

When the shouting stops ...



The City planners are working to enhance Broad Street to enable people to enjoy it fully as a public space. In early July they revealed the 'meadow' at the west end of the street to give us a taste of what is possible.

We have undertaken to get our members' feedback on this scheme so please watch out for our online survey later in the summer.

See back page for another photo.

Photo courtesy of Roger Grosvenor

We invited Hugh Ellis, Policy Director of the Town and Country Planning Association, to reprise the talk he gave at our recent debate on planning the county's future. He electrified his audience with an assessment of why we should oppose the Planning Bill, due before Parliament this autumn. As he says, "The big loser will be the voice of local people."

There's been a seismic change in the politics of planning over the last weeks as we build towards the Government's publication of its blueprint for the radical rewrite of the English planning system¹. But with the Government seeking to divide those worried about democracy from those in need of homes is there any prospect that a fair and progressive planning system can emerge?

The Chesham and Amersham by-election was dominated by fears over planning reform and the impact of HS2. It revealed the depth of mistrust that the electorate in high demand areas feels over the Government's planning reform agenda. The concern among Conservatives both in and outside the chamber is growing in intensity. And this is not just about the South East. The assumption that people in 'red wall' constituencies will sustain planning deregulation is deeply misguided. Conservative voters (and others) in these

seats are just as concerned as their southern friends with poor quality development in the wrong places over which they have no meaningful say.

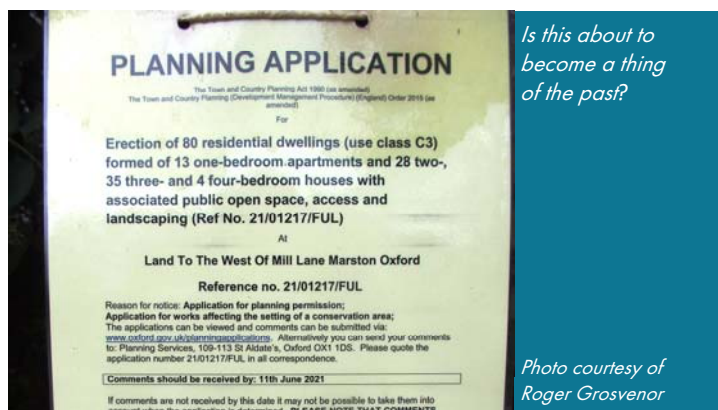
At the same time new and large networks of community groups are emerging which are beginning to find their voices. Civic Voice and many other environmental and housing NGOs are stiffening their resistance while a powerful property lobby is piling on pressure for further deregulation. Yimbys now shout at Nimbys in a debate which is highly polarised.

Losing the right to be heard

Now we can at least be clear that planning reform is in a mess and that shouting matches on social media help no one. The Government's approach has been to defend their reforms in the same way that the British order meals in foreign countries, by speaking ever slower and ever louder. Their view is that we have all misunderstood their intentions. This is the price any government pays for a White Paper which lacks evidential credibility and policy clarity.

The gap between rhetoric and detail is most extreme when it comes to the issue of democracy. No one on the Government

When the shouting stops ... (continued)



side has ever denied their intention to remove the right to be heard in person in plan making. This right, which is the only legally-defined right to be heard for communities in the whole planning system, allows groups and individuals who make an objection to be heard by a planning inspector during the public examination of a plan. It was a right hard won by campaign groups, but the planning White Paper made clear that it would be removed and that who gets heard will be at the discretion of the planning inspector.

The need for consensus

Perhaps the biggest impact on democracy will be the removal of the planning application stage where most people engage in decisions. Instead, consents will be approved up front in the new zonal plans and planning committees will be largely redundant. Nor have the Government flexed on the implementation of permitted development which allows almost any commercial building to be turned into housing with minimal safeguards which don't include design or climate change. Local councils and communities will become bystanders in the future debate on their own town centres.

But the key issue is that at no point has any effort been made to build a consensus between the increasingly angry voices surrounding planning reform. The problem is that by fuelling a battle between local democracy and housing needs the

Government is creating a dangerous culture war in which the real needs of the homeless get ignored and the fragile legitimacy of democratic planning will be broken.

It didn't have to be like this. There is a consensus to be found, a balance to be struck, a way of reconciling the legitimate importance of local growth with robust representative and participative democracy. The Raynsford Review² worked hard to show how this could be done, recognising that planning needs a careful constitutional settlement between the power of citizens' voices and their aspirations for their local communities and the needs of future generations around housing and climate change. There will never be a perfect way of resolving all of these competing interests, but it is possible to provide a new stability and legitimacy to the planning system and that should be the goal of planning reform.

