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## Shaping the city's recovery



*High Street at the height of lockdown in early April. The absence of traffic had a big impact on pollution levels and also allowed us to see and admire our heritage as never before.*

*Photo courtesy of Peter West*

**As we ease out of COVID-19 lockdown, we now have a unique opportunity to assess what we've learned from the experience in order to shape the city's recovery.**

With so many deaths attributable to the virus and the economy in crisis, the pandemic has been a tragedy. But some of the short-term effects of the lockdown have been very positive. Will the effects have a lasting impact on the way we do things and plan ahead for a post-COVID-19 world? Some of the plans we had before, or which we were developing, are still sound and it's just a question of extending target dates to allow time for the economy to recover. But we have an opportunity to reassess other plans because we have seen what can be gained by radical change to many of our previous behaviours.

As we've seen, if we use cars less, we significantly improve the quality of the air we breathe (a 59% drop in pollution in Oxford). If we are not squeezed onto too-narrow pavements alongside too-congested roads, the city's streets are pleasant places to be in. Buses can move along efficiently with emptier roads. If we acknowledge and respond to the different vulnerabilities of our communities and if these kinds of

behaviour changes are consolidated, we could begin to create a future with an improved quality of life.

There is much more to tackle of course: maximising opportunities to build long-lasting resilience to climate change; improving health, wellbeing and education for all; full and inclusive employment; fulfilling, adequately paid jobs; with greater connectivity and accessibility, especially across key employment and housing locations. The glimpse of a better future which we've seen during the lockdown could also reinforce our awareness that the quality of development planning in the city region and beyond has profound implications for the quality of life in Oxford. That should bolster our resolve to do things differently at city-region and regional level too.

The crisis has brought about enormous and perhaps irreversible structural and societal change for our communities and local economies. Nationally and locally, the fragile nature of our economy and our reliance on often neglected parts of the workforce has been exposed. At the same time, it has highlighted the importance of expertise, science, cooperation, information and transparency. It has also shown that societies can, when necessary, implement bold and rapid responses,

# Shaping the city's recovery (continued)



Broad Street in March

Photo courtesy of Peter West

and that, despite the perceived fragmentation of society, there is still substantial support for community action (this is very much the case in Oxford as demonstrated in our recent webinar featuring the Oxford Hub).

Discussions are now well under way internationally, nationally and locally about what happens as the lockdown is eased and in a post-COVID-19 vaccination world. We take the view that the opportunity is now here to make the recovery effort a time for economic, social and environmental reformation. We support a 'just recovery' that will strengthen our local economies and our society. **The actions we take now will have profound and lasting consequences for how we work, manage our economy and indeed how we live.** The recovery needs to play a lead role in tackling the slower-moving but equally alarming climate crisis. The recovery should also play a lead role in tackling inequality – the need for this has been highlighted by the pandemic.

There are two paths that can be taken: one is that retreat to some idea of 'business as usual'; the other is to shape the 2020s economy in ways that are greener, cleaner, healthier, more equitable and more resilient. We are pursuing the latter approach and are organising a series of discussions /

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webinars to build up constructive engagement with the Oxfordshire 2050 Team / Oxfordshire Growth Board and its constituent bodies at a county-wide level.

At regional level, we have a track record of constructive engagement, starting with our 2014 *Oxfordshire Futures* report which established our credentials in what is now an era of joint strategic planning between all the Oxfordshire local authorities.

**The need for an independent voice has never been so great.** In the rest of this year the local authorities in Oxfordshire, including the County and the Oxfordshire Growth Board (it has still not changed its name) and the Local Enterprise Partnership (and others) will be continuing to prepare an Oxfordshire-wide Spatial Plan (Oxfordshire 2050), an update of the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy, the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan 5 and a Rail Connectivity Plan. These need to link with the Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy and of course the Oxford, Milton Keynes, Cambridge Arc.

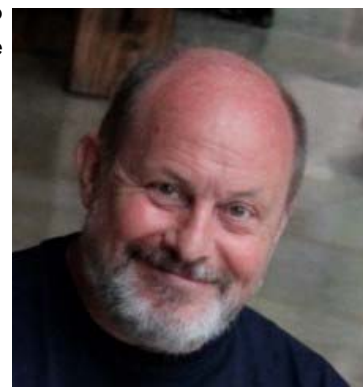
All of these strategic initiatives not only need to knit together, but also need to consider the post-COVID-19 world with revised assumptions and projections and, we sincerely hope, new visions of what can be achieved. We are intensifying our contributions to these strategic activities: see for example page 4 which summarises our response to the recent pre-consultation discussion on the LTCP5. The recent launch of the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan open consultation (Open Thought – see [www.oxfordshireopenthought.org](http://www.oxfordshireopenthought.org)) is very welcome and it may well prove to be a great way for independent groups and individuals to contribute.

