

What can we do about climate change?



Thousands of people, including many schoolchildren, joined the climate change march on 20 September, calling for 'action now'. What kind of influence can we exert on policy-makers and the public at large?

This edition of *Visions* reflects the high level of attention we are giving to the issue of climate change.

Climate scientists are now certain that human activity is causing potentially catastrophic change to our climate. Oxford City Council was ahead of the national government in declaring a climate emergency in January this year. The Council has rigorously examined what it means to decarbonise the city, including an assessment of the extent of its influence. In recent weeks the Council has held meetings of a Citizens Assembly on Climate Change to inform the Council's climate change policy. These and other initiatives will lead to a new City Council sustainability strategy for Oxford. These are bold and welcome moves.

Contents list and dates for your diary – see back page.
Read more from the Chairman on pages 10-11.

The question for us is what can a **civic society** do to make a meaningful contribution to policy-making? In the following pages you can read what our working groups are doing to better understand the highly complex issues that need to be addressed and the influence we might wield. We are delighted that Chris Church, a leading advocate for climate change action, has joined the Executive Committee to support the Society's efforts and he introduces this issue of *Visions* on pages 2-3.

We are also mindful that individuals have a role to play, both as consumers and activists. We'd welcome **your** opinions on what we should be focusing on. Please send comments, ideas and suggestions to me at chairman@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

Ian Green, Chairman

A changing climate ...

Chris Church sets the scene

Concerns about climate change are not new but there is, at last, a new sense of urgency.

Thirty years ago this month, scientists from the USA spoke at an event at the Thames flood barrier in east London. Their theme was the changing climate: they highlighted their fast-growing concerns that human activity was affecting the climate, making it warmer. They spoke of the likelihood of increasing weather extremes across the world as a first sign of increasing climate instability. Three years later, at the 1992 Rio 'Earth Summit' over 180 governments said that they shared these concerns and launched the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Since then there has been progress but nowhere near enough. The UK passed our Climate Act in 2008 and others have followed us. In 2016 the UN Paris Agreement set out a framework for change but hard targets were missing. Emissions of 'greenhouse gases', notably carbon dioxide, have continued to rise and a succession of reports by scientists across the world – many here in Oxford – have shown how many climate impacts around the world are happening faster than had been previously predicted.

In 2019 there can be no reasonable doubt that our society faces serious threats posed by a changing climate. Ignoring this is no longer an option. Our government has recognised this and this year set a target of 2050 as the date by which our society and economy will reach 'net zero' – in other words our overall greenhouse gas emissions are reduced to zero.

Many would say that is not soon enough and other governments and cities have set more ambitious targets – Oxford City Council is just one looking to a date of 2030. Reaching net zero is going to involve change in just about everything we do – the buildings we live in, the places we work, how we travel, how we grow our food and more. Oxford will certainly not be immune from the need to change. All councils across the county have recognised that they have to play a part in the moves to a carbon-neutral society.

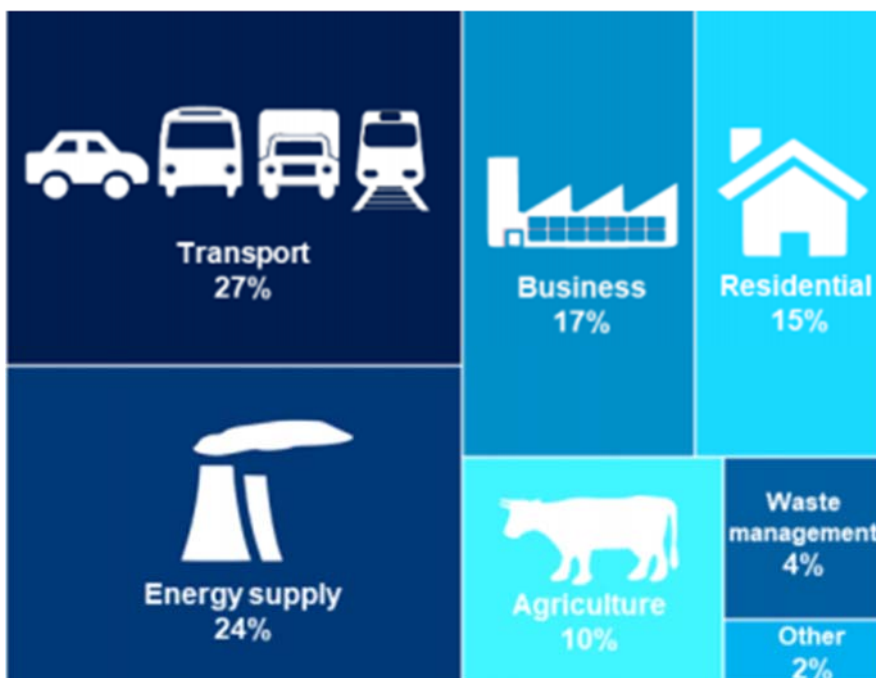
The idea of change is not always popular. OCS came into existence to oppose potentially harmful changes to our city and protecting our heritage is part of our work. But change is coming and we need to steer that change, and indeed to be one of the organisations driving it. If we get this right, there will be benefits for us all.

Getting to work on the issues

The Society is in a strong position to influence the climate agenda as it has working groups on many of the key concerns – strategic and local planning, housing and transport. **Transport is the largest source of emissions across Oxfordshire** (34%) with homes not far behind (this differs from the national picture shown below). Cutting carbon in our transport system is not just about running cars on renewably-generated electricity; it's also about increased use of public transport and getting more people cycling and walking. These are exactly the issues being discussed in the current consultation on *Connecting Oxford*, and the benefits are clear: clean air, safer cycling and walking, and an end to the situation where many of our most attractive city centre spaces are no more than car parks.

Housing is another example of where change will affect us all. It's not just new buildings that need to be 'zero carbon' – all our homes need to be improved and 'retrofitted' with the best energy efficiency measures and insulation. Some people dislike the idea of the domestic disruption that might be needed, but who wouldn't like to see their fuel bills fall by 80% or more?

Change needs to happen at every level. We need strong **policies** to lead the way from both central and local government. We need the **infrastructure** to enable people to lead low-carbon lives – from electric cars (soon to be rolling out of the BMW Mini factory in Cowley) and smart buildings to an improved rail network for the county and more local food production. And underlying all that we need the active **engagement** of people and communities in both pushing for change and in making the changes themselves.



Emissions in the UK by sector in 2017. Transport was the largest polluter, accounting for more than a quarter of our emissions.

Source: Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy / National Statistics

... a local response

Much of the most innovative work that is showing the way forward world-wide has started in individual cities – Oxford's Low Carbon projects are an example. It is the case that 'local can lead' and show governments what works, and Oxford (with all its expertise) can and should be a leader.

What needs to happen?

