

COP26 is over: now it's time for action



The Blenheim Estate was recently hit by a tornado categorised as 'severe' that uprooted or snapped about 100 trees. Oxfordshire has also recently experienced more floods than normal. Such weather extremes will become more common in the years ahead unless we act to combat climate change. The cost of inaction is likely be many times greater than the cost of dealing with the issues.

Photo courtesy of Blenheim Estate and Pete Seaward

We invited Chris Church to reflect on the recent COP26 conference in Glasgow where world leaders came together to agree action on climate change.

As we go to press the UN COP26 conference has just drawn to a close. Some genuine progress has been made. There is commitment to faster methane emissions cuts (another problematic greenhouse gas), an accelerated 'phase-down' of coal, and a new reporting mechanism that will encourage nations to set strong targets.

But in terms of getting what we really need, the outcomes are disappointing. When the 26,000 delegates are all back home the challenge will remain the same – to control climate change to limit the planet to a (barely) manageable 1.5 degrees. Quite simply that involves a **huge** shift away from burning fossil fuels – coal, oil and gas.

The promises made by governments and industries at and beyond the Glasgow summit need to be properly funded and acted on. This is inevitably work in progress, but to date progress has been far too slow.

But progress also needs action on the ground – in our cities and communities. We must avoid an 'implementation gap' where policies are agreed but nothing happens. The science of climate change is widely accepted - and much of the key

research has been done here in Oxford – now we must also accept the need to act and to change. That local action needs our councils, businesses and institutions, and it also needs all of us.

A civic approach to the climate crisis

We shouldn't just wait for change to happen. We can push for the changes we need to see. How we do that may vary – from protests to lobbying and discussions with MPs and councillors – but we can all be involved. MPs do keep track of what we are worried about – every email shows that someone cares enough to contact them. We have seen the government back off on unpopular issues ranging from the Expressway fiasco to the recently abandoned plans for changes to the planning system.

There is plenty of support for change in Oxford. Over 3,000 people marched through the city on 6 November to one of the largest rallies for many years. Speakers in Broad Street included both our Oxford MPs, the Bishop of Oxford and Monawar Hussain, the High Sheriff of Oxfordshire who is also one of our Vice-Presidents. He used the occasion to launch a new set of awards – for Oxfordshire's 'climate heroes', people across the county making a real difference.

The talking is over ... (continued)



The Osney Lock hydro power station makes enough green electricity to power 55 average homes. Small-scale solutions such as these have a role to play in driving down our reliance on fossil fuels. This project was set up and funded by local people, providing a model for community-led action.

Photo courtesy of Roger Grosvenor

Climate change is no longer just an environmental issue: it is a civic responsibility. So this raises a question: **what can Oxford Civic Society do to have the greatest impacts?**

The answers may be multiple. We have a good understanding and some influence on the local planning systems. We can work to ensure that new developments wherever they happen are helping us reach net zero rather than pushing us backwards. We also need to consider how we adapt given our built environment heritage. Retrofitting our own homes to be carbon neutral will be a huge undertaking – but what can be done for the hundreds of historic buildings that grace our city centre?

Our city centre was never designed for motor traffic but every change aimed at cutting traffic and pollution has been resisted in the past. The more radical proposals in the

upcoming Transport Plan may seem challenging to some but these are the very issues that we need to address. We should not shy away from radical solutions just because they are innovative and some, inconvenient.

Towards a genuinely sustainable future

Some of the innovation we need is here already, from Green-core Construction building zero carbon homes in Southmoor and the great work of the Low Carbon Hub to high-tech innovation and new energy sources at Harwell and Culham. New ways forward such as the Oxfordshire 2050 and Local Transport and Connectivity Plans are looking at ways to deliver zero carbon commitments, at least on paper.

The Society has always looked to the future and one important role for the coming years may be to look at how we support, celebrate and promote innovation and how we integrate that work with the conservation of what matters in our city and across the county.

The original definition of genuinely sustainable development, from the UN 1992 Earth Summit in Rio is “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. The Oxfordshire 2050 Plan draft stresses that to do this that we should not consider “*environmental, economic and social objectives as competing demands that need to be balanced*” but we should work to “*align and integrate these priorities so that they are mutually supportive*”.