At city level we continue to engage with the Oxford Strategic Partnership, with its focus on inequality, and the City Centre Task Force and its recent development of a four-stage COVID-19 recovery plan. The preparation of a City Centre Vision and Action Plans continues and will need to be adapted to the Recovery Plan. The implementation of these plans and new Oxford Local Plan plus the response to the climate emergency all have links with wider strategic planning activities. At city level we also contribute to the Coalition for Healthy Streets and Travel and many other community organisations.

We welcome any members who would like to join one or more of our working groups to contribute to these efforts. We always welcome new people who would like to join the Society and to contribute. Please contact me if this interests you (see the back page for contact details).

Ian Green

Chairman





## Warm welcomes, fond farewells

At the AGM (held online in June) we were delighted to welcome a new Vice-President and to vote in two new members of the Executive Committee. We also welcomed a new group coordinator.



Our new Vice President is **Imam Monawar Hussain** MBE, DL whom we first met at the Ashmolean's One World Festival. This festival celebrates the rich cultural and religious diversity of the city.

Imam Hussain is the Muslim Tutor at Eton College, Windsor; Muslim Chaplain to the Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and the founder of The Oxford Foundation which promotes religious and community harmony, primarily through education. He is an adviser to a number of national charities and is our nominated High Sherriff for 2021–22.

Monawar says: "I hope that in my role as Vice President, I will be able to support OCS in its engagement with young people and diverse communities in the city". He makes a team of four Vice Presidents to strengthen our links within the county.

### New Executive Committee members



**Penelope Lenon** moved to Oxford in 2011. She joined OCS early on and also became Secretary to the very active St John Street Area Residents' Association. She is particularly interested in developments affecting the historic centre but says that "Working as a volunteer adviser at Citizens Advice has given me a broader understanding of the city and its needs". Penelope spent much of her working life at the Bank of England, where her roles included several years as a Press Officer – experience that has been put to good use since she joined the Communications Group and started helping with the Executive Committee's administration.



**Sarah Hendriks** is a socio-cultural and architectural historian who first moved to Oxford from Australia in 2011. She has a particular interest in heritage conservation and environmentally sensitive development, especially in light of increasing tourism. Having lived, studied and worked in Oxford, Sarah says "I appreciate the vibrant and active communities that make up the city and am excited to contribute to the ongoing and future well-being of the city." Sarah was unfortunately 'stuck' in Australia at the time of writing! We wish her well for getting back to Oxford.

### Farewells

We were very sorry to say goodbye to two members of the Executive Committee, **Thelma Martin** and **Wendy Robinson**, both of whom are leaving us for personal reasons. We are really grateful to them for their enthusiastic support of our work and wish them well.

### The Programme Group

**Terry Bremble** has stepped down as the coordinator of the group after leading it since 2014. As an Oxford Blue Guide Terry was uniquely qualified to take on the role. She helped to widen the range of our walks, talks and visits, all of which are hugely appreciated by members. Terry will remain on the group as a 'back bencher'.

Her role as coordinator has been taken on by **Ian Salusbury**. Ian has lived in Oxford since 1990, when he joined Pergamon Press. He has since worked for a number of scientific publishers. Ian says: "I particularly enjoy setting up events and meetings bringing people together. My interests cover a variety of subject areas, but especially science, nature and business."



### Remembering Keith Holly

Keith Holly, one of the Society's longest-standing members, sadly died last November, at the age of 93. Keith followed a distinguished professional career in agricultural science, around the world as well as locally, with what became Oxford University's Begbroke Science Park. He campaigned for the protection of open spaces and was instrumental in saving Warneford Meadow from development. He was also a great walker and an enthusiastic member of Ramblers and Oxford Pedestrians Association, as well as OCS.

Keith made some very generous legacy provisions and we hope to be able to say more later about the commemoration of his contribution to these causes he loved.

### Increase in subscriptions

At the AGM members discussed raising our subscription rates from January next year. It will be the first increase since 2006.

The new rate for personal members will be £15 for single members, £25 for two people at the same address.

We'll be in touch in the autumn with further details.

# The jigsaw that lacks a picture on the box

## Ian Green reports on LTCP5

**We responded to the County's invitation to contribute to a 'pre-consultation engagement survey' on the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan 5.**

The County set up the survey to inform the content of the wider consultation on the proposed Plan later this year. One of many amenity groups to comment, we welcomed this wide-ranging survey and congratulated the County on its willingness to offer a platform for opinion and interest before the more formal consultation.

