

A focus on planning

Annual Review 2018



The first new homes at Barton Park were completed this year. The development is the largest in Oxford for decades and will provide around 850 homes, some of them 'affordable'. Some of the flats will be rented to people on the Council's housing list.

The Society had a significant input into the planning stages of the development. It is notable for its attention to landscaping.

Photo courtesy of Clive Booth

2018 may well be remembered as the year of major transport challenges and lost opportunities for the city and county. But we welcomed the preparations for a county-wide spatial plan.

The Society enjoyed another busy year in 2018. The Executive Committee continued to learn from and guide its various working groups. We also continued to contribute to the work of the Steering Group of the **Oxford Strategic Partnership** and ran the **Oxfordshire Futures** Group. We all welcomed the opportunity to contribute to **Oxfordshire 2050**, the spatial plan we have been calling for since 2014 (read more on page 3).

The Committee also took on the additional task of planning special events for our **50th anniversary year in 2019**. Among these was the commissioning of a history of the Society by Liz Woolley, the renowned local historian. Her account of the Society's first 50 years will be on the website in April 2019.

The Society's assiduous monitoring of applications for planning permission is in evidence every other Wednesday morning in the City Council offices where the **Planning Group** gathers to do its work. In association with the Transport, Housing and Futures Groups, the Planning Group also worked hard to support the consultations on

the **Oxford Local Plan**. We collaborated with the City Council to run a 'heads-up' meeting of residents associations and community groups from across the City and we submitted comprehensive comments on the soundness of the draft Oxford Local Plan.

The **Transport Group** has very diverse interests and this year has taken steps to synthesise its views on key issues, while not suppressing its creativity and its capacity to pursue the interests of members. A major disappointment was the failure of the City Council's attempt to introduce innovative **traffic management** measures in central Oxford. The measures were not good enough and were not helped by the County Council's failure to introduce 'demand-management' measures to reduce the number of vehicles entering central Oxford. This is necessary if public transport operators are to be given the opportunity to provide more efficient, effective and sustainable public transport and if environmental challenges are to be addressed. We welcomed new support for **cycling**.

The proposed **Expressway** also exercised the Group who took the view that while a rail link between Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge may be needed, the parallel road link has not been justified. The detailed route planning being undertaken by Highways



Every cyclist is potentially keeping one car off the roads. We welcomed new funding to support cycling in and around the city. Photo courtesy of Tejvan Pettinger

England is so far ahead of the planning of employment and housing locations that their planning process is risible.

Part of our remit is to encourage people to learn more about the city and county; appreciating our heritage is the first step to preserving and enhancing it. The **Programme Group** continued to organise walks, talks and visits which have remained highly stimulating and very popular with members. The sheer variety of the programme is always impressive.

The **Communications Group** has been working at a hot pace as apart from routine work it has also taken on leadership of the preparation of special anniversary reports, documents and the anniversary version of our logo.

The **OxClean** Spring Clean had to contend with snow but litter-picking continued to be immensely popular with community groups across the city. Behind the scenes the OxClean team worked with schools and businesses, some of which have taken up the Spotless Oxford campaign.

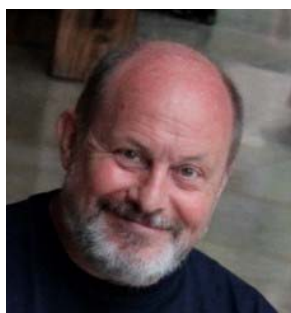
The Society continued to support **Oxfordshire Blue Plaques** which commemorates people from all walks of life who have lived in the county and made a significant contribution in their field. We also supported the **Museum of Oxford** and remained an active member of **Civic Voice**, the national charity for amenity groups.

Everything that has been achieved in 2018 has been the product of the enthusiasm of our Executive Committee and working groups to whom we owe a great debt of gratitude. They are all highly motivated, in part by the pleasure and satisfaction they derive from participating and in part because they are proof that 'ordinary' people can influence the way the city and county develop. **Once again the Society has been an independent voice for Oxford as it has been since 1969.** Our updated logo reflects that.

I'd also like to thank all our members for their support in 2018.

As we look ahead to a Golden Jubilee in 2019 we hope to welcome more members and to celebrate both old and new achievements.

Ian Green, Chairman



The Planning Group kept up its oversight of all planning applications. Clive Booth reports on the team's work.

The Planning Group helps to ensure that the Council's planning decisions are informed by comments aimed at maintaining the quality of new development in the city. In 2018, the City Council received over **3,300 planning applications**. The Group selected about **1,400 for scrutiny** because of their potential impact on the public domain or threat to neighbours' quality of life.