In 2022 governments will be expected to deliver on the pledges and agreements made at the COP. The Society and many others will be looking for UK and local policies that are fair and effective and that lead to real and rapid emission cuts. But governments cannot easily impose change on us and they cannot do it without us. As citizens concerned about the climate crisis or simply people concerned for our children’s futures we need to accept the need for change, to push for it, and act to help create the changes we want to see.

Chris Church

Chris is a member of our Executive Committee and Chair of the local branch of Friends of the Earth



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Mark Barrington-Ward: an appreciation

Tony Joyce pays tribute to a towering figure

Mark Barrington-Ward, who died in October aged nearly 94, was not only the catalyst who led to the founding of our Society, he was also a strong supporter for decades.

His deep knowledge of Oxford began as a young Balliol history scholar but his career in journalism took him to Uganda then to the *Northern Echo* before he returned to Oxford to edit the *Oxford Mail*. As Editor (1961-79), Mark commissioned a series of articles on the 'erosion of Oxford' which led to the founding of the Society. He joined the Society in 1993 and became a stalwart of the Planning Group for many years before also becoming our President from 2004 to 2010.

He was not only a penetrating observer and commentator on all aspects of the city's development, he was also keenly aware of the political shenanigans behind the major applications as they journeyed through the machinery of planning permission.

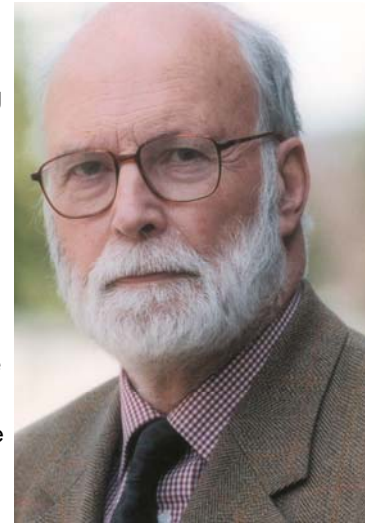
Mark brought with him not only his own lifetime of interest, knowledge and experience in history, art, architecture, literature, politics and journalism, but, above all, a knowledge of every stick and stone of the city. His wise and knowledgeable counsel was deeply appreciated by the Chairmen (myself and Peter Thompson) he supported as President. As Peter said: "He

would listen and accept an argument, even when he was unconvinced, whilst expressing his own views as one might expect from his experience as a newspaper editor".

In 2009 we published his booklet *40 Years of Oxford Planning* * to commemorate our 40th anniversary. Up to the very end of his life he continued to show interest in how the city would develop and to hear news of the Society.

Mark carried his erudition lightly and his charm, kindness and gravitas without pomposity made him a loved figure in the Society. Many members will recall seeing him at our talks, always immaculately dressed in tweed jacket and silk tie, and often ready with a probing question for the speaker. "We shall not look upon his like again."

*Download free from www.oxcivicsoc.org.uk/forty-years-oxford-planning/



The Museum of Oxford: a new chapter

The Museum of Oxford reopened last month after a complete refurbishment that saw its space triple in size.

Housed in the Town Hall, the museum is our only museum dedicated to telling Oxford's story. The £2.8 million overhaul has totally reconfigured the gallery space, shop and welcome area and improved facilities for the 100+ volunteers who support it on a regular basis.



The extra space allows the museum to display many more objects, images, oral histories and interactive exhibits. The galleries tell the story of Oxford from Romans and Saxons to modern times: even the infamous Cutteslowe Wall features among the tales.

With a focus on the city's diverse communities, the museum hopes to become a learning hub for

schools and community groups, encouraging them to connect with their own place in Oxford's story. It aspires to be 'a museum for everyone'.

It is hard to believe that Oxford came very close to losing its museum in the early 2000s when the City Council was forced to make big savings. We persuaded the Council to apply for external funding and to bring in volunteers to support its work. The biggest donor has been the National Heritage Lottery Fund but money has also come from the City Council, trusts, foundations and several local individuals.

Tony Joyce has represented the Society throughout and has been a key adviser and supporter. He says: "We must also be very grateful to the other members of the Development Trust whose experience and expertise set the tone for what has now been achieved. I hope all our members will take an early opportunity to see this. I think you will be impressed".

See museumofoxford.org/whats-on for details of the wide variety of talks and activities to mark the relaunch.

MOX
Museum of Oxford

What you told us about 'Broad Meadow'

Gillian Coates summarises the results of our survey

A recent survey of our members and others gave us an insight into public reactions to the pedestrianisation of the west end of Broad Street this summer.