The new report – **Fast Forward Oxfordshire** – launched this month by Oxford Friends of the Earth, outlines policies on issues including transport, homes, food and nature that need to be taken forward now. Some of these are national but many are ones that our councils can adopt and many are taken from other cities.

Housing is one key issue. Every new building that wastes energy is making the problem just a little bit worse and is inexcusable when we have the technology to make zero carbon the norm for all new homes and other buildings. This could and should be in every Local Plan from now on. Some will say that this will make new homes more expensive and any transition to new technologies can bring costs. But wringing hands, making excuses and saying 'it can't be done' is not going to solve the problem. Government, house builders, housing associations and councils all have a responsibility to future generations as well as to their balance sheets.

There are other ways that we need to go forward. The Government's Committee on Climate Change, the Royal Society and many other bodies have stressed the need to plant many more **trees** (to absorb carbon dioxide) as part of our national climate strategy. The **Oxfordshire Trees for the Future** campaign is calling for us to double tree cover across the county over 25 years in line with national campaigns. Currently less than 9% of the county is woodland (compared to a national average of 13%). Councils, colleges, landowners, farmers and local communities can all play a part in making this happen. At the end of November national 'Tree Week' will see new planting in many parts of Oxford (see www.oxtrees.uk for more information). 'Greening our green belt' could provide more and better quality green spaces around the city.

The solutions are here

The climate crisis is here and it is alarming, but the solutions are with us. Back in the 1960s US Health Secretary John W Gardner pointed out that *"We are continually faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as insoluble problems"*. Oxford has huge housing pressures, but whatever homes are built in Oxfordshire in the coming years, they should all be of the highest quality. Upgrading our transport systems so that everyone has fair access to the services they need can cut carbon and will also improve public health.

Our children and their children face an uncertain future – that is one reason that the youth climate protests are building

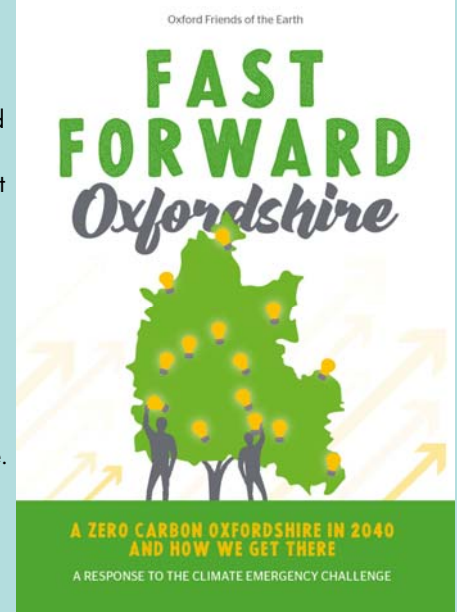
Fast Forward Oxfordshire looks at what the county might be like in 2040 if we have tackled the climate crisis effectively, avoiding the worst consequences. It was developed by Oxford Friends of the Earth with the aid of leading Oxford experts.

It covers six areas: homes, transport, work, energy, food and nature. For each there is a short story of what one person's life might be like in 20 years' time. Alongside these stories are the

policies that will need to be implemented urgently if we are to have a good chance of delivering that positive future. Every councillor in Oxfordshire has been given a copy of the report.

The key message is that we need to accelerate the process of change – to move 'fast forward'. Some policies need national action but many can be taken forward by local councils. Some will be challenging to deliver, but if we are serious about moving to a zero carbon economy and society, these are the changes that will be needed. One key policy is to require zero carbon standards for all new homes and other buildings in Local Plans from now. This is entirely feasible and this policy is being promoted in many cities.

Download the report from www.oxfoe.co.uk/fastforward/



around the world. If we act we can help them 'take back tomorrow' and create a safer future as well as a better city to live in now.

Many groups are calling for the planting of more trees to absorb carbon dioxide. Our county has surprisingly low levels of tree cover compared to the national average.



Housing: making it fit for the future ...

Peter Thompson reports

Our Housing and Planning Groups believe that the Planning and Building Regulations systems need to support and not undermine our attempts to move to a carbon-neutral future.

With a commitment to making the whole of the UK net zero carbon by 2050, we need to think about **all** the contributors to atmospheric carbon dioxide. The good news is that Britain's emissions have fallen for six straight years, are at a level not recorded since 1888, and that we have de-carbonised more quickly than any other G20 nation. The less good news is that although there has been a reduction in energy consumption overall, most of the saving in CO2 production has been due to the phasing out of coal as a fuel. And the reduction in emissions also appears to be tapering off; extrapolating the curve to the point of zero-emissions is going to be difficult.

Probably nowhere is this more true than in regard to housing. A report in February this year by the government-appointed Committee on Climate Change (CCC) highlighted that emissions from residential properties account for 15% of the total for the UK (see the graphic on page 2). Only transport and energy supply contribute more, but while the energy supply sector has made big inroads into CO2 reduction, and much is made of the transition to electric and hydrogen transport, the housing sector actually increased emissions slightly in 2017.

Reducing housing emissions is likely to be the most intractable of the problems we face and needs to be addressed separately for new housing and the stock of around 30 million existing homes, of all varieties.

Setting standards for new housing

The relatively easy task should be ensuring that every **new** property is genuinely fit for the future. That means achieving proper standards of insulation, air tightness and ventilation, and the adoption of technologies such as heat pumps and energy recovery from stale air and waste water, local sustainable energy generation and storage, and alternative fuels and energy sources.

The UK has lagged far behind other countries in the quality of components such as doors and windows, and in the adoption of relevant technologies. Building Regulations have been tightened considerably in recent years, but are still not high enough. Furthermore, the scrapping by the Government in 2015 of measures such as the Code for Sustainable Homes and the Zero Carbon Homes Regulations has meant that a mere 1% of new homes completed in 2018 were built to the highest [Energy Performance Certificate](#) (EPC) Band A standards.



A large new housing development at Wolvercote Mill. The homes have many energy-efficient features but why are new homes not required to be built to net zero standards?

Not only are building standards and incentives to build better too low, the Committee on Climate Change report also highlights the need for much greater levels of inspection and stricter enforcement of standards. There is a wealth of anecdotal evidence of failures to comply with Building Regulations as the revelations from the Grenfell Tower tragedy show. As readers will be aware, the Planning Group looks at a selection of planning applications submitted to the City Council and comments where appropriate. Many of these comments concern housing projects. But the Building Regulation regime is separate, with no consultation process and there is no obligation on developers to do more than comply with minimum standards.

What can we do?

Our only recourse is to lobby central government whenever we get the opportunity for much higher Building Regulations standards, and better control and monitoring. We hope that other local organisations and indeed other civic societies will join us in the campaign for planning and building control systems that put mitigating climate change at their heart.