It may be that time has run out to rescue planning reform from the bitter conflict between communities and the development sector. If so, we have thrown away our last best hope of providing a decent home for those in need, addressing the climate crisis and securing our long-term health and well-being. But let's never forget there was a much better way, a clear and consensual alternative.

The outline of this blueprint was set out in the TCPA's publication *Common Ground*³. This document sets out some simple principles to underpin a stable, democratic and positive planning system. I urge everyone who cares about our future to take a look and if it appeals send it to your local MP.

I would also appeal to everyone concerned about the future of democratic planning to support the cause of consensus. If the Government insists on pushing forward with the planning reform agenda in the face of widespread community opposition, nothing will get built anywhere by anybody. Government needs to pause, think again, talk to people and show it has the courage to deliver a lasting solution in the public interest.

Hugh Ellis

TCPA



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1 www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-future/planning-for-the-future

2 www.tcpa.org.uk/raynsford-review

3 www.tcpa.org.uk/commonground

Consulting on the BIG county-wide plan

Ian Green explains why this matters to us all

An important joint plan for the county is now out for consultation. When adopted the plan will steer our future policies until 2050. We will be commenting on the plan and invite members to add their own voices to the discussion. Our own preparations started with a series of public debates – read about them on pages 6 –7.

The Oxfordshire Plan 2050 is one of the commitments made by the Oxfordshire authorities as part of the £215 million Housing and Growth Deal. It is a joint plan of all six Oxfordshire local authorities and it is intended that the Plan will enable the local authorities to collectively consider the needs of the county and align their strategies so that future housing and infrastructure are better integrated.

It is also intended that all six authorities can work better together to identify and implement policies to help tackle climate change across the county. Issues such as the Green Belt, biodiversity and transport will also benefit from consideration at a higher level with a consistent approach across all the authorities.

The Oxfordshire plan builds on the foundations set by the current and emerging Local Plans and looks beyond them, at the strategic planning issues for the period up to 2050. It will give districts a framework for future planning policies.

The plan will identify key areas for **sustainable growth** with associated **housing/employment numbers**, while considering how to help tackle **climate change**, improve efficient use of **water** and mitigate **flood risk**. Districts will then use this to produce future Local Plans which will provide a detailed view of how housing and infrastructure will be delivered, and how they will address the climate emergency.

Preparation of the plan has reached the point where options for the spatial distribution of further development in Oxfordshire are ready for public consultation – expected to start at the end of July 2021.

Two issues arise – first there is no consensus within Oxfordshire about the **scale and pace of growth** and this will be a key issue to discuss in the consultation period. Second, the impacts of the emerging **Oxford to Cambridge Arc** Spatial Framework will not be incorporated at this stage of the plan preparation, but at the later stage. This could raise further problems with the consultation expected at the end July: if the scale and pace of growth is thoroughly debated at the next consultation, could the assumptions then be changed at the later consultation, to accommodate the impact of the ARC?

You can have your say by visiting the Growth Board website: www.oxfordshiregrowthboard.org/ (Note: at the time of writing the documents had not been posted up.)

Getting us back on the buses has to be part of the overall strategy



Meeting our new County Council

Following the May 2021 elections the Liberal Democrats, Labour and Green Parties have formed a coalition – the Oxfordshire Fair Deal Alliance – to lead the County Council. They have now set out their shared goals:

- Tackling the climate emergency through rapid decarbonisation and supporting climate resilience
- Tackling inequalities and providing opportunities for every one in Oxfordshire to achieve their full potential
- Putting wellbeing first – improved outcomes for residents, better air quality and access to cultural facilities
- Reforming the social care system to prioritise users and carers, with a focus on co-operative and community provision of social care
- Investing in a county-wide active and sustainable travel network to improve choice and reduce car journeys
- Improving access to nature and green spaces for all

- Supporting the health, wellbeing and educational outcomes for all our children and young people
- Supporting a resilient local democracy where residents are meaningfully involved in the decisions that affect them
- Supporting local employment and businesses to make Oxfordshire a centre for green and sustainable technologies through a local 'Green New Deal'
- Managing the Council's finances responsibly, reducing wasteful outsourcing.