Most of those scrutinised were acceptable. We commented on **213 applications** and it is clear from informal feedback that the planning officers valued our comments. As the map overleaf shows, they were spread across all areas of the city. Most numerous are proposals for domestic extensions or new homes, followed by applications for Houses in Multiple Occupation and development of commercial and retail premises.

Applications from the **universities and colleges** required fewer comments because the Society is increasingly invited to briefings before applications are submitted. We are thus able to understand and influence projects at a formative stage.

We also welcomed the decision to appraise the **Central Conservation Area** for the first time. Although aspects of the report disappointed us, it did perform a useful service in identifying potential threats to the Conservation Area.

OxClean: picking up momentum

Our 11th annual Spring Clean sprung an unwelcome surprise but it was a very successful year, as Rosanne Bostock reports.



Early March 2018 saw the biggest snowfall of the winter! We're very grateful to the groups who rescheduled their spring clean and got the work done. We were delighted when **Goodgym** agreed to do litter picks on a regular basis. Goodgym is a running group that runs to help people or community projects, fitness with a mission.

We were very pleased to work with Helen Flynn from **Abingdon** where a new annual spring clean is being set up under the name of **AbiBinit**. Helen is also bringing new ideas to the project.

The **Spotless Oxford** campaign to keep the pavements and gutters litter free in front of all premises is continuing. We had a recent boost from 15 **Co-ops** signing up, with the possibility of seven more. Over the years the Co-op has been consistently supportive of OxClean and it is much appreciated. We are also developing a good relationship with the BMW works.

We are really grateful to the **new volunteers** who came forward to support OxClean's work. Natasha Robinson will organise the annual Spring Clean, with help from Ingrid Lunt and our regular team - Vernon Porter, Liz Grosvenor and Gillian Coates. Caroline Thompson will maintain our work with schools and I will continue to take an interest in local and national campaigns.

Walks, talks and visits

Terry Bremble reports on the Programme Group's successful series of events for members and the public.

Almost 900 places were taken on the events which included 13 walks and visits for members (some of them repeated), and seven **public talks**. The talks covered a wide range of issues concerning our city, from homelessness to planning and architecture.

The **visits and walks** allowed members to explore the lesser-known or hidden aspects of our region, from nature reserves (the Lye Valley and Sydlings Copse) to an organic farm (Willowbrook) with impressive environmental credentials. College visits always attract a big audience (Lincoln College, Rhodes House, St Cross College) but a tour of portraits held in some of the colleges was a new departure. Tours of the Botanic Gardens and city walls were fascinating, as was Old Headington, and further afield we visited historic Bicester. These visits enable our members to appreciate our rich heritage and learn more about a region that is full of surprises.



The visit to the Lye Valley - one of Oxford's hidden treasures

Photo courtesy of Marilyn Cox

Transport hold-ups

The Transport Group has contributed to some major initiatives, as Andrew Pritchard reports.

We contributed to the Phil Jones Associates' **City Centre Transport and Public Realm report**, which proposed one-way loops for east-west traffic. There is no indication that any part of it will be implemented however.

We welcomed the recent plan that £150 million should be spent on **cycling** in Oxford. The County now has an officer who is working on a plan for cycling and walking. We have urged the City, County and the University to help extend this appointment which initially runs for only one year.

Although the route of the proposed Oxford-Cambridge **Expressway** has been narrowed to two possible corridors, we have seen little progress on the parallel **East-West Rail** project. In our opinion the case for the rail link is much stronger than the case for a new road.

It was disappointing to learn from Network Rail that there is no likelihood of passenger services on the **Cowley branch line** because of capacity constraints on the main line to Didcot and at Oxford station. We have actively campaigned for this route to be brought into service.



We are concerned by the delays in a whole range of transport-related decisions that affect the emerging Joint Statutory Spatial Plan (or **Oxfordshire 2050**, as it is now called), the draft of which is due later in 2019. Our discussions with the University, and the Transport Studies Department in particular, showed interest in helping to provide background data to inform it.

We discussed the impact of **tourism** on Oxford with both the City Council and the University and this has been followed by actions to investigate it in more detail.

Oxfordshire Futures

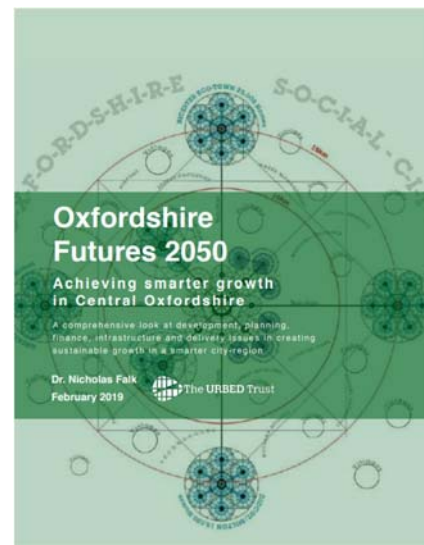
The Oxford (now Oxfordshire) Futures Group was launched in 2015 to implement the recommendations of our 2014 *Oxford Futures* report. Ian Green reports on the group's work.