See pages 10 - 11 for the contribution that strategic planning can make.

... starts with our own homes

Upgrading existing housing

Achieving zero-carbon performance in the stock of around 30 million existing properties, over three-quarters of which are over 40 years old, is likely to be a huge challenge. This is because of the scale of the operation necessary to transform the energy profile, the enormous variety of types, design and condition, the long life-span of buildings, and the complexity of patterns of ownership. Here planners have no control at all as no one can force householders to upgrade their properties – and there is little in the way of subsidies to enable people to tackle it. Clearly there are serious issues of availability of resources, adequately trained in the disciplines likely to be necessary. Major upgrades to homes will surely involve massive disruption to occupiers, and resolution of issues of responsibility and funding.

A detailed case-study of a complete refurbishment, extension and energy-reduction project on a typical Edwardian semi-detached house in Summertown six years ago suggests that even using the most expert consultants, highest-specification components, state-of-the-art technology, and meticulous attention to detail and workmanship, zero-carbon performance is an elusive goal. Furthermore, the costs of energy-reduction measures, over and above those for a 'standard' refurbishment, added some 18% to the final account, around £50,000. Clearly few people can afford to do this.

Of course, higher standards cost money, and with cheap energy this level of investment has been unjustified. The new imperative of reducing carbon emissions changes all this. In the case of new houses, prices are largely determined by land values. There is a rising swell of opinion that it is wholly inequitable that the value of a site increases by a factor of tens or hundreds when it is designated for development, but so little of this increase is available for infrastructure, or even improving building specifications. Taxation reform in this regard is long overdue and could be part of a funding solution. Other taxation reforms, such as the imposition of a General Carbon Charge on goods have also been suggested.

This is not to say that small upgrades are pointless. Any efforts we can make to improve insulation, reduce heat loss through doors, walls and windows, install heat pumps and so on do make a difference. We all have a responsibility to do what we can to lower emissions, one home at a time.



A tale of two householders

Building our 'passive house'

Charles Young writes: On becoming empty-nesters, my wife and I searched for a smaller house. Having failed to find a suitable one, we decided to buy the wrong house in the right place and start again – demolish it and build new.

We aimed to meet the Passive House standard – the simplest international standard of energy-efficiency. A Passive House must meet three criteria: it must be rigorously airtight (hence mechanically ventilated with a heat exchanger); it must require no more than 15 kWh per square metre per year for heating and no more than 60 kWh for all uses. The heating requirement is about one-tenth of the average existing UK house and about a quarter of the average new one.

Meeting these requirements normally means positioning the house for maximum exposure to sunlight – this was not possible for us because of the neighbouring house. However, we just managed to get certified. The house is heated with an air-source heat pump, supplemented by under-floor heating in the most exposed room – we use no gas. Having tiny utility bills is one, but not the most important, advantage of living in a house that was designed to meet our needs.



Upgrading a new-built house

Dick Wolff writes: In our new-build estate, ours is the only house with solar panels. We bought it with the aim of making it net zero carbon. But there's little point spending on renewable technology if the house isn't built properly. The Energy Performance Certificate bore little relation to the actual performance of the house, which had missing insulation and failed our own air tightness test badly.

We plugged holes, stripped out the gas supply and central heating we never wanted in the first place, removed ground floor toilet, washbasin, doors and skirting boards in order to fit the underfloor heating that wasn't offered as an option, and installed a heat pump and 100 litre hot water cylinder.

The house is warm all winter, uses a quarter of our old house's energy and supplies a lot of that energy itself. We import in winter but export in summer – a net export of 1.5 MWh annually. It should pay for the extra cost (including the £6,500 'wasted' refit money) in about 11 years.

There's no reason why a system like ours shouldn't be standard on all new builds, and if the government made it mandatory, land prices would probably adjust to compensate for the additional cost (roughly 3% of the house price for us).

Transport: speeding up the solutions

Andrew Pritchard reports

Almost one third of the UK's carbon emissions are associated with transport and major reductions are thus essential. How do we get there?

The National Planning Policy Framework, on which all planning decisions are based, has for some time advocated walking, cycling and the use of public transport as the three means of transport to be given most support and these form a sound basis for reductions in emissions. Walking and cycling have added health benefits, while reducing vehicle numbers will lower harmful pollutants. The uptake of these transport options would be helped by the provision of hubs where travellers could easily change between walking, cycling, buses, trams and trains.

Technical challenges

But there are considerable technical challenges to overcome in making vehicles, of all types, fit for the future. Electricity is the cleanest source of energy if it is produced without burning fossil fuels (wind and solar power, and nuclear energy among them). Electricity can be used directly in motors via rails or overhead wires (catenaries) though the provision of this infrastructure usually restricts its use to public transport.

Most vehicles will need to rely on batteries. These have some disadvantages: both the charging and discharging processes are only 80 - 90% efficient. The weight of batteries is a further factor. Battery performance is also limited by factors affecting its life; charging is slow compared to refilling a tank with petrol and charging points are few and far between. For the consumer, battery-powered cars are expensive and it will take time for a second-hand market to get established. Even assuming that prices will eventually come down, it will clearly be many years before a complete replacement of the existing fleet could be achieved, though this could be used to encourage modal shift. Replacement of diesel-powered freight vehicles will be more difficult.



Traffic restrictions have come to be accepted on the High Street. Proposals for additional bus gates in other parts of the city are now being considered to encourage people to shift from cars to other ways of getting about.

Other sources that have been used include electric super-capacitors. These have lower charge capacity than batteries, but charge and discharge rapidly and are less subject to degradation from use. They have been used in some public transport systems with recharging taking place at stops. Hydrogen can be used as an intermediate fuel, but converting it to useable electricity is very inefficient, high-pressure storage tanks are needed to give a worthwhile range and there are very few hydrogen refuelling points.

Encouraging better choices

Reductions in emissions can most easily be achieved by getting people out of their cars and the recent 'Connecting Oxford' proposals suggest ways to do this (see page 9). But many are deterred from cycling because it does not feel safe. We need to press for more continuous cycle paths, preferably separated from other traffic, including pedestrians. We also need a joined-up public transport system based on electric vehicles, which might include a Rapid Transit system using trams on radial routes and in the eastern arc, connecting the major hospitals and some of our more deprived areas. As trams run on steel rails they do not generate the small particles associated with rubber tyres on tarmac. Where trams have been introduced they have often doubled ridership, as they offer a more comfortable ride and faster journeys.

Although rail does not at present carry many local commuters, electrification of the line from Didcot and East-West Rail could make a significant difference. A freight delivery system based on fast electric rail trains similar to passenger ones has also been suggested, using modern electronic sorting and control techniques, similar to those used by the Post Office and Amazon. Oxford is already looking into the possibility of freight consolidation at transfer stations, where HGVs would deliver freight for transfer to smaller electric vehicles serving the city.