A new County Council **Cabinet** has been selected with Councillor Liz Leffman (Lib Dems) as Leader of the Council and Councillor Liz Brighthouse (Labour and Co-operative Party) as Deputy Leader. The cabinet includes several appointments of special interest to the Society and our Oxfordshire Futures Group. We have already had useful meetings with some of the cabinet members and hope to meet with others shortly. You can read more on our website oxcivicsoc.org.uk/new-oxfordshire-county-council/

Land value capture: why it matters

John Goddard puts the case for radical change

The market in land for development is dominated by six big house builders who, with landowners, scoop astronomical profits when land is granted planning permission. Land value capture is an essential way of sharing these profits to help provide more and more genuinely affordable homes and services that new developments require. It is time to re-assess this unfair approach.

Land is currently valued at its existing use value except when that use is changed, or is expected to be changed, for a new use that commands a higher price. The upward shift in value for land with planning consent is often large and sometimes astronomical. For example, a landowner whose land is designated for housing could sell it to a developer for 30 to 50 or more times its existing value. Knight Frank assess poor-quality pasture in Oxfordshire at £7,100 per acre while the value after planning consent is assessed at anywhere between £9,800 and £293,000 per acre. The shifts in value are keenly disputed but the huge scale of what is at issue is not.

This increase in value is often termed an 'unearned increment' since it does not result from any improvement made by the landowner. The value would accrue to the landowner in the absence of any mechanism to 'capture' or 'share' some of this increase for the common good. It is the scale of these unearned increments and their resulting impact on the property market that make their existence, and what could and should be done about land value capture (LVC), so important.

Why does this matter? Why now?

Some quick answers to these questions: the level of house building has been below previous long-term levels for around 20 years; the methods of funding house building have been eroded over the same period. Government grants to local authorities and housing associations have been reduced; local authorities have been severely curtailed by national governments in their ability to build council houses, previously the principal source of genuinely affordable homes; and the structure of the house building industry has changed.

Forty years ago houses were built mainly by small to medium local builders making a modest profit. Now house building is dominated by the big six huge developers. They acquire land banks with options to buy from landowners so that when planning permission is granted the enormous upward shift in value, the unearned increment, can be divided between them and the landowner. Developers' profits now come importantly from this source.

In the post-Covid world it is unlikely that the government will raise taxes to fund the building of more housing and infrastructure. Consequently, there is a growing realisation that new sources of income to finance development – and particularly affordable housing – are urgently required. An obvious possibility is to go for a far greater role for LVC.

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) may be raised by the local planning authority on new developments but its scope is far too small to be effective. Many local authorities, particularly in the North, have not introduced it at all. It is generally accepted to be inadequate and the Government proposes abolishing it and replacing it with a levy to raise substantially more to help finance necessary infrastructure.

Is there a new future for LVC?

There are signs that point in this direction. The World Bank remains in favour of systems of LVC around the world and many influential figures have spoken in support. As always this requires political will. In its recent White Paper on the planning system the Government said it would raise a new levy on planning that would make a "substantial increase" in the amount raised to fund necessary infrastructure and support affordable housing. The Labour Party has suggested setting up an English Sovereign Land Bank to "enable more pro-active buying of land at a price closer to existing use value".

LVC is far from a new idea having underpinned Ebenezer Howard's Garden Cities, the Docklands Light Railway and the Canary Wharf development among other places. Now there is surely scope for civic societies such as ours to help shape this debate and campaign for a more equitable solution that enables communities to benefit from new development.

John Goddard served as a City Councillor and is a former member of our Executive Committee.

*New homes at Wolvercote Mill where starting prices close to £400,000 reflect in part the cost of land
Photo courtesy of Roger Grosvenor*



The fight for special places – and planning

Gillian Coates reports on the Planning Group's work

With a number of major developments in the planning stages, the Group is both busy – and worried.

The work of the Planning Group continues at pace. There remains a significant trend in the conversion of garden buildings and garages to provide additional accommodation, fuelled perhaps by the trend towards more home working as a result of the pandemic. Perhaps more interesting is an emerging trend involving the conversion of dwellings in multiple occupation into a number of self-contained flats. We have not fully examined the extent of this recent trend but could it be attributed to the increased provision of accommodation by the universities for their student population? As students move out of the private rental sector it makes way for occupancy by those workers who are unable to get on the property ladder.