The survey was not a small matter – it consisted of 28 topic papers on issues as diverse as cycling, bus strategy, low traffic neighbourhoods, the rail network, Park & Ride schemes and more. Although it was not expected that everyone would respond to every paper, we did so because the updated transport plan (to 2035) is seen to be a vital component of national, regional and local planning. Peter Thompson valiantly reviewed all 28 papers.

As a critical friend, we also contributed an accompanying short report which noted that we found that there were minimal links between the 28 topic papers and no over-arching strategy or 'vision' which might provide a common thread between them. It was as if we had been presented with a jigsaw with no picture on the box containing a variety of pieces of different shapes and sizes. We don't know whether all the pieces fit together (or whether any are missing!), what picture is created when assembled and how far this matches the one being aimed for.

The detailed responses and strategic response were prepared by the Transport Group of the Society. This group has about a dozen active members with a mix of experience and skills and is supported by our Special Advisor on transport matters, Peter Headicar who is the main author of the supplementary report. If you would like to contribute to the work of this group please get in touch.

### Some key points from our response

- We need to know whether the projected growth in population, employment and traffic is practicable and desirable. If not, how will demand be managed?
- Encouraging people to switch to more sustainable forms of transport will need both carrots and sticks.
- The development of new homes in the county needs to be planned in conjunction with transport planning.
- This survey omits reference to the A34 on the grounds that this is the responsibility of Highways England. However, the A34 is a key artery for the whole region and needs to be planned for in the context of this study.
- Lockdown has transformed people's perceptions of the benefits of working from home. To what extent can this be encouraged and planned in for the future?

**See more on our website:** [www.oxcivicsoc.org.uk/transport-strategy-civic-society-response](http://www.oxcivicsoc.org.uk/transport-strategy-civic-society-response)

# A shake up of the planning system

## Louise Thomas explains

**The Government's plans for post-COVID recovery include major changes to the planning system.**

Shortly before the lockdown began, the Government's White Paper *Planning for the Future* indicated plans to introduce a number of efficiency-style measures in the planning system. These include:

- expanding the use of zoning tools to support development – simplifying the process of granting planning permission for residential and commercial development through zoning tools, such as Local Development Orders;
- revising the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to embed the principles of good design and place-making – this will make clear that high-quality buildings and places must be considered throughout the planning process;
- responding to the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission's report; and

- giving local authorities the ability to ensure that new homes conform to local residents' ideas of beauty through the planning system – using the National Model Design Code.

While some of these measures are to be welcomed, the return to planning by zoning risks eliminating mixed use areas, which are the lifeblood of most towns and cities. So for civic and amenity societies there is much to do to monitor growth and recovery plans and our social and built heritage.

We will be considering the White Paper in more detail.





# The routes to a post-COVID era?

## Andrew Pritchard reports

The lockdown has transformed how, and how often, we move. It has also produced a raft of new suggestions and initiatives. Could some good come of this pandemic?

The County applied for nearly £3 million from the Government's Emergency Active Travel Fund, designed to encourage more walking and cycling in a post-COVID world. However only half of the £594,000 expected in the first tranche was provided. This must be spent within eight weeks. The other half is to be made up with County Council funds. Perhaps the most welcome proposal by the City was for more cycle parking to be provided in the city centre.

We took the opportunity to comment on this, in particular the need to avoid reducing the space available for pedestrians and the dubious use of 'Sheffield stands' in echelons which reduces the road space taken up, but makes them more difficult to use. A more effective and better design of stand would be more attractive.

The remainder of the money is to be spent on improvements to cycle paths. There does not appear to be any plan to re-allocate road space in the way proposed in other cities, though some pedestrian one-way pavement schemes have been implemented in the city centre to help achieve social distancing.

### From bus gates to school streets

Oxford City schemes suggested for the second tranche, of £2.4 million, include three new bus gates in the city centre (in South Parks Road/St.Cross Road, Worcester Street and Oxpens Road/Thames Street), the adoption of school streets (where traffic is restricted at drop-off and pick-up times), reallocation of road space and safer junctions for cycling, more 20 mph zones and electric scooter trials. More seating areas are suggested in Bonn Square, Gloucester Green and Broad Street.

The City is proposing to implement the first two bus gates while Wantage and Witney have already put forward proposals for traffic control. We shall be putting forward our views through the City Centre Recovery Strategy Group, of which we are a member. They are also planning for a restart period 3-6 months in the future, a recovery period from 6-18 months, and the post-COVID era, with some more permanent changes.

### A bridge to the future

Linking the **Oxpens** to the redeveloped **Osney Mead** continues to attract our interest. A £6 million bridge has been suggested, paid for by the City Deal, but its location fails to provide a good link for cyclists between south Oxford and the city centre, or to Osney Mead. We feel that a new bridge across the river and the railway is needed, preferably with provision for public transport as well as cyclists and pedestrians. This could be an opportunity for a landmark rather than the University's suggestion of an ugly addition to the city, and would help to make the redevelopment part of a new exciting and vibrant part of central West Oxford. We shall be putting our views to the City Centre Task Force.