Many of the technical challenges outlined here will be solved in time but the political mountain to climb may be the hardest challenge of all. The recent Queen's Speech made scant reference to climate change and measures to combat it. It paints a depressing picture of government inaction.

What can the Society do?

We can and must press for change, both locally and, when we can, nationally. We are in regular touch with a wide range of players – bus and train operators, Network Rail, local and national politicians and transport professionals, and other specialist groups, such as those representing cyclists. It gives us a broad perspective on transport issues and some influence to argue for the changes that must come to safeguard our future from rampant climate change.

Climate action at Oxford University ...

The University has now committed to doing more to tackle climate change. As expected, world-class research is in hand to study climate change and combat its effects.

Last month the Vice Chancellor, Professor Louise Richardson, spoke about climate change in her annual 'Oration to the University'*. Ten days later the first-ever University 'climate assembly' took place, involving staff and students, to look at how the University can do more on climate action.

Professor Richardson highlighted the many initiatives across the University aimed at reducing their emissions and said "It is worth asking ourselves whether we believe these commitments are equal to the gravity of the threat. Personally, I am not convinced that they are." She committed to "review our practices and our targets, to draw on the expertise that resides across the University ..." and to establish "a detailed, ambitious Sustainability Policy in which we can all take pride".

A month before that the Environmental Change Institute (ECI) hosted the world's first international scientific conference on 'Achieving Net Zero' emissions. This followed an earlier ECI conference on 1.5 degrees which resulted in Oxford providing (probably) the most authors of any institution for the agenda-setting *Global Warming of 1.5 °C* report following the Paris Climate Agreement.

Among other initiatives ECI staff run the world's largest climate forecasting experiment with hundreds of thousands of 'citizen scientists' in 150 countries. [Climateprediction.net](https://climateprediction.net) now informs the important new science of attributing extreme events.



The University has invested £4 million in CO2 reduction projects and now uses 100% wind power supplied by Scottish Power

They also host the CREDS programme – the Centre for Research into Energy Demand Solutions (www.creds.ac.uk/), a multi-million-pound national consortium of 20 universities and industrial partners aiming to make the UK a leader in linking energy demand to an affordable, secure and low carbon energy system.

The Society enjoys regular meetings with leading figures at the University, helping to link University plans and programmes with those of the city and county.

*www.ox.ac.uk/news/2019-10-14-vice-chancellors-oration-2019 – see the end section.

... and in the community

Oxford has many groups active on the climate crisis and the Society is working in partnership with some of them.

Coalition of Healthy Streets and Active Travel is an alliance of groups, of which we are one, aiming to work at street level in the county. cohsat.org.uk

Oxford Friends of the Earth is a group of people working together to drive meaningful, positive change that makes a lasting difference. It is one of 150 local groups that are part of the national Friends of the Earth. www.oxfoe.co.uk

Community Action Group (CAG) Project Oxfordshire consists of over 65 groups across the county working on community-led climate change action, organising events and projects. Members include Low Carbon Oxford North and Low Carbon West Oxford. cagoxfordshire.org.uk

Extinction Rebellion Oxford organises peaceful direct action against Government inaction on the climate and ecological crisis. www.xroxford.org

Oxford Together on Climate Change (OxToCC) is run by groups based in Oxfordshire concerned about climate change. It helps people to become active. change4climate.uk

Low Carbon Hub develops community-owned sources of green energy and mentors others. www.lowcarbonhub.org

CPRE Oxfordshire campaigns to protect the countryside across Oxfordshire. www.cpreoxon.org.uk

Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) is a local wildlife conservation charity. www.bbowt.org.uk

The Sandford Hydro, a Low Carbon Hub project generating power from the Thames



Photo courtesy of Low Carbon Hub

OxClean: how green can we go?

Natasha Robinson sets out our stall

Probably our best-known working group, OxClean has impeccable green credentials but more could be done to support climate goals.

The ambition of OxClean is to make Oxford a cleaner and more attractive city by removing litter from its streets, green spaces and waterways. We support and organise volunteers and work in partnership with the City Council. Every year hundreds of people take part in the OxClean Spring Clean, collecting many tonnes of rubbish, while other volunteers work throughout the year to keep their patch litter-free.

Much of what is collected is food and drink packaging, and small plastic items. Even though as a society we are increasingly aware of the damage that we do by polluting our environment with harmful rubbish – *Blue Planet* told us that – we continue to allow it to happen. Hedges are festooned with indestructible crisp packets, discarded drinks cans line the roadsides and gutters are full of cigarette butts which will eventually find their

way to the ocean. No one can now claim ignorance of the adverse effects of litter on biodiversity and the natural world.

So OxClean's mission must not only be litter collection but also reduction at source through promoting behaviour change from government, manufacturers, retailers and all of us as consumers. To achieve this we work with local schools – where our children are among the most passionate advocates for the planet – and also with retailers at local and national level to bring about changes in practice. Do we really need plastic gloves to wear when filling up on petrol? Could take-aways not come in paper instead of polystyrene packaging? How can we deal with all the disposable coffee cups? Can we easily recycle more on the go?

OxClean can help make Oxford a cleaner, greener city, supporting the net zero target, but to increase our impact we need more volunteers to support our work with schools and businesses, and to join in removing the litter that degrades our environment. **Do get in touch if you'd like to help.** And please note in your diaries that **OxClean Spring Clean 2020** runs from 28 February to 1 March.

Find out more at www.oxclean.org.uk
Contact us at info@oxclean.org.uk



Walking: free, fun and green!

Our Walks in Oxford project* was set up not to reduce our carbon footprint but to encourage people to enjoy the city on foot. But it's clear we need to change people's thinking about walking as a means of travel.

Walking is an alien activity to many people in our country. Jumping in the car is the new normal. We need to challenge that behaviour if we are to reduce the impact of car use on our carbon emissions. Many more of us could walk to work or the shops, or walk the children to school. We would need another page to list the health benefits of walking!

Where better to start than leisure walking in a city as glorious as ours? Our **Walks in Oxford** website offers over 70 walks in and around the city, ranging in length from under a mile to nine miles. The walks are themed (waterways, history, science and industry for instance) and graded, so if you're a serious hiker or in a wheelchair or pushing a baby-buggy, you'll find something suitable. You can download the walk notes from our website, or in some cases you'll find the walk in a book.

Visit www.oxfordwalks.org.uk - and please give us your feedback.

*Run with our partners OXPA and Oxford Ramblers



Connecting Oxford: our views

Most people would agree that traffic congestion in Oxford is worsening with impacts on the climate and our health. Could the new *Connecting Oxford* proposals deliver worthwhile benefits?