There is a growing number of major developments and we have been pleased to meet with developers in several pre-public and pre-application consultations. These include the plans for the **station** (Network Rail), **Oxpens** and **Osney Mead** (City Council and University), the **West End** and **Island site** (Nuffield College). It was disappointing to note that the views we shared with the developers on the **St Frideswide Farm** development were not taken into consideration in the application now submitted to the Council. However, we will reiterate these as a formal comment to the planners. (*Visions*, October 2020, p.4)

Many of you had concerns about the Bayswater Brook development at **Barton** and we are pleased to report the developers (Camargue) are reviewing their Masterplan and have indicated they will set up a liaison group with residents and other interested parties. We will have representation on this group and we will report on progress in the coming months.

New build at Old Marston

Two projects are planned in Old Marston, an area identified for development in the Local Plan. These will provide in total 238 dwellings: Mill View Farm (159) and land to west of Mill Lane (79). The latter, a City Council project, comprises 50 per cent social housing while the remaining 39 will be sold as private dwellings.

We are concerned these developments bring into question the continued existence of Old Marston village. We shall be making a formal comment to the planners outlining our concerns, relating to overdevelopment, access before and after construction, and transport connectivity. Given the close proximity to the Northern By-Pass the obvious question is why no access is planned from the A40, rather than through the village.



Old Marston village where over 200 new dwellings are in the planning stages, raising concerns about access and traffic

Photo courtesy of Roger Grosvenor

Back to the centre

We are currently involved with the **Covered Market** Masterplan, serving on the Council's working group alongside all stakeholders (including colleges and traders). The results of our Covered Market Survey were published on our website – www.oxcivicsoc.org.uk/covered-market-survey-results – and there is a summary on page 8.

We are also on the working group for the **Broad Street** pedestrianisation project and have had some input into the design of the pilot for the west end of the street (see the photos on the front and back covers). We will be issuing our Broad Street Survey shortly and would value readers' responses. Issuing the Survey during the pilot is helpful as it will be easier to envisage what impact the pedestrianisation will bring to one of Oxford's most beautiful streets.

The attack on town planning

We cannot talk about planning without referring to the **Planning Bill** which was included in the Queen's Speech. Our experiences show that public engagement is an essential part of planning so we are anxious that this Bill will, among other things, see the 'consultation period' reduced to such an extent that it makes the process ineffective and virtually removes the people from planning decisions. We fully support the views expressed by Hugh Ellis on our front page.

We are determined to lobby against this Bill – as is the civic movement at large. **We lost the battle concerning Permitted Development Rights but the planning war is not over.** If you support us we invite you to contact your local MP with your views. Read more at committees.parliament.uk/work/634/the-future-of-the-planning-system-in-england/publications/

Oxfordshire is special...

Ian Green selects some highlights from our recent public debates

Four online debates across two days, 16 speakers and four chairmen of local and national reputation, hundreds of members and guests in the audience – by any standards this was a big occasion. For those of you who missed this stimulating series of debates, here are just some of the points speakers wanted to get across.

The debates were held in preparation for the county-wide debate on the next Oxfordshire Plan 2050 consultation, expected to start at the end of July (see page 3). The plan will identify the scale, pace and distribution of development to 2050 and set the scene for future Local Plans.

The debates asked the question ‘**how can we ensure good growth in Oxfordshire?**’ They focused on the themes of **climate change, transport, housing and strategic planning.**

Climate change needs to take top priority

All participants agreed that it is imperative that the plan resolutely contributes to the national target of reaching net zero by 2050. While we need a strong national strategy to improve efficiency, reduce demand and decarbonise electricity supply and transport, Oxfordshire priorities should be to:

- increase local renewable electricity generation;
- renovate existing buildings to cut energy use and install zero-carbon heating;
- increase the use of public transport, cycling and walking; and change vehicles to electric or hydrogen.

“The COVID crisis has seen emissions fall by 11% across the UK in a year. We need to make cuts on this scale every year for the next decade.”

“If we accept the science then we must accept the need to act.”

Councils and other agencies across the county will need to:

- collaborate towards a route map to zero carbon;
- build cross-sector consensus on the work to be done; and
- push for central government to support local innovation and action.

The Oxfordshire 2050 Plan has a key role to play in all these. The new County Council has set goals of which the first is:



“Tackle the climate emergency through rapid decarbonisation, proper accounting of carbon emissions and ambitious targets, as well as supporting climate resilience”. The Oxfordshire Growth Board’s new Environment Sub-group will start to meet from July 2021.

The scale and pace of growth needs consideration

The debates demonstrated the lack of county-wide consensus on the scale and pace of growth and it was emphasised that seeking this consensus is vital to good growth:

“A plan without a growth consensus will not achieve good growth.”