Following refurbishment of the Botley Road corridor, the **Woodstock Road and Banbury Roads** are next and our offer to take part at an early stage in the planning has been welcomed by the City. Although budgets have been set, it is not clear what they are based on, but they are not enough for the complete road rebuilding that is needed. The side roads could be made into low traffic neighbourhoods.

Much better routes are required for **cyclists** to reach Oxford Parkway station, the 4,400 new homes planned around Kidlington and the new Oxford North development.



*A deserted Magdalen Bridge in March. The lack of vehicles tempted many more cyclists onto the streets to get to work or take exercise. Can we ensure they continue to feel safe on the roads?*

*Photo courtesy of Peter West*

# Balancing heritage and growth

## Louise Thomas reports

**How is growth being managed in historic towns and cities and can growth and heritage be better balanced? A new study aims to find out.**

The Society is a key partner in a new research study funded by Historic England, working with the Historic Towns and Villages Forum (HTVF) and the Alliance of Historic Cathedral Cities and Towns (ACT). This study, *Balancing heritage and growth in cathedral cities and historic towns*, focuses on them as whole settlements.

The study aims to produce practical, policy-relevant recommendations to help local authorities to tackle the challenges of truly sustainable growth in relation to heritage. Most importantly it will empower local communities to assist in this. The project is built around the contributions of local civic societies in identifying local character and challenges to heritage. Oxford is one of 12 case studies involved along with Durham, Canterbury, Peterborough and others.

The basis of the study is that legislation and policy for protecting heritage tend to bite at the level of the individual building, historic site or limited locality (e.g. conservation areas). There is no legislation devoted to historic towns as a whole. Yet many struggle to balance heritage, the demands of growth, the need for investment, or what is most sustainable.

Working with the HTVF (based at Kellogg College) and consultants Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners, the project will deliver a method or toolkit for assessing the types and characteristics of development likely to be sympathetic to historic places and those likely to be problematic. There will also be guidance for planners, civic societies and specialists on how to ensure benefits from development, especially in places with separate county and city governance.

In the longer term the study hopes to achieve:

- a greater understanding of the benefits of growth in historic towns, in areas under development pressure or promoting heritage-led regeneration;
- the mitigation of potential damage to urban historic character; and,
- a contribution to on-going local and national planning policy formulation focused on sustainable growth challenges in historic towns as a whole.



Since this project began in December 2019, it has of course been affected by the restrictions related to COVID-19 and social distancing. Much of the early data collection has involved the partners conducting interviews with other civic societies and local planning authorities, and also visiting other towns. Our Chairman, Ian Green, has been instrumental in not only getting the study funded, but now in undertaking these interviews.

### The effects of COVID-19 restrictions

Until we can resume work on the project, it is useful to reflect on the effects that COVID-19 restrictions may have on the research's questions, findings and recommendations. The massive reduction in traffic has led to a widespread appreciation of our public realm (whether streets or parks), safer walking and cycling. We've had a clearer view of our heritage – natural or built, grand or ordinary – across less cluttered and polluted streets. The strengthening of community relationships is also to be celebrated, especially as work, commuting, office politics and busy lives in general had overshadowed the value of the neighbourhood.

However, the vulnerability of high streets and town centres has increased. Cafés, tourism, leisure activities and flexible workspaces, which had been seen as the saviours of the town centre 'experience', are under threat if degrees of social distancing are required for the remainder of 2020 at least. Some businesses may become unviable.

Perhaps we can take comfort from the longevity of our historic centres and their ability to adapt as we plan our way forward. The conversation about the need to rethink town centres had already started and so the first hurdle has been cleared. However it will take some time to see the impact of the virus on the rest of the economy and how that will affect growth and regeneration plans, confidence and investment.

But what of local authorities which were already under pressure? The threats of not having a five-year housing land supply in place or not determining applications in time remain in place at the time of writing. So developers could gain planning consent thanks to the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' regardless of the desirability of their proposals. There is also a risk that planning officers can be diverted to COVID-19 related services, especially in those authorities that have not identified planners as key workers. Officers could become ill, already under-resourced teams would not be able to cover for them and key community concerns could be overlooked. Councils are now introducing online committee meetings so that the delegated authority powers granted to senior officers should not be needed. Yet this period and the months that follow could prove a testing time for town planning.

*Photo courtesy of Peter West*



# Exposing some 'home truths'

## Peter Thompson reviews a new book on housing

The Housing Policy Group welcomes *Home truths*\*, a new book on the housing market.