Connecting Oxford is the latest attempt by the City and County Councils to address the problems of traffic congestion and pollution in Oxford, to promote sustainable alternatives and to reduce the number of vehicles travelling into and through the city. Its proposals include traffic restrictions at key points (such as Hollow Way in Cowley, Marston Ferry Road) and workplace parking levies in the eastern arc of the city.

Recognising the need for *Connecting Oxford* to benefit both residents of the city and commuters, the City and County councils invited comments through a public consultation.

We commend both the public consultation and City - County collaboration. However, it is difficult to make specific comments as few details are yet available. We hope that the Councils will move quickly to commission the technical work necessary to enable all parties to make an informed assessment. We will comment further as details are developed.

While we wait for more details, in our initial response we support the Councils' proposals to use traffic restriction points to reduce peak-hour traffic and encourage a fall in overall traffic entering the city.

But we are concerned that such points may simply redirect traffic to already overburdened routes such as the Ring Road – a risk that does not appear to have been considered in plans shared to date.

We are also concerned that the proposed workplace parking levy may be less effective than a city-wide congestion charge, as a levy risks disadvantaging businesses while leaving other vehicles (peak-hour school runs, delivery trucks, tourist buses, etc) unaffected. We would like to propose that revenue from such a levy, and any associated exemption system, is used to support public transport systems to, and within, the eastern arc.



How climate-friendly is your lifestyle?

We don't claim this is science but this questionnaire may remind you about which lifestyle choices make a direct impact on the climate.

At home

Is your **heating and hot water** provided by: (a) a heat-source pump or solar panels (b) gas central heating (c) electric storage heaters and fires/ immersion heater?

Do you usually dry your **laundry**: (a) outdoors when possible (b) on the radiators (c) in a tumble drier?

Is your **lighting**: (a) LED bulbs (b) other low-energy bulbs eg halogen (c) neither?

Is your **loft**: (a) insulated to a depth of 25 centimetres (b) insulated to some degree (c) used mainly for storage?

Do you have: (a) insulated cavity walls (b) double-glazed windows (c) neither?

Getting about

Do you : (a) almost always use public transport /bike/go on foot (b) use a car for many journeys (c) always use a car?

If you use a car, is it: (a) an electric vehicle (b) a car-club car (c) a standard petrol/diesel car?

On your main **holiday**, do you usually: (a) use trains/buses/coaches (b) drive the car somewhere (c) fly overseas?

Resources

Do you **recycle /re-use** things: (a) always (b) sometimes (c) rarely?

Do you **eat meat**: (a) never (b) most days (c) every day?

Do you: (a) grow some of your own food (b) buy local produce regularly (c) neither?

Your score

Mainly (a) – well done, you're leading the field

Mainly (b) – good but some room for improvement

Mainly (c) – need we say?!

The point is that small adaptations add up. For example, if all UK households with a tumble dryer dried one load of washing outside each week, instead of using the machine, we would save over a million tonnes of CO2 in a year. Get advice at change4climate.uk

Photo courtesy of the Oxford Mail



The need for a county-wide plan ...

Ian Green reports

The Oxfordshire Futures Group argues that county-wide development planning is the best way to beat the worst effects of climate change.

Climate projections prepared by the Meteorological Office suggest that Oxfordshire faces more rainfall, including more heavy downpours; milder and wetter winters; and hotter, drier summers with heat waves at least once in every three years by the 2050s. Scientists worldwide are clear that temperature increases above 2°C will have serious impacts on our environment and society – action now is essential.

The **Oxfordshire 2050 Plan** (being developed now) is an opportunity to mitigate the risk of the extreme changes and adapt to some inevitable change. It is an especially appropriate opportunity as: the Plan is a joint Plan of all the Districts and the City; it could effectively incorporate emerging new County Council strategic transport plans (a high greenhouse-gas emitter); and it has a long forward vision – to 2050. Adapting to climate change requires long-term visions.

The Plan could provide a strategic policy framework for tackling climate change in future iterations of the Oxford Local Plan and District Local Plans. Unfortunately the approach to climate change in the first Oxfordshire 2050 Plan *Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report* (January 2019) was disappointingly bland. Much more is needed of this Plan as it continues to be prepared and before its formal submission to central government in 2021.

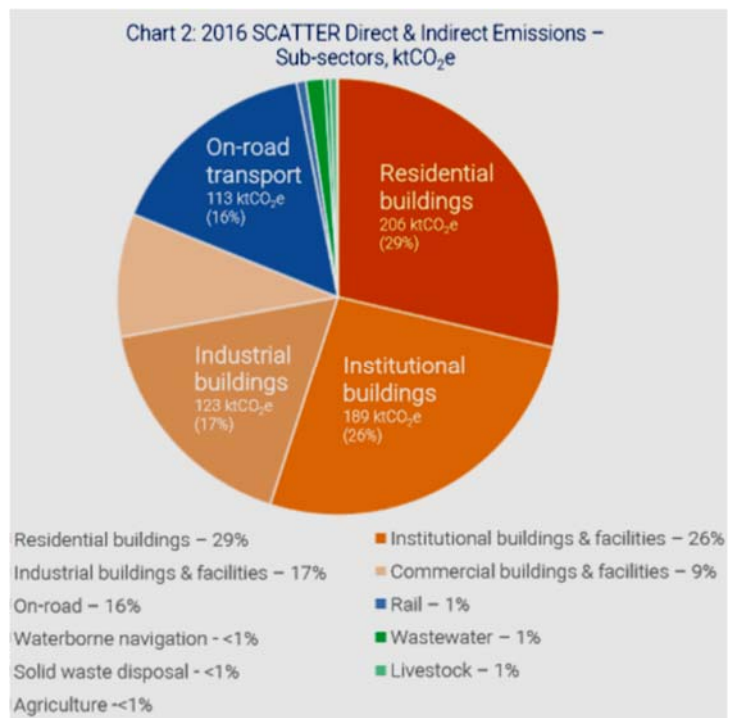
Local planning authorities (LPAs) (such as the City and its neighbouring Districts) are obliged to follow national climate change related policy and legislation. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. The 2018 revised NPPF contains policies on climate change but implementation at Local Plan level (and in our case, also at the level of the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan) has been slow.

Planning policies must also reflect relevant statutory requirements and international obligations. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires LPAs to include in their Local Plans "*policies designed to ensure that the development and use of land in the ... area contribute to the mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change*". This will be a consideration when the Oxford Local Plan is examined later this year. The Climate Change Act 2008 established a legally-binding target to reduce the UK's emissions by at least 80% in 2050 from 1990 levels and in 2019 the Government set a new national target of 'net zero' by 2050.

Acknowledging these requirements, climate change responses need to be accelerated in Oxfordshire, the Oxford City-region, City of Oxford and the Oxfordshire Districts.