“For many people good growth is no growth – to them it is an existential threat. For others growth can be good so long as it brings people together.”

Speakers noted that the scale and pace of growth is not entirely in local hands – central government has a significant influence. The view was that growth must be locally driven rather than having top-down targets imposed.

“Further development can be accommodated, but only if it is at a scale and pace that can be absorbed.”

Existing Local Plans collectively make provision for 100,000 new homes between 2011 and 2031. Several speakers stressed that any assessment needs to respond to the impact on economic growth of the pandemic and BREXIT.

“Good growth is growth which has a clear purpose.”

It was suggested that purposes could include – to tackle the climate crisis; actively reverse bio-diversity losses; reduce inequalities (in life expectancy, schooling, and access to good jobs); and to put community at the heart of our future.

Good growth needs sound infrastructure

In Oxfordshire we are short of water, have lost biodiversity, have polluted rivers and exceed safe air pollution limits in many towns. Our urban area has increased by 30% in the last 25 years. Growth has focused on a limited number of places resulting in towns like Didcot and Bicester experiencing much growth over relatively short timescales, with inadequate long-term basic infrastructure planning in place. Good infrastructure provision is difficult to achieve in other smaller communities where unplanned growth has taken place.

“Integrating the planning of employment, housing, accessibility and other infrastructure is a fundamental pre-requisite of good growth.”

Speakers called for a new housing assessment based on real needs and environmental and social constraints and for genuinely affordable housing. Failure to build sufficient housing in recent decades has betrayed a new generation who cannot afford what is on offer.

“Oxford needs more homes as many dwellings have morphed into HMOs, private renting is costly and the cost is driving families out of the city.”

... and worth fighting for!

The City Council wants to create sustainable settlements such as Barton Park which contain all the elements of infrastructure needed. Brownfield land should be developed first. Green Belt and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty should be developed as a last resort under proven exceptional circumstances. High densities of development should become standard, to make best use of land and to increase the viability of public transport. Any new communities must be sustainable and expanding rural communities will need investment to support services and infrastructure.

"What is needed is enough homes which ordinary people doing vital jobs can afford, built in the right places."

Several speakers encouraged the use of land value capture to help fund infrastructure. (See page 4.)

Transport is a vital part of the equation

Decarbonising transport is not just a matter of zero emission vehicles but of exploiting opportunities to reduce the distances travelled. The County Council's emerging Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP5) aims: to reduce average trip lengths; encourage more home working; and travel by more sustainable modes such as public transport.

Speakers proposed local enhancement of rail services within a more comprehensive 'Metro' network. This would include principal bus services and purpose-built hubs for interchange to provide a 'whole journey' offer for sustainable travel. The forthcoming Bus Service Improvement Plan offers an opportunity to reshape services adopting this unified concept.

England lacks a national transport policy linked to a national spatial strategy. But transport is an important component of the National Infrastructure Strategy which promotes investment with green and 'levelling up' agendas. A number of recent publications on individual transport topics – rail, bus, cycling and walking and decarbonisation – signal appetite for change and opportunities for good growth.

Is strategic planning possible?

Effective strategic planning: looks across administrative boundaries to ensure an integrated response to delivering a sustainable economy and environment that benefits everyone; and that development is directed to the best locations. Statutory regional planning was revoked in 2011 and the Duty to Cooperate replaced it. In response, the County introduced the Oxfordshire Growth Board.

But strategic planning is not easy in England. At the national level there are conflicts within and between policy documents, poor political understanding of the development



planning/transport relationship, lack of integration across government departments and between central and local government. At local level, the Duty to Cooperate could be abandoned in the Government's proposed planning reforms. There are welcome national initiatives to return statutory strategic planning powers to local authorities.

"Challenges to good growth include attitudes/mindsets of officers, politicians and developers, weakened local government capability and public reaction to change, aggravated by uncertainty over future working/ living patterns, new technologies and scale/nature of movements."

Some argued that statutory strategic planning is not essential in Oxfordshire but the current approach could be more effective: policy could be clearer and consensus could be easier to achieve despite the challenges. The Oxfordshire 2050 plan will not succeed if it is only a vehicle for transmitting government-imposed targets.

"The requirements of national planning policy and the aspirations of local communities will often conflict. There is a need to seek consensus and imaginative solutions."

The Planning White Paper largely ignores strategic planning. To help achieve good growth, should we lobby for strategic planning to be included?