An economist by training, Liam Halligan was prompted to write this book by the chronic shortage of house-building and a crisis in affordability. He sets out the history of housing supply during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, concludes that too few homes have been built to meet population growth and household formation, and goes on to examine many of the causes of this situation. In making proposals for how it can be remedied he argues that: "We must radically reform the supply side of UK house-building ... particularly the opaque and deeply dysfunctional market for land."

The big villains of his analysis are, first, the politicians who, in several steps, emasculated the ground-breaking Town & Country Planning Act of 1947. Apart from beginning to regulate urban planning, this Act set the value of developable land as that of its existing use (agriculture mainly). The elimination of this principle was finally achieved by the passing of the 1961 Land Compensation Act, allowing owners to benefit from the hugely enhanced value of land with development consent.

The other big villains are presented as the four or five largest house-builders, who completely dominate and manipulate the market, indulging in an array of mal-practices in order to generate massive profits and rewards for directors.

Halligan rightly points out that the biggest component of house prices is the land value and it is this that makes housing unaffordable. However, he also explains that land values are determined by 'residual valuation', i.e. by assessing the gross returns from the completed development and deducting the building costs so that the selling price of the completed houses determines the land value, not the other way round.

As in any market, house prices are set by what buyers are prepared to pay, not by the costs of production. The fact is that, even in expensive Oxford, some buyers can pay exorbitant prices for homes, but they exclude most of the key workers on whom we all depend. 'Unaffordability' thus raises issues of wealth discrepancy and how we value jobs, perhaps more than the price of developable land. Halligan recognises house ownership and high prices as contributors

to wealth inequality, but not as a consequence of it, possibly because it is a subject beyond the remit of this book.

He quotes a wealth of statistics, including figures showing the rapid decline in home ownership in the last 20 years and increase in private renting. One failing, perhaps, is that although he alludes to insecurity, he does not fully explain why private sector tenants are at such a disadvantage in this country. Perhaps a reference to the introduction of the Assured Shorthold Tenancy by the Housing Act of 1988 deserved a mention.

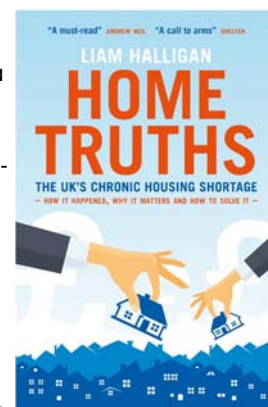
Halligan does expound on the perceived desirability of 'a home of one's own' and the manner in which the market is broken (as conceded in the government White Paper of 2017). He devotes a chapter to the merits of local authority involvement and is deeply critical of the implementation of measures such as the Right to Buy.

His 'Manifesto for Change' lists 10 issues to be addressed, including land value capture (Halligan suggests 50% of the value should go to provide infrastructure); new towns; more good quality social housing; better planning and design; reconsideration of Green Belt policies; rescinding the 'Right to Buy' and giving greater protection to buyers of new homes; the selling-off of government-owned land for housing; the removal of secrecy as to just who owns land in the UK; removing the automatic right of a development to remain, without it having been granted planning consent, if no action is taken within four years; and opening up opportunities for smaller businesses to break down the oligopoly of the big house-building companies.

The book does not consider where we should build housing, or how it should relate to the nature and location of economic activity. It does not suggest what 21<sup>st</sup> century development should look like, nor the transport and connectivity issues surrounding it. Perhaps most importantly, it mentions climate change only once in the introduction, and not at all in the context of what needs to be done in regard to housing.

The 'radical reform' required, Halligan suggests, is necessary to address social disengagement and wealth inequality. For all its flaws and omissions, this book is a worthwhile read and makes some pretty convincing arguments for political action, by any government.

*\*Home Truths: The UK's chronic housing shortage - how it happened, why it matters and the way to solve it. Biteback Publishing, 2019*



Work continues at Barton Park where one-bed flats cost upwards of £290,000

# OxClean Spring Clean breaks the records

## Natasha Robinson reports

**We were lucky to get a record-breaking Spring Clean done just before the country went into lockdown.**

This year's 'Leap Forward' OxClean Spring Clean took place over the leap year weekend 28 February – 1 March, just before the country was really aware of the coronavirus threat and the enormous change about to happen to our daily lives.

The annual event, the 13<sup>th</sup> to date, was a record year for volunteers. Over 100 groups signed up totalling almost 1,000 volunteers, covering all areas of the city. They included university and school students, faith groups, residents' associations, many other community groups and some businesses. The amount of litter collected was less than previously at six tonnes, which optimistically might reflect less litter to pick, one must hope so. As usual, it was a team effort supported by Oxford Direct Services.