Despite local government resource shortages, Oxford City Council is accelerating its response: the first carbon manage-

ment plan was launched in 2008 and the Low Carbon Oxford partnership was established in 2010. A plan for a Zero Emissions Zone was published in 2018 and by 2019 the City Council had established a high quality assessment of what it will take to decarbonise the city. The assessment, published in the *Oxford City Council Climate Emergency Strategy Support report 2019*, supported the declaration of a climate emergency in January 2019*. In September 2019 the City convened a Citizens Assembly to contribute to climate change policy formulation and a new sustainability strategy for the City.



The diagram is extracted from the report and shows city-wide emissions (page 2 gives the UK picture). It shows that in the city, buildings far outstrip other sources of greenhouse gas emissions including transport (although this is high enough at 16% of all emissions). Researchers at the Tyndall Centre in Manchester University say that Oxford should reduce emissions by at least 13% per year; this presents a challenge to housing managers, developers and transport planners in particular. Peter Thompson explains the housing challenge on pages 4-5 and Andrew Pritchard explains the transport challenge on page 6.

Planning our infrastructure

Within the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, strategic infrastructure development is prioritised but this needs to incorporate climate change adaptation and mitigation criteria. A review of the *Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy* (OxIS), November 2017 shows how this is lacking**. Environmental criteria to be used in investment prioritisation are limited to: *extent to which project impacts upon natural and or urban environment*

... and bold ambitions

and local air quality and noise. The Oxfordshire 2050 Plan will need to assess the current status of infrastructure provision, its development potential and the likely impact of infrastructure development on climate change adaptation and mitigation. Below is a summary of the key issues which are receiving or needing immediate attention:

Energy – the growth of housing as suggested by the Oxfordshire Local Plans (as in 2016) and the anticipated increase in employment cannot be supplied by the existing distribution network. Connecting new renewable schemes into the existing grid remains a problem and resolving it is a priority. The OxIS report adds that a minimum of £100 million per year until 2030 must be invested within Oxfordshire for the energy sector to contribute effectively to meeting the county's commitments to reduce emissions by 50% of 2008 levels by 2030.

Water – Thames Water forecasts a water supply deficit from 2022, growing to a peak deficit by 2100 in Swindon and Oxfordshire, driven by population growth and climate change impacts. The deficit will initially be managed through demand management programmes, including tackling leakage and helping customers save water. They suggest that demand management measures cannot offset all the increase in demand and a major new water resource is needed in the 2020s.

Waste Water – various Waste Water Treatment Plants (WWTPs) in Oxfordshire will have capacity issues up to 2031. We must ensure that growth will not have a detrimental impact on water quality; it is essential that there is sufficient capacity within the receiving water environment to accommodate the increased flow and pollutant loads due to growth.

Waste management – planned housing growth alone will lead to an additional 133 thousand tonnes of waste per year by 2040. Embedding the 'circular economy' (in which products are designed to maximise repair, reuse and recycling rather than disposal) is central to the required approach.

Flooding – OxIS recommends that the County Council works with Thames Water and the LPAs to address flood risk by improving drainage and implementing county-wide sustainable solutions. Long-term, there are moves towards Natural Flood Management (NFM), the use of land management techniques that enhance water storage and increase floodplain capacity. The key advantage of NFM is its long-term sustainability and relative low cost. The Environment Agency has started exploring opportunities to apply NFM around Oxfordshire.

Tree coverage – trees play an important role in absorbing and storing carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas. They also provide a home for nature, clean up air pollution and reduce flood risk. Trees cover only 8.9% of Oxfordshire. All areas should aim to double tree cover as soon as possible.

These are all practical and immediate areas of action to reduce or mitigate the effects of climate change. Strategic

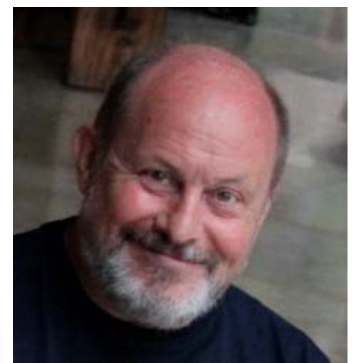


Major floods hit Oxford in February 2014. Flooding is predicted to become more frequent and more severe as the climate warms.

development planners, including those preparing the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan, also need to consider broader sustainable development techniques which are more difficult to address. Compact and connected urban growth is an example, but as the predominant strategy in the past has been to disperse growth, this essential technique is difficult to apply.

This edition of *Visions* has attempted to show what the Society is doing to contribute to mitigating the impact of climate change and to adapt to it. The contributions are, necessarily, of two kinds: those which can be effective in the short term – the emergency response; and those which need a more gradualist approach because significant change can only be achieved with shifts in the current political economy and its approach to economic growth. The Society is active on both fronts – and we hope that readers will be inspired to help us in these efforts.

Ian Green
Chairman



* www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/6660/climate_emergency_strategy_support_report_2019

** www.oxfordshiregrowthboard.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/oxis_stage2.pdf

OCS@50: the battle for Oxford 1969

John Barrow remembers

John Barrow was one of the pioneers who founded the Society. He looks back at the Society's brilliant start.

Co-opted by fellow-architect, James Stevens Curl*, I found myself seated in late autumn 1969, in Helen and Gerard Turner's home in Hamilton Road, Summertown. I was one of the "handful of citizens worried about the erosion of our historic city's character" as Ian Green put it (*Visions* no.141).

But "worried" carries no sense of passion. The mood was one of outrage in those early meetings, with James Curl and the Turners urging the formation of a new society to do battle against the City Council's monstrous road proposals: a multi-lane urban motorway to skirt the city centre, to run from the foot of Headington Hill, south then west across the river to Hinksey Park, there to join a further multi-lane motorway, running parallel to the railway (the 'Eastwyke Farm route'). The primary aim of this was to restore some peace, space and beauty to the High Street by reducing vehicular access. At vast expense, however, it would involve the destruction of scores of houses and commercial properties, bringing ruination to much of the city.

Mark Barrington-Ward, in his invaluable booklet *Forty Years of Oxford Planning*, described the scene in the Turners' lounge: "Professor Curl *fired up*" (my italics) "by the size and brutality of the proposals". James's booming voice was the perfect vehicle to convey anger. It infused each of us with a certain camaraderie, energy and a rising bravado.

But, Ian Green is right, we were a mere handful – seven or eight of us – including both the Turners and James Curl. The late Nancy Villiers and I added to the number and there were two or three other men, whose names at this stretch in time I regret I cannot recall.