The planters, benches and meadows have gone for now but the aim of this pilot was to gauge people's views on using Board Street differently. It is without doubt one of the finest public spaces in the city but it's hard to see the beauty amid the traffic and parked cars, and there is little opportunity to sit and take in the view. So we are pleased to be helping to develop the City Council's thinking on how to reinvent it.

The response to our survey was a little disappointing with 168 replies but some of you perhaps contributed to the Council's own survey. Most respondents were in favour of pedestrianisation (83%), fewer than 30% use the parking facilities in the Broad, and 87% either walk or cycle to/through it. More than half of respondents (60%) visit or pass through the street at least once a week. 65% of respondents had no reservations about the loss of parking but many recognised that some should be retained for disabled people, while some argued that arrangements for motor cycles should not be ignored.

What respondents value most about Broad Street is its architecture and the pilot provided an opportunity to stop, sit and admire it. People feel that public green space in the city centre is scarce though the University Parks and Christ Church Meadow were well used.

Almost half of respondents felt that designated lanes for pedestrians and cyclists were essential for safety and 31% felt

Broad Street in July with its seating, shrubbery and tiny performance area. The general approach was enjoyed by the vast majority of people who took part in our survey.

Read the full results of the survey on our website: oxcivicsoc.org.uk/broad-street-pedestrianisation-survey/

Photo courtesy of Roger Grosvenor



that cyclists should dismount at particular times of day (as in the other city centre streets).

On the scheme itself, 76% approved of the random location of seating benches; 73% valued the inclusion of flower and lawn beds, and 68% felt the inclusion of a central entertainment area was crucial to add to the vibrancy of the space. Objections to the pilot centred around the potential noise and disruption that an entertainment area could generate.

The Council is now reviewing all the feedback. If permanent pedestrianisation is agreed upon a new design must be prepared and a larger budget secured. There are many challenges to face, loss of income from parking being one obstacle. But we should be optimistic.

Your letters – the covered market

Geoffrey Randell writes:

Those respondents to the Society's survey who would like to see the market become more like those on the continent are likely to be disappointed. Architecture, management and society create different environments for covered markets.

The French counterparts are not called Les Halles for nothing; their roofs cover a large open floor area where produce is displayed on open-topped counters. This openness under a great canopy offers theatre, entertainment and practicality under one roof.

The roof of our covered market has never been a single span but a series of spans, with clearstorey windows, supported on stone pillars informed by the 'avenue' layout of back-to-back stalls. The daylight interior is in marked contrast to many continental markets which rely largely on electric lighting.

Stalls used to have fine fascia lettering giving a sense of integrity to the whole market experience. Liberal attitudes to

personalisation have produced a ragbag of styles which detract from a once-pleasing visual experience. The drama of interlocking spaces and lines of top-lit avenues connecting Market and High Streets could be restored and the connection from Golden Cross yard to the central market crossing celebrated with a glass dome.

The survey strongly suggests the entrances should be inviting. Could canopies, possibly glazed, be added and lettering cleaned? The installation of automatic fully glazed doors at all entrances would be a positive addition. Should the market yard be converted to a new use under a glazed roof with a single undivided window to Market Street?

Let's conserve this covered market not only as an historic city asset but as a focal point in the renewal of the city centre.

At the time of writing the City Council is still considering its options for the future of the market. Editor

Celebrating 150 newsletters!

Ian Green dips into the archive

You may have noticed our latest milestone: our 150th newsletter. They capture the history of the Society, the state of Oxford (planning matters especially) and the sheer energy of all our activists.

The first newsletter is dated August 1970, less than a year after the Society's inaugural meeting. Hilary Bradley, the current *Visions* editor, and I have been down to the Oxfordshire History Centre in Cowley where we keep the Society's archives. We have retrieved copies of every edition and what fascinating reading they make.

One thing that's clear is that over 51 years the Society has consistently worked constructively with local government and others to seek solutions to a wide range of problems threatening the city and its region, and to ensure that opportunities are not missed. Not all solutions have been long-lasting but some have been. We have been very influential in persuading others of the need to manage transport systems in ways other than road building, for example. Throughout the period we have continued to suggest and support measures to manage the numbers of vehicles using the city's roads, to encourage active travel and various types of public transport.