Many of the groups who registered were keen to continue to keep their community litter-free year round. We had planned to harness this enthusiasm by providing equipment for them to do so, but three weeks later we were living under lockdown. Reluctantly we had to rethink, despite the glorious spring weather and the enthusiasm of volunteers who wanted to combine their daily exercise with collecting litter as they went.

As lockdown loosened and outdoor gatherings became more frequent, so litter in public places, especially parks, playgrounds and rural areas, started to become a problem, which was sad to see. Clearly we still have some way to go to get across the message that littering is not acceptable.

If restrictions continue to loosen then we hope to restart supporting individual groups with 'anytime litter picks'. Volunteers reported 'grot spots' associated with some of the larger retail outlets, and as soon as normal access becomes possible, we will be promoting 'Spotless' to encourage these businesses to be responsible for their immediate surroundings.

Other OxClean plans, in particular working with schools, are also currently on hold, but once the schools resume, we hope to be able



*The Vice Lord Lieutenant Brian Buchan joined local litter picking volunteers, a team from Oxford Direct Services and reporters from local media to launch our Spring Clean outside Rose Hill Co-op*

*Photo courtesy of Emma Gascoigne*

to meet again with pupils and engage them in looking after their local environment.

We may have to do things a bit differently in 2021, who knows, but we plan to go ahead with our 14<sup>th</sup> Spring Clean on 12-14 March 2021. For further information on how to join in with making Oxford a cleaner and greener city, go to [www.oxclean.org.uk](http://www.oxclean.org.uk).

*The Nepalese community turned out to support us in the Bams Road area of Cowley and in Rose Hill.*

*OxClean is not just about clearing litter: it is also about building stronger communities. That we have now run this event successfully for 13 years is because it brings people together to do something enjoyable and worthwhile.*





# What the new Local Plan means for us

## Peter Thompson assesses the impact

In June the Local Plan for Oxford was adopted by the City Council, having been assessed as 'sound' by Government-appointed inspectors. This important Plan will shape our City's policies and priorities up to 2036.

According to the Foreword, the Plan "will determine the homes, jobs, community facilities and infrastructure for the next twenty years". It claims to make a priority of providing affordable housing and good quality jobs, and to tackle congestion and pollution by prioritising walking, cycling and public transport, while respecting "the city of previous generations" and shaping the city of the future.

The Plan consists of nearly 60 policies relating to housing, employment, the environment and sustainability, 'green' and 'blue' infrastructure, heritage and design quality, movement and communities. In addition, there are over 60 more policies ascribing particular uses to specific sites.

### Providing homes for the future

Perhaps the most controversial issue in preparing the Plan was the assessment of housing need and the provision necessary to meet it. The controversy is compounded by the impossibility of meeting housing needs within the city's boundaries and the legal 'duty to cooperate' of adjoining local authorities.

The key factor is the unaffordability of housing, with average prices being 17 times average income. Following Government guidelines for calculating housing need, this acute situation means 678 'affordable' homes are required each year.

New developments are required to provide 50% of homes at 'affordable' prices so, to provide 678 'affordable' homes, we need to plan for building around 1,400 dwellings, since not all sites will deliver that proportion, owing to size and viability issues. The Inspectors found that "There are no convincing environmental or delivery grounds that indicate that a lower figure for housing need should be set".

However, the official definition of an 'affordable' home (80% of market price) is of course, in Oxford terms, a complete misnomer. Clearly, although planning policy is a relevant factor in addressing the housing crisis, it is no solution, even when development at a huge scale is planned. **Housing will neither be affordable nor in sufficient numbers and the Government's Inspectors recognised this.**

Delivering the housing numbers required (28,000 over the Plan period) poses the dilemma of where they might be located. Repeated investigations have shown that only a fraction of the homes needed – 10,880 – could be accommodated within the tight boundaries of the city, even allowing for homes at higher density.

In this situation national legislation requires that the 'duty to cooperate' of all local authorities must prevail. Thus, the larger



*Blackbird Leys is earmarked as an 'area of change'. Some planning decisions will be controversial, including the possible demolition of the Church of the Holy Family (a Grade 2 listed building) and its replacement by a smaller church, 21 flats and a community hub.*

*Photo courtesy of the Oxford Mail*

part of Oxford's new housing must, in fact, be provided by the neighbouring authorities – an issue which has been highly contentious across the county.

Even finding sites for 10,880 homes within the city has necessitated re-drawing the Green Belt. This is permitted only in 'exceptional circumstances', but the dire housing situation has been ruled to be just this; the areas of Green Belt sacrificed were of limited value in contributing to its objectives, so the policy is considered justified.