Taking command, Helen Turner took much care outlining for us the background and urgency of the situation. The Turners and James Curl had found themselves adrift and alone in their opposition to the City Council's views. To their dismay, the Oxford Preservation Trust had declined to do battle against this latest road scheme and was preparing to accept

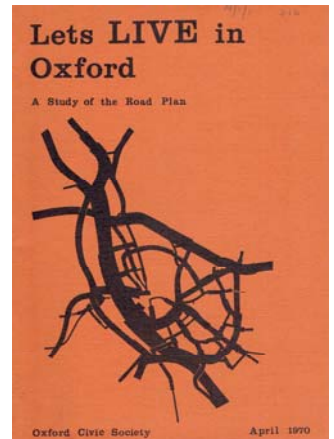
the newly designated Eastwyke Farm route. The Trust, having for years defiantly and successfully opposed plans for a relief road across Christ Church meadow, had, as Helen explained, grown battle-weary. (Helen was later to become the Secretary of the Trust.) It was now, she urged, down to a scarce-born Oxford Civic Society to stand in the Trust's stead, to rally to the clarion call and take up arms.

Establishing our credentials

First, however, James Curl (by then Chair of the Society) and she had decided that we must prepare a document, to define our views – to be published under the battle-cry of *Let's LIVE in Oxford*. Speed was paramount. Still headed by Helen Turner, we were each tasked to prepare a chapter. As a newcomer to the city, recently arrived in Headington, I was assigned "The threat to the suburbs".

Having no idea what tone to adopt and with no time for consultation, I frantically drafted my text. I was also asked to prepare sketch maps. One such, appropriately displayed on the cover, is a diagram showing the predicted traffic densities on the new motorways were they ever to be built.

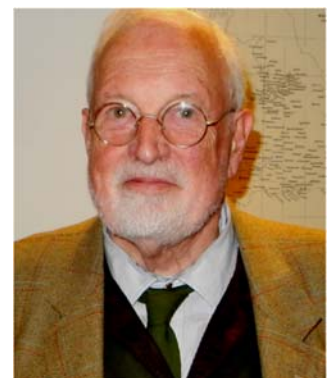
Largely due to Helen's professionalism, our various articles were gathered, rapidly edited, then published with a distinctive orange cover. So it was: in April 1970 *Let's LIVE in Oxford* heralded the birth of Oxford Civic Society. The Society won the day; we campaigned for Park and Ride schemes and the motorways were never built. Oxford thus became a leader in traffic management in towns. And here we are, celebrating our 50th year and still working for Oxford's future. **But NEVER forget the passion.**



* Editor's note

We were thrilled to welcome Professor James Stevens Curl (right) to Oxford in September when he gave a talk on modern architecture. He now lives in Northern Ireland.

Read more about our pioneers in Changing Oxford by historian Liz Woolley, freely downloadable from www.oxcivicsoc.org.uk/changing-oxford/



Helen and Gerard Turner in the 1960s
Photo courtesy of Jane Bigos

Tourism: can we manage it better?

Tony Joyce reports

Tourism is a mixed blessing to the city. Now, at last, some change is coming.

To those who know and love the city, it will come as no surprise that Oxford is one of the most desired cities in the world to visit. The dreaming spires, supported by such fictional locals as Alice, Morse, Harry Potter and Lyra form one of the most valuable of international brand images. The city's many attractions and a vibrant programme of events attract over 8 million visitors a year. They contribute an estimated £873 million to the local economy and provide about 12% of local jobs.

It is shocking however that less than 40% of visitors are satisfied with their visit: Oxford is among the lowest of destinations that visitors would consider returning to for a second time. Their complaints include the hard-to-find Visitor Centre in Broad Street and an acceptable public toilet. The average stay for a visitor on a tour-operated day visit is 90 minutes.

Towards a planned response

The rising flood of tourists, the disorganised and often dangerous parking of tourist coaches in St Giles and blocked pavements in the city centre seemed to have exceeded any acceptable level by the summer of 2018. In response to a sea of complaints, including from OCS, the problem was referred to the city's Scrutiny Committee, who set up a Tourist Management Review Group, chaired by Councillor Andrew Gant. The Group met six times between February and May this year, reviewed a great deal of statistical evidence and interviewed numerous witnesses, both from the local community and from national and regional organisations.

In May, the Group produced a very thorough report of 38 pages, containing 21 recommendations, and these were considered at the City Cabinet meeting on 29 May.

For those with the time, the Group's Minutes, full report and the City Cabinet's responses make most interesting and highly informative reading*. As Andrew Gant stresses in his introduction, the Scrutiny Committee can only make recommendations to the Cabinet: but these were not just about spending

additional scarce money. The expressed aim was to develop a comprehensive agreed vision for the management of visitors to the city, so that improvements could follow a coherent plan and the city could reach out more widely to tourism partners who would cooperate if offered the proper leadership.

The Cabinet's responses were mixed. Though there was frequent agreement in principle, it was stressed that some proposals would require additional budget or applications for external funding which had to be appropriately timed, and that officers were already fully extended and would need time to develop workable policies.

Making a start on the plan

So, on which of the main recommendations might we hope to see action emerging soon?

It was recommended that there should be a **named officer** or team at the City Council to **lead on tourism affairs**. The Council has recently appointed the experienced Iain Nicholson as City Centre Manager with some additional assistance for him – though of course there are numerous other city centre issues which urgently require his attention.

On **coach management**, fresh information has been issued to coach operators on the current opportunities for drop off and waiting. More effective planning between City and County, who are the transport authority, needs urgent attention and the development of a long-term strategy consistent with the City's emerging traffic control measures.

To help individuals visit a wider range of delights, the **Oxford Pass** has been introduced.

On enhancing the city's **waterways'** contribution to accessibility and attractiveness, the City Council has recently published a policy document: *Oxford's Waterways – A Shared Vision*.

Extra **accommodation** for visitors is needed, in order to encourage longer, more enjoyable and more valuable stays. Planning permission has already been granted for an additional 600 bed spaces in the city and these will come into use as built over the next few years.

On the major **overall policy** structure and its implementation however, there appears to be little prospect of really rapid action, unless the Cabinet is goaded into giving this need higher priority – perhaps at the insistence of a frustrated local electorate.

OCS plans an open discussion meeting on Monday 10 February so that these issues may be debated in a wider critical forum. (See the Programme page 15 for details.)

* See the City's website www.oxford.gov.uk under 'All Meetings, Agenda and Minutes'



Booking form

Spring 2020 ticketed events

Closing date for applications: **18 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 ☺
Tap Brewery, Botley: a visit and tasting Saturday 21 March at 3pm @£16		
The regeneration of Blackbird Leys: a visit Wednesday 22 April 2pm @£8		
☺ 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.			

Note: tickets will be posted out in the New Year.

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, tel: 01865 248 105. We always have a waiting list.