The Oxfordshire 2050 Plan is the 'anchor' plan, setting out the scale, pace and distribution of growth. Will it be a truly strategic plan which aligns and integrates economic, environmental and social objectives to achieve good growth? **The consultations are an opportunity to ensure this and we urge our members to contribute to the discussion.**

We're working on a longer summary of the debates and this will be freely available on our website in due course.

OxClean: cleaned out but still clearing up!

Natasha Robinson reports

The OxClean team hope this year will be a one-off in so many ways.

The OxClean Team is used to challenges and even the pandemic did not dint our aspirations. We realised in the New Year that our usual March Spring Clean would be impossible due to Covid so this was put on hold pending the easing of restrictions. Then on 1 April we discovered that our stock of litter pickers had 'disappeared' from the store where they overwinter. But this was no joke and sadly they have not returned home.



Having decided that we should go ahead with the delayed event as soon as possible due to the large amount of rubbish accumulating in public spaces, we set about publicising the theft and fundraising.

We would like to say a huge thank you to all the

members and others who contributed to the appeal. With a generous gift of 200 litter pickers from Oxford Direct Services, we were able to replace our equipment. This meant we could go ahead with a Covid-compliant series of three Big Saturday Clean-ups in May and June, to coincide with the Keep Britain Tidy national event.

Nearly 700 people in 80 groups went out and collected almost 1.5 tonnes of rubbish and recycling from all around the city, braving the brambles and nettles that late spring brings. This is less than previously, but a great effort, nonetheless.

Our next steps include getting our teams of litter pickers back out for **Oxfordshire Great Big Green Week** in September and continuing to build a cohort of **Duke of Edinburgh student volunteers** from schools across the city.

Children are always enthusiastic supporters of OxClean!

With thanks to the Marsh Park Group for this delightful shot

What you said about the Covered Market

The findings of our recent survey on the Market will inform a City Council strategy for refreshing this retail gem.

The City Council recognises that the Market is now looking tired and somewhat sad, with several empty units – hence the aspiration to refresh it. And our survey produced a wealth of data to guide their thinking. The survey showed what shoppers value about the Market as it is and provided a multitude of ideas for improving it.

The typical shopper uses the Market primarily for its cafés and food stalls and values it for its independent shops. When asked 'What needs to be improved in the Market' respondents identified: the need for more designated social spaces; extended opening hours; improved lighting, ventilation and heating; better signage and the enhancement of entrances on both sides of the Market.

Some consideration should be given to encouraging tourists to visit the Market. Locating the Tourist Information centre (now closed) in the Market would add to general footfall. Similarly, the hosting of pop-up market kiosks on different days would enable small, independent craft businesses to have a presence in the city.

The majority of respondents favoured the idea of holding music and other performances at lunch-time or in the evenings, to add vibrancy to the Market. There was a call for more seating and more pleasant social spaces to sit and relax.

Our vision is that the Covered Market should more closely follow the European model where markets are a lively shopping and socialising venue used equally by residents and visitors of all ages.



The bear necessities in the Market

Photo courtesy of Roddy Maddocks

Improving our rail network

Andrew Pritchard reports on the Transport Group's work

Our rail network is attracting significant investment but we also need to invest in bridge work.

We are in contact with Network Rail and are generally supportive of Phase 2 of the **Oxford Corridor Capacity Scheme**, for which they were recently awarded £69 million.

Phase 2A will replace **level crossings** at Sandy Lane and Yarnton Lane by footbridges, allowing more trains to run, while road traffic will have to use other existing routes. This work does not include a possible new station at Begbroke to serve the new university development there, though Network Rail indicated that it could be facilitated.

Phase 2B will provide 75 mph junctions at North Oxford for faster running. The money will also fund some land acquisition and design work for the new **Botley Road bridge** and a new entrance on the west side, giving access through a subway to the new platform 5, but not to platform 3, for which passengers will have to use the existing bridge and lifts. The funding for building this (estimated at £80-90 million) will depend on a satisfactory business case being produced. A five-day road and rail blockade in summer 2023 is planned to achieve this, though the road blockade must surely be much longer.

Work to extend bay platform 2 across the Botley Road to give a further through track is not included, though reference to it was made in a consultation for East-West Rail, to which we contributed. This requires the **demolition of the existing main station building** but no details were given of how trains will be accessed while this is in progress, or of how the improved transport interchange, which the Society has long campaigned for, will be achieved.