### Of students and jobs

The City Council sought to restrict the progressive 'studentification' of the city, by prioritising developments by the two **universities**. This recognised that Oxford University occupies a unique position in the world and its interests should be carefully considered while protecting other interests of the city. The Planning Inspectors **rejected** this proposed policy, which raises concerns over potential proliferation of educational establishments.

The allocation of **sites for employment uses** has often been criticised, since Oxford's economy is already buoyant and housing is the greatest need. But all authorities are required to plan for business development. In fact, no wholly new sites are identified for these uses in the new Plan; rather, reliance is placed on intensification and development of existing or previously identified sites.

[continued overleaf]

# Local Plan (continued)

## Going green

Perhaps the most radical and welcome policies are the requirement that, with immediate effect, all developments must achieve a **40% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions**, rising to 50% after 2026, and, in the case of housing, zero carbon emissions at the end of the Plan period. New limits on **water** consumption are also set.

Other **environmental improvements** include new policies aimed at encouraging walking and cycling and reducing car traffic, for example by widening requirements for travel plans in development proposals and requiring housing projects to be car-free (zero parking) in appropriate locations.

## The bigger picture

Traffic and its polluting effects are, after housing, probably the biggest problems Oxford faces, yet the City Council is not the designated transport authority, so the Local Plan is inevitably limited in its influence on these. As we have often said before, this underlines the absolute necessity for **proper coordination** across development and transport planning, and across the whole city region. The reliance on five Local Plans and a separate Local Transport and Connectivity Plan, all prepared by different authorities, to determine the homes, economy, infrastructure and communities of the city region is hardly reassuring.

The complexity is increased further by the ongoing preparation of the **Oxfordshire 2050 Plan**. This is the responsibility of the Oxfordshire Local Growth Board, made up of all the county local authorities under the terms of the Government's Housing and Growth Deal. The 2050 Plan is scheduled for adoption by March 2022, following several stages of public consultation. How it relates to or integrates the multitude of other plans for development and transport remains to be seen.

*All relevant documents including the Adopted Local Plan 2016 - 2036, the Inspectors' Report with Main Modifications, and Sustainability Appraisal Report are available on the Council's website at: [www.oxford.gov.uk/oxfordlocalplan](http://www.oxford.gov.uk/oxfordlocalplan)*

## Earmarked for change

The new Plan identifies nine 'areas of change' – 'areas of the city where significant change is expected or best directed': the West End and Osney Mead; Cowley Centre; Blackbird Leys; East Oxford – Cowley Road; Summertown; Headington; Cowley Branch Line; Marston Road; and Old Road. These AOCs have area policies attached.

Noteworthy is that nine sites are within the **Cowley Branch Line** AOC. This suggests that the prospect of re-opening the railway line to passenger traffic and constructing two new stations in the reasonably near future is considered realistic.

Outside of these AOCs, a further 41 sites are identified, including eight in the current **Green Belt**. These are mainly small areas on the periphery of the city, totalling 18 hectares, just less than 0.03% of our Green Belt – described as 'swathes of land' by some – but considered suitable for at least 724 homes, a significant proportion of the city's need.

Other sites perhaps merit the closest scrutiny: for example both sides of **Banbury Road**, just north of Bevington Road; college sports grounds at **Bartlemas**; **Manor Place**, where a development proposal by Merton College was refused in 2017; and the Neilsen site at **Thornhill**, where at least 534 homes could be provided.

# OCS Calendar

'Cut out and keep'

## Online talks

### September–November 2020

Tuesday 8 September 8pm

**Liveable streets – bringing them to Oxford** with Dr Scott Urban, Oxfordshire Liveable Streets

Tuesday 15 September 8pm

**Rewilding – restoring ecosystems** with Dr Paul Jepson, Ecosulis

Monday 19 October 8pm

**Olive Gibbs: Oxford politician and peace campaigner**, with local historian Liz Woolley

Tuesday 10 November 8pm

**The future of personal mobility**, with Professor Allan Hutchinson, Oxford Brookes University



Photo courtesy of BMW Mini

Wednesday 18 November 8pm

**The railways of Oxfordshire** with railway historian Laurence Waters

*Join the talks by registering via our e-Bulletins or email*

[events@oxcivicsoc.org.uk](mailto:events@oxcivicsoc.org.uk)



# Programme September– November 2020

## Talks online – all welcome

Talks are free, just tune in – and please help us to recruit new members by telling your friends

Until the coronavirus restrictions are fully lifted we can't offer our usual programme of walks and visits. But our popular talks continue online so that you can enjoy them in the comfort of your own home.

If you're new to online talks (also known as webinars) here is what you need to know.

Anyone with a personal computer, laptop, tablet or smartphone can attend a webinar. We use the Zoom platform to host our talks. The audience cannot be seen or heard, as we'll ensure that all web cameras and microphones are switched off.