*Reflections ...
members greatly
enjoyed the visit to
Worcester College
and the Sultan
Nazrin Shah
Centre in
September*

*Photo courtesy of
Pauline Massey*

OCS Calendar

'Cut out and keep'

January – April 2020

**ticketed events*

Thursday 28 November 8pm
The vernacular buildings of Oxfordshire,
a talk by **Lawrence Kelly**
St Michael's Parish Room, Cornmarket

Tuesday 14 January 8pm
Devised in Oxford: tales of innovation,
a talk by **Dr Matt Perkins**
Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall
Street

Monday 3 February 8pm
A vision for Oxford city centre, a talk by
Louise Thomas and Ian Green
Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square

Monday 10 February* 8pm
A vision for tourism in Oxford, a panel
discussion, speakers to be announced
Oxford Town Hall, St Aldates

*NB This is a ticketed event – see panel
opposite*

Wednesday 19 February 8pm
250 years of weather in Oxford, a talk by
Dr Stephen Burt
Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall
Street

Tuesday 3 March 8pm
Saving Oxford's wetland wildlife, a talk by
Ellie Mayhew
Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall
Street

Saturday 21 March* 3pm
Tap Social Brewery, Botley: a visit

Tuesday 24 March 7pm, AGM 8pm
Oxford: onwards and upwards?, a talk by
Gordon Mitchell followed by the AGM
Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square

Tuesday 31 March 7.30pm
**Architecture is plural: combining old and
new**, a talk by **Alan Powers**
Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square

Wednesday 22 April* 2pm
The regeneration of Blackbird Leys, a visit
led by Catalyst Housing Ltd

Programme January – April 2020

Open talks – all welcome

Talks are free, just turn up – and please help us to recruit new members by bringing a guest

Devised in Oxford: tales of innovation

Tuesday 14 January 8pm

Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street

Dr Matt Perkins, CEO of Oxford University Innovation, describes how Oxford University's technology and research commercialisation company has helped launch over 150 spinout companies.

A vision for Oxford city centre

Monday 3 February 8pm

Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square

The Society's **Louise Thomas** and **Ian Green** discuss the history of the city centre, emerging trends and their implications and present a vision which seizes opportunities and mitigates threats.

A vision for tourism in Oxford

Monday 10 February 8pm – see panel below

250 years of weather in Oxford

Wednesday 19 February 8pm

Magdalen College Auditorium,
Longwall Street

Weather observations have been made at the Radcliffe Observatory since 1772, the longest continuous record in the British Isles and one of the longest in the world.

Dr Stephen Burt from the University of Reading delves into the records. What do the records tell us about weather oddities and climate change?



Saving Oxford's wetland wildlife

Tuesday 3 March 8pm

Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street

Ellie Mayhew from the Freshwater Habitats Trust will explain why our area has such rich biodiversity and what the charity has been doing to improve and monitor these valuable freshwater areas to protect the species they support.

Oxford: onwards and upwards?

Tuesday 24 March 7pm followed by the AGM 8pm

Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square

Gordon Mitchell, the City's Chief Executive, takes a broad look at the many challenges and pressures facing the city and describes what the City Council is doing in response. Some of these challenges relate to climate change – and the city can claim to be something of a pioneer.

Join us in the bar after the talk!

Architecture is plural: combining old and new

Tuesday 31 March 7.30pm

Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square

The contest between modern architecture and its alternatives may never be resolved, but **Alan Powers**, academic and writer, makes the case for greater tolerance and renewed understanding of the ways in which buildings contribute to our enjoyment of places.

A vision for tourism in Oxford: a panel discussion

Monday 10 February 8pm

Oxford Town Hall, Assembly Room, St Aldates

Oxford is a 'must visit' destination with 8 million visitors a year. However, many visitors are disappointed by their experiences while residents are frustrated by crowds on the pavements and chaotic parking. What should we aspire to? What needs to change and how?

Following on from the highly popular **OCS@50 debates** this panel discussion aims to set out a vision for tourism in the city. An expert panel will be announced; come and have your say.

This is a ticketed event, price £7. Tickets can be bought online from Eventbrite www.eventbrite.co.uk (search by the title or use the link on our website). **This is a public discussion, all welcome.**

Members only: if you can't use the Internet please order tickets by phone from Alan Hobbs – 01865 248 105.

Members-only visits

Tickets are needed for these events: bookings by Wednesday 18 December

Tap Social Brewery, Botley: a visit

Saturday 21 March 3pm

Tap Social is a craft brewery that trains and employs people during and after prison sentences. Join us for a one-hour tour of the brewery, including a talk about brewing and the company's work with the criminal justice system. The tour concludes with a tasting session of all beers on tap (up to 10) and a pint of your favourite.

The regeneration of Blackbird Leys

Wednesday 22 April 2pm

Catalyst Housing Ltd is working in partnership with Oxford City Council to redevelop council-owned sites in Blackbird Leys. The development will provide much needed new homes in the District Centre, as well as new shops and new community facilities. A talk by Catalyst and City Council staff will be followed by a short walk around some of the areas which will benefit.

Dates for your diary and Exec matters ...

Dates for your diary

Don't miss three events of note:

A panel discussion on tourism – Monday 10 February 8pm at the Town Hall. See page 15 for details.

OxClean Spring Clean – Friday 28 February – 1 March inclusive – read more below.

AGM – Tuesday 24 March at 8pm, preceded by a talk by Gordon Mitchell at 7pm, at Rewley House. See page 15.

OxClean – leap into action in spring 2020!

Leap into spring and join 1,000 people throughout Oxford over the **Leap Weekend** (28/29 February, 1 March 2020) helping to make our city a cleaner and greener place.

Every year OxClean organises the Oxford Spring Clean collecting litter from our verges and hedges, parks, pathways and waterways, to spruce up our beautiful city.

Our OxClean project is not just about litter however. It has become one of Oxford's great community events, bringing together people of all backgrounds and helping us to get to know our neighbours. What's more, children love it and it helps to develop their awareness of litter and its impact.

To find out more go to www.oxclean.org.uk where you can sign up and join in, as an individual or a neighbourhood or community group. We will provide you with all the information and equipment you need. We look forward to seeing you in spring!



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- 16 Dates for your diary / Exec matters

Join the Society's think tanks!

We welcome newcomers to our working groups and our Executive Committee which is voted in at the AGM.

We always welcome new helpers as our opportunities exceed our capacity to seize them. Currently we have working groups on planning, housing, transport, OxClean, Oxfordshire Futures, communications and the programme group, which organises walks, talks and visits. The groups report to our Executive Committee which meets monthly. Care to join us? If so, please ring Vernon Porter for an informal chat (contacts are given below).

Nominations for the Executive and notice of any items to go on the AGM agenda should reach Vernon by **9 March**.

The photo below shows (most of) the Executive Committee and our Special Advisers in September this year.



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

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

You can join online, at our talks, or contact Liz Grosvenor at membership@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

Oxford Civic Society

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www.oxfordfutures.org.uk

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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