Four-tracking to Didcot, necessary for the local '**Spine Line**' service proposed by the Society, is unlikely to be pursued. No timescales are given either for reopening the **Cowley line** to passenger traffic or for electrification.

Woodstock and Banbury Road studies

We are included as representative stakeholders in the group that is considering better provision for active travel on these roads. There is not enough space for the segregated cycle-

ways that we would like. Cyclists do not want to share road space with buses while the bus companies would prefer to share with cars, effectively removing existing bus lanes. The Rapid Transit network proposed in LTP4 (2016) appears to have been forgotten.

Bridges are vital links

We were alarmed by the sudden closing of the '**pipework**' **bridge** across the Thames due to structural issues and are anxious that its replacement should offer better connectivity for cyclists between South Oxford and the city, linking up with Sustrans route 51. It is not clear yet what is to be done.

We continue to be concerned about the poor connectivity offered by the proposed pedestrian and cycle bridge to the south of the new **Osney Mead redevelopment** and the city and have urged that the £6 million allocated is better spent.

The cable car conundrum

Cable cars (more accurately gondola lifts) have been put forward as a means of public transport, reducing journey times on specific routes. We have met with sponsors Skyways to discuss a lift between the Redbridge Park and Ride site and the Oxpens. Skyways suggest that this could be financed by tourists travelling from their buses at Redbridge, with no need for public finance if planning permission were granted. Although the concept of urban cable cars in cities such as Oxford is an interesting one (and is also being explored in Bath for example) the current Skyways preliminary proposal needs more work, including, possibly, a search for alternative locations.

Not joining the dots

We continue to be concerned about the lack of integration between different transport initiatives, such as the ZEZ, bus gates, Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, '15-minute communities' and the like. We are looking forward to meeting the new transport representatives on the recently elected County Council.



Oxford railway station will be demolished under current proposals. Will we then get the transport hub that we so urgently need?

Photo courtesy of Roddy Maddocks

Booking details

Making booking easier

For some time members have been asking for a simpler method of booking events and paying for them. We have chosen the online booking service Eventbrite which seems to offer the flexibility we need.

Please go to the web links given below to book your place on these visits and pay for them. If you find we have reached our maximum capacity for a particular event, please make use of the waitlist function in Eventbrite.

Bookings are taken on a first come – first served basis but the lists will stay open until seven days before the event. If you are offered a ticket via the waitlist you have 72 hours to claim it. A joint member may book two tickets.

You can cancel your booking up to 30 days before the event and get a partial refund – Eventbrite takes a small percentage of the fee. After that no refunds can be offered.

If you book and cannot attend the event, we urge you to cancel as soon as you can so that someone else can take your place. Our events are popular and we almost always have a waiting list.

If you can't access a computer or smartphone to book via Eventbrite, please contact the Society on 07505 756 692, so that we can arrange an alternative booking route for you. (The phone is manned part-time so please leave a message if you get no answer.)

Please note: our walks and visits are open to MEMBERS ONLY. If you book a ticket and are NOT a fully-paid-up member you will be required to join the Society or top-up your lapsed membership before you join the event.

Event	Price	Link
Cotteslowe Meadow Tuesday 24 August 2pm <i>Sturdy footwear is advised</i>	£9	bit.ly/ocs_cotteslowe
Oscar Nemon's studio and gallery Saturday 11 September 10.30am	£10	bit.ly/ocs_nemon1
Oscar Nemon's studio and gallery Saturday 11 September 2.30pm	£10	bit.ly/ocs_nemon2
Tap Social Brewery and Community Space Saturday 9 October at 2pm	£17	bit.ly/ocs_tapsocial

OCS Calendar

'Cut out and keep'

August – November 2021

*ticketed events

Tuesday 24 August * 2pm
Cotteslowe Meadow, a visit with Ellie Mayhew



Saturday 11 September * 10.30am and 2.30pm

Oscar Nemon's studio and gallery, a visit with commentary by Alice Nemon-Stewart.

Wednesday 15 September 8pm
Sculls, skiffs and steamers: the history of Salter's Steamers, a talk by Simon Wenham
Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street

Thursday 7 October 8pm
Wytham Woods in a changing world, a talk by Nigel Fisher
Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street

Saturday 9 October * 2pm
Tap Social Brewery and Community Space, a visit

Thursday 4 November 8pm
150 Years of Through the Looking-Glass and what Alice found in Oxford, a talk by Mark Davies
Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street

Tuesday 23 November 8pm
Railways of Oxfordshire - part 2, a talk by Laurence Waters
Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square

Please help us to recruit more members by bringing a friend to our talks.