All you need to do is to follow the link that will be sent in the regular members' e-bulletin. Register for the talk you want to attend and you will receive an email with a link, which you can then use to watch the talk. (Talks are open to non-members also and they can email [events@oxcivicsoc.org.uk](mailto:events@oxcivicsoc.org.uk) to request the link.)

The speaker(s) will be introduced by a member of the OCS team. You can ask questions via either the Chat or the Raise Hand function. Both options can be found at the bottom of the Zoom screen. Details will be explained at the beginning of each talk.

Talks will usually be recorded and you can watch them afterwards via our website.

## Liveable streets – bringing them to Oxford

**Tuesday 8 September 8pm**

**Dr Scott Urban** of Oxfordshire Liveable Streets, will explain low-traffic neighbourhoods with successful examples from elsewhere. He will discuss what we could do here to claim back our streets for the people who live in them.



## Rewilding – restoring ecosystems

**Tuesday 15 September 8pm**

**Dr Paul Jepson**, Nature Recovery Lead at the environmental consultancy Ecosulis, will provide an overview of rewilding from a European perspective. He will discuss the potential for rewilding in and around Oxford.

## Olive Gibbs: Oxford politician and peace campaigner

**Monday 19 October 8pm**

Olive Gibbs (born in 1918) was a redoubtable local Labour politician, peace campaigner and founding member of CND. During her long political career she helped to shape our city. Local historian **Liz Woolley** talks about Olive's extraordinary life and legacy.



## The future of personal mobility

**Tuesday 10 November 8pm**

A quarter of all our energy is used in transport but vehicle emissions are slowly killing us. The general approach to cleaning up the air is to go electric. But where does the energy come from? What does the future of mobility look like? Is it the end of the road for the car?

**Allan Hutchinson**, Professor of Mechanical Engineering, Oxford Brookes University, will talk through some of the challenges and exciting opportunities.



## The railways of Oxfordshire

**Wednesday 18 November 8pm**

Railway historian **Laurence Waters** will talk about the development of the railway from its opening in 1844 until the present day. The gradual decline in the post-war years was compounded by the Beeching cuts of the 1960s; at one point even the 'Cotswold Line' was under threat. The privatisation of the railways has resulted in a resurgence in rail use both locally and nationally and Oxford has once again become an important railway hub.



# OCS Lockdown Films presents...

## Now showing on a screen near you...

The lockdown gave us a marvellous opportunity to do some filming in the almost-deserted streets in the city centre. The result is two short videos that you can now watch at home.

Without the crowds on the pavements, nose-to-tail traffic and noxious fumes, central Oxford in April and May showed our beautiful streets and buildings as we've never seen them. We took the opportunity to do some filming to capture things that are often hard to see or appreciate.

We commissioned local historian Liz Woolley to be our researcher and guide, and with Ian Green as Director, Chris Church as camera-man and Emma Gascoigne as film editor and producer, we got to work.

The *Historic Oxford* video shows some of the sights at Carfax and in Broad Street, St Aldates and Cornmarket Street. Some of this detail is easily missed, such as the flamboyant carvings on the town hall façade. The video shows what splendid open spaces we could have for pedestrians to enjoy, Broad Street being the most obvious.

One thing we all enjoyed about lockdown was the absence of traffic and this was the starting point for our second video. With the *Connecting Oxford* report in mind the film explores the potential of different roads in the city centre to be reconfigured, with wider pavements for pedestrians, more space for cyclists and the reduced road space allowing for one-way bus traffic.



*Liz Woolley starts the tour of historic Oxford outside Carfax Tower*

We are racing to finish the film as it is very topical: these kinds of measures are being considered by the City and County Councils as they look for ways to facilitate lockdown easing, while maintaining social distancing.

We suggest in the film that these changes could be made permanent. Just imagine no more congested pavements, no more congested roads, cleaner air and bluer skies. Vehicular access will need to be managed effectively of course, but the lockdown has shown us what can be gained.

See the videos on our website: [www.oxcivicsoc.org.uk](http://www.oxcivicsoc.org.uk)



*The Bridge of Sighs in March with not even a bike in sight*

*Photo courtesy of Peter West*

### Please take part in the members' survey!

Look out for an e-bulletin from Vernon Porter inviting you to take part in an online survey (courtesy of Civic Voice).

This quick survey should take you less than 15 minutes to complete and will give us useful information as to whether we're meeting your expectations of the Society. Those of you who have not given us an email address will get the survey in the post. **Thank you!**

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

See the website for details of our current subscription rates. You can join online or contact Liz Grosvenor at [membership@oxcivicsoc.org.uk](mailto:membership@oxcivicsoc.org.uk)

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