hunters: a history, a talk by **Allan Chapman** at Magdalen College Auditorium

*Contact for booking/tickets only:

Alan Hobbs Tel: 01865 248 105
66 Southfield Road, Oxford OX4 1PA



Programme

January - April 2019

Open talks - all welcome

No pre - booking, free of charge (except the debate series)- help us to recruit new members by bringing a guest

Archaeological discoveries of the last 50 years

Wednesday 30 January, 8pm
Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street

Since the 1960s there have been hundreds of digs in the city, revealing much about the world under our feet. **Ben Ford** from Oxford University's Department of Archaeology will take us on a journey from the prehistoric ritual landscape to a military frontline stronghold during the age of the Vikings and King Arthur to the growth of the medieval university city and its vanished streets.

'Heaven might be something like North Oxford'

Wednesday 20 February, 8pm
Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street

Architectural historian **Professor William Whyte** of St John's College will reflect on the North Oxford Conservation Area, designated just over 50 years ago.

Securing nature's recovery

Thursday 7 March, 8pm
Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street

Wildlife today faces many serious threats and is in general decline. **Estelle Bailey**, Chief Executive of the largest local wildlife conservation charity in our area, the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) will talk about what needs to be done to reverse the trends.

OCS@50: half a century of changing Oxford

Tuesday 2 April 7pm, AGM at 8pm - Venue to be announced

How has Oxford changed in the 50 years since the Society was set up and what role has the Society played in influencing those changes? Recently we commissioned local historian **Liz Woolley** to investigate. Tonight she reveals her assessment of our first 50 years. *An illustrated booklet will be available for sale.* The AGM will follow her talk.

Ghosts, science and ghost hunters: a history

Wednesday 17 April, 8pm
Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street

The 'scientific' study of ghosts from the 17th century onwards was followed by 'scientific' ghost-hunting in Victorian times. Historian **Dr Allan Chapman** of Wadham College lifts the lid on a fascinating application of science. What do scientists, theologians and the public think about ghosts today?

OCS@50 debates

Should we prioritise the
Green Belt or new homes?

Date and venue to be announced

Please note there will be a small charge for this event.

See the next issue of *Visions* or website for full details

Members-only walks and visits

Tickets are needed for these events: bookings by 10 December

Culham Science Centre - a visit

Wednesday 20 March 6.30pm

Culham, world-famous for its cutting-edge research into fusion power, is also a powerhouse of other high technology innovation. This 2.5 hour visit will take us behind the scenes to learn about this fascinating work.

Oxford's ancient water boundaries - a walk

Monday 8 April 2pm

The outer bounds of the City of Oxford were defined on three sides by its waterways. In the first of a series of walks led by local historian **Mark Davies** you will hear about some of the unusual and amusing experiences of the mayor and his retinue over the past 400 years.



Your letters

Alison Blaney writes:

The photo shows what many places have looked like during the summer – rows of dockless bikes scattered over pavements, fallen over, obstructing pedestrians, especially those with impaired sight. Can we dare to hope that improvements are under way? **I hope that the Civic Society might put pressure on the bike companies to comply with the new requirements.**

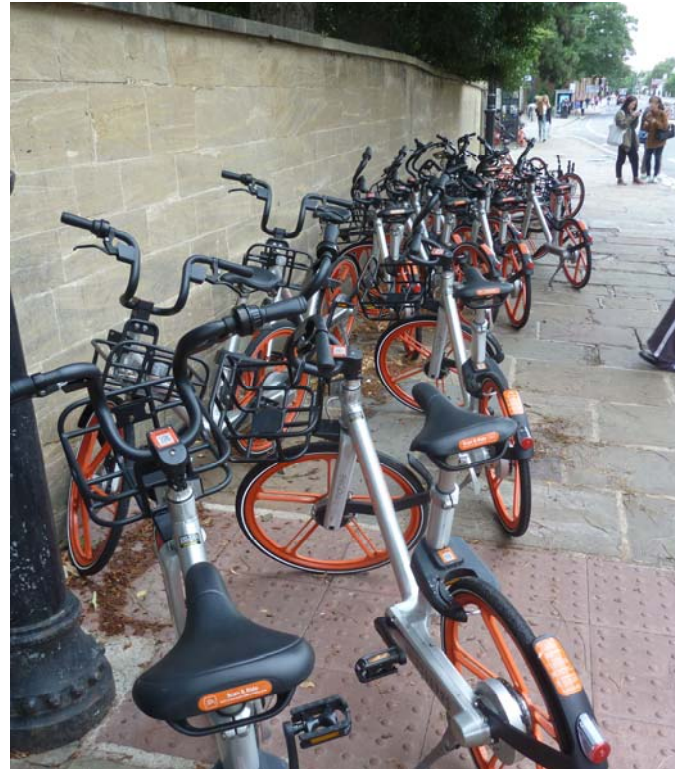
When they started up last year the three dockless bike companies concerned agreed to a Code of Conduct (see this at www.oxford.gov.uk). The companies have not kept to this Code, for example failing to provide telephone and e-mail contacts or to tell users to park at suitable places, one saying 'Park it anywhere'. As any Oxford resident must know, users often leave dockless bikes mid-pavement, by bus-stops and other hazardous and awkward places for pedestrians. The companies park dozens in certain places.

It is hard to find out how many bikes each firm has on the streets, but it is in the many hundreds. Mobikes have been very obvious in St Aldates, with over 100 between Folly Bridge and Carfax from June until recently. They hindered tourist groups and pedestrians and detracted from the beauty of the street. This 100 was in addition to those of other companies, residents and students, so the street looked absurd.

In late September Councillor Louise Upton, one of Oxford's two Cycling Champions, chaired a Forum, attended only by the companies, University and Police (none of whom has powers to act), to discuss the issues. I have seen notes of that meeting, which covered the pros and cons of dockless bikes and ways of improving the scheme. The Council is to investigate the use of parking 'hubs' at sites around the city. It will try to lower the cap on numbers, as agreed by all companies, but to how many I cannot find out. Companies are to encourage 'good parking behaviour' and are restricting the areas in the city where parking is permitted. Other actions have been requested, including reporting abandoned bikes and putting contact details on the bikes. **However, my concern is that companies will not truly comply, nor will users.**

There may be benefit in getting more people to use a bike, though I have seen dangerous riding. I doubt that dockless bikes reduce car usage. I notice few hirings: by a few tourists and students. Parked bikes do for certain hinder walking on pavements and spoil the appearance of our historic city, and, I believe, should be further limited in number. In the weeks since agreeing to reduce numbers, there have been up to 60 Mobikes daily between Folly Bridge and Carfax, vastly more than is needed. They are literally dumped there. **The companies have little to lose by flooding our streets with bikes and it is us residents who suffer.**

Photo courtesy of the author



OCS is a society for people who care about Oxford, want to enjoy it more fully and help shape its future.

Membership costs £10 a year (£9 by standing order) or £14 for two people at the same address (£12 by standing order). Students and local groups may join for £5; corporate members' rates on application.

See the website for how to join, or contact Liz Grosvenor membership@oxcivicsoc.org.uk or join at our talks.

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Letters to the Editor and photos can be sent to Hilary Bradley newsletter@oxcivicsoc.org.uk or by post to the above address.

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