The **Oxfordshire Futures Group** has thrived on the introduction of the Joint Statutory Spatial Plan (now named the **Oxfordshire 2050** Plan) to the workload of the Oxfordshire Growth Board. Such a plan was recommended by the Society in 2014 so we are delighted to be able to collaborate on its preparation. The Group's view is that Oxford is part of the Central Oxfordshire city-region, and planning for Oxford's future must be on this basis.

During the course of 2018 the Society's Groups (including the **Housing Group**) worked with URBED to prepare principles for the preparation and implementation of the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan. The report, *Oxfordshire Futures 2050**, was submitted to the Growth Board and others in early 2019.

* *Oxfordshire Futures 2050: Achieving smarter growth in Central Oxfordshire* is available here: www.oxfordfutures.org.uk/OF2050

As the geographic focus of this group is the city-region and the county, membership is open to amenity groups from Oxfordshire.



Finances in 2018

2018 was a challenging year as Richard Dodd, Honorary Treasurer, explains.

Income from individual members fell by 25% in 2017, while corporate membership income fell by 15%. This is largely due to non-renewal of standing orders following the change of our banking arrangements.

Reduced income and increased expenditure on the programme of visits during the year was offset by reduced expenditure on the talks. The figures were largely due to the nature of the events however, which were well supported.

We maintained our financial support of both OxClean and the Blue Plaques scheme, and supported the Murals for Marston project. Our donation towards the redevelopment of the Museum of Oxford was held over to 2019.

A study of the Society's history to mark our 50th year was an exceptional item of expenditure. Other items of both income and expenditure were broadly similar to 2017, resulting in the deficit of £2,700 for the year.

Income	Expenditure
Income - £12,860 (£17,529 in 2016)	Expenditure - £15,559 (£21,950 in 2016)
- Subscriptions £8,323	- Newsletter £3,109
- Walks/visits £2,961	- Walks/visits £2,094
- Gift Aid £1,228	- Talks £1,465
- Other £348	- Website £262
	- OxClean £422
Assets £35,220 (£37,920 in 2017)	- Corporate events £812
	- Blue Plaques £515
	- Donations and subs £625
	- Special Projects £4,518
Deficit £2,699 (Surplus £2,151 in 2017)	- Other £1,737

Assets and reserves policy

Our assets are on deposit with the CCLA Interest Fund for Charities. Our policy is to hold in reserve sufficient to cover our liabilities and to enable us to take professional advice on planning and other issues as needs arise.

The full accounts are on the website, or please contact me for a copy: treasurer@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

How the public benefit

As a charity we are obliged to show how the public benefit from our work. We hope that this review has given an insight into all the activities and campaigns that are improving the quality of life for people who live and work in Oxford.

We welcome more volunteers to spearhead new projects or support existing ones. Do get in touch: info@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

Housing policy

Peter Thompson writes about the new group's work.

Lack of affordable housing in our region contributes to serious problems in recruitment for vital services, as well as causing hardship and social fragmentation. We have endeavoured to keep up with the commentaries and to monitor implementation of any measures, which, to date, have been limited. It seems likely that some mechanism will emerge for the more equitable sharing of the increase in land value when development is approved.

Meanwhile, housing represents the most controversial element of all the new Local Plans of the five county planning authorities, the Government's Oxfordshire Housing and Growth Deal, and the National Infrastructure Commission's proposals for one million new homes across the arc between Oxford and Cambridge. Recognition of the housing problem is one thing; solving it by developing across our green acres is another!

We have met to discuss the issues and contributed to the Society's response to the Oxford Local Plan 2016 - 2036.



Our message

The Communications team keeps up the flow of information to members and the public.

The group is responsible for publishing the newsletter, *Visions*, and four websites as well as maintaining our Twitter accounts and contact with the press.

Planning for the 50th anniversary year in 2019 was a major commitment. We commissioned local historian Liz Woolley to write a **report on our history** for publication online in April 2019, with a summary in print too. We also helped to plan the three **OCS@50 debates** on the most contentious issues in the region. These will take place from April to June 2019. A revised logo (see the front cover) will herald a landmark year.

About us / contacts

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

Our aim is an ever-improving quality of life in Oxford by working to influence planning, transport, the environment and community issues. New members are always welcome.

We are run by an Executive Committee whose members are elected at the AGM. See the website for the full list of members.