Programme August – November 2021

Talks – all welcome

Talks are free and don't need to be booked ahead, just turn up. As you can see, we're assuming it will be possible to meet in person, in lecture theatres. We'll update you by e-bulletin if the situation changes.

Sculls, skiffs and steamers: the history of Salter's Steamers

Wednesday 15 September at 8pm

Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street

Salter's, based at Folly Bridge, is one of the most famous and long-established businesses operating on the River Thames. **Simon Wenham**, a part-time tutor of Oxford University's Continuing Education Department, will explain how Salter's played a key role in popularising pleasure boating on the non-tidal river, providing a fascinating insight into how water-based leisure developed over the past two centuries.

Wytham Woods in a changing world

Thursday 7 October at 8pm

Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street



Wytham Woods is the most studied patch of woodland anywhere in the world. Learn more about the past, present and future of Oxford University's 'Laboratory with Leaves', from **Nigel Fisher**, who has been the Conservator of Wytham Woods since 2000.

150 Years of *Through the Looking-Glass* and what Alice found in Oxford

Thursday 4 November at 8pm

Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street

Lewis Carroll's sequel to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* was printed in November 1871. Both books contain subtle Oxford references – people, places and events. Local historian and author **Mark Davies** will reflect on some of the more intriguing examples, based on his own research, on a day of the year which has particular relevance.



Railways of Oxfordshire - part 2

Tuesday 23 November at 8pm

Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square

Following his talk to the Society last year, **Laurence Waters** turns his attention to some of the branch lines in the Vale, including the Abingdon Branch, Didcot Junction to Uffington, Faringdon and the Wantage Tramway. As photograph archivist for the Great Western archive at Didcot, Laurence brings an unparalleled insight into local railway history.

Members-only visits

Tickets are needed for these events: tickets on a first come–first served basis. See page 10 for details.

Cotteslowe Meadow

Tuesday 24 August at 2pm

Join us for a walk around the Cotteslowe ponds, home to a profusion of insect life, amphibians and birds, located in a little known flood meadow in North Oxford. **Ellie Mayhew** (Freshwater Habitats Trust) will show the practical steps being taken at this site and others to restore such habitat, including the translocation of plant life such as creeping marshwort and greater water-parsnip.



Oscar Nemon's studio and gallery

Saturday 11 September at 10:30am and 2:30pm

Following the much enjoyed talk in May, we've arranged a visit to Oscar Nemon's studio at Boar's Hill with a commentary by his daughter-in-law, **Alice Nemon-Stewart**. View examples of his work and discuss his technique.

Tap Social Brewery and Community Space

Saturday 9 October at 2pm

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

OCS people

New recruits to the Executive Committee

We're delighted to welcome two new trustees who were elected at our online AGM in March.



Strictly speaking **Thelma Martin** is returning to our ranks. A former barrister working for the Crown Prosecution Service, she is well known for her work with the communities of East Oxford. Thelma is a trustee of Friends of Aston's Eyot and until recently was Chair of Iffley Fields Residents' Association.

Jim Girling has served as a member of our Planning Group for some time and now acts as convenor for pre-application presentations from design teams/architects on major schemes. An architect by profession, Jim worked with Oxford Architects for many decades and has an interest in both modern and traditional architecture. Jim is now 'semi-retired' and enjoying the city he has lived in since graduating.



Your letters

Caroline Compton writes about housing issues.

Housing in Oxford is clearly unaffordable for large numbers of people.

When I have been to the retail parks along Botley Road, I have noticed several large shops that have closed down or moved. Those sites would be ideal for housing – with enormous amounts of space now hardly used for car parking.

Much land is wasted by the provision of street-level car parks. The Chief Executive of John Lewis and Waitrose is seemingly thinking along the lines of building housing above its car parks. What about the wasted space used exclusively by cars at the huge Parkway Station car park? These kinds of plots of land could be used to build affordable housing for key workers. Let's keep housing at the forefront.



'Our shop' at 115 High Street in April when we were promoting the Covered Market survey. If you'd like to be part of the creative team please get in touch with us.

Photo courtesy of Roddy Maddocks

Shoppers and visitors enjoying time out in Broad Street in early July



Photo courtesy of Jim Girling

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

Membership costs £15 (£25 for two people at the same address) with concessions for students and residents' associations. Corporate rates on application. You can join online or contact Liz Grosvenor at membership@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

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

 Follow @oxcivicsoc

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