President: Sir Clive Booth

Chairman: Ian Green

Hon Secretary: Vernon Porter

Hon Treasurer: Richard Dodd

Oxford Civic Society

67 Cunliffe Close, Oxford OX2 7BJ


Tel: 075 05 756 692 | info@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

oxcivicsoc.org.uk | oxclean.org.uk


oxfordfutures.org.uk | oxfordwalks.org.uk


We are a registered charity No. 1116739

Oxford Civic Society: where we were active in 2018

 Comments on planning applications and consultations

 Walks and visits

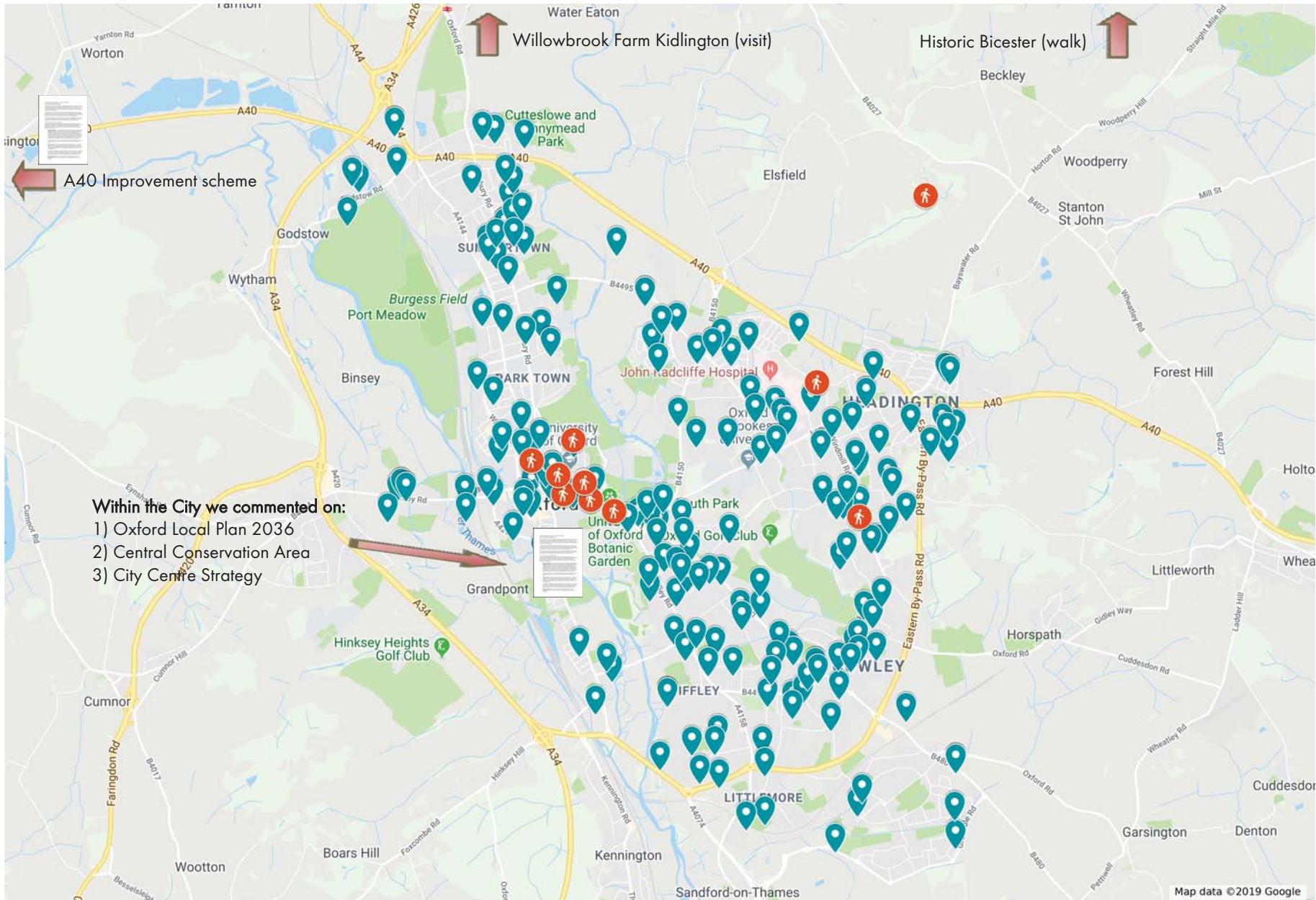
 Further afield

 Comments on local plans and County consultations

We also commented on the Oxfordshire Growth Deal and proposed changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

About OCS

OCS is a society for people who care about Oxford, want to enjoy it more fully and help shape its future. New members are always welcome. You can join online, at one of our talks, by contacting membership@oxcivicsoc.org.uk or phoning 07505 756692.



An interactive version of this map can be found online at www.oxcivicsoc.org.uk/map2018