We have not held back when governance arrangements were being introduced – we had a lot to say when the new county/district arrangements were introduced and continued to have a say on how it has been working. We supported the emergence of what is now called the 'Future Oxfordshire Partnership'. Over the years we have promoted and supported recognition of the significance of environmental planning and management and more recently have been engaged in discussions about making the city region more inclusive. The evolution of our thinking has led to our current engagement in the Oxford Strategic Partnership and the Oxford Inclusive Economy Partnership. While doing this we have continued,

week in and week out, to review planning applications and give independent views on their merit.

The Society's organisation has changed over the years enabling it to anticipate or respond to changing demands for a civic organisation working at city-wide level: the role of the Society has expanded and deepened.

Most of all what comes through in the review of 150 editions of the newsletter is the vigour and enthusiasm of the Society's members. We have been able to achieve so much, year-on-year, by having members willing to serve in our working groups and we have been steered by a succession of able Presidents and Executive Committee members and officers. Most of all we have consistently had the support of very many Society members from all parts of the city. This has been our greatest strength and it is the one that is valued the most.

Read Liz Woolley's history Changing Oxford, free to download from www.oxcivicsoc.org.uk/what-we-do/communications/books-and-pamphlets/ A beautiful illustrated summary, All our futures, can be bought at our talks or from our Membership Secretary, price £3.

The story behind the stories

From a fragile-looking one-pager the newsletter quickly expanded as the Society took on more activities. By the mid-70s the newsletter often had 12 pages and even the occasional supplement. The programme too was an insert so getting the newsletter out involved teams of volunteers stuffing envelopes and even hand-delivering many to save postage!

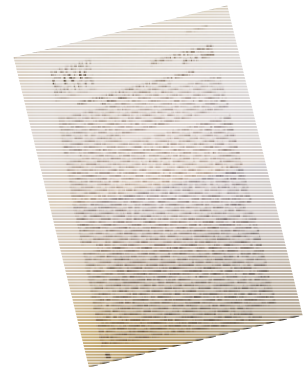
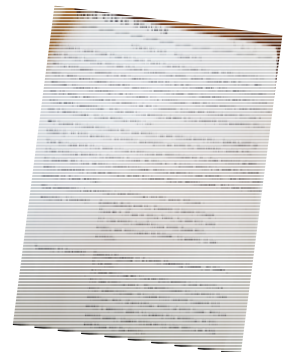
The newsletter acquired an ISSN (International Standard Serial Number) in 1977, while a first logo celebrated the 10th anniversary in January 1979. It acquired the title *Visions* in July 2012.

The first editor to get a mention was Pamela Schiele in April 1986 when the Society's Chair, Treasurer and Planning Secretary were all female. There have been remarkably few editors (four named ones, the others being Genefer Clark (July 1999–March 2004), Pauline Martin (June 2004–

November 2010) and Hilary Bradley since March 2011) which just proves this is the best job in the Society!

Some of the content has been remarkably durable. When Tony Joyce explained 'how to object to a planning application' back in November 2014 we scarcely thought it would still be a resource on our website seven years later!

Recent newsletters are on our website, the complete set can be viewed at the Oxfordshire History Centre oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/leisure-and-culture/history/oxfordshire-history-centre



Where are the links?

Andrew Pritchard reports on the Transport Group's latest work

The group has been assessing a number of vital plans and regrets that they don't join up.

Thanks to promptings from one of the group's members, Peter Headicar, the latest draft of the **Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP5)** now includes a section on decarbonisation as the 'overriding challenge'. However, the plan does not indicate how this transformation is to be achieved. It is essentially a series of high-level aspirational policy statements, with nothing that is spatial or scheme-specific that might link it to the Oxfordshire 2050 plan (see below).

We have concerns that the draft **Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy** is using a 'need-based appraisal score' for transport projects that fails to take account of the synergy between different modes of transport along the same corridor. These scores could be blindly used to prioritise funding.

Network Rail has submitted outline plans for a **new western entrance for Oxford station** to accompany work on the Botley Road rail bridge. This shows 4m wide foot- and cycle paths on each side of the road at normal level. The road will be deepened with increased gradients to allow full height buses to use it.

Together with the Planning Group we were critical of the unrealistic claims for a public open space outside the new entrance. We also disliked the poor design of the subway, which only served one platform and appeared to take no account of the next Phase, which will involve demolishing the existing station. No provision was made for pick-up and drop-off facilities. The intention is to tender for design in November and construction to start in February 2022, with completion in March 2024 if funds are made available.

Not a single mention was made of the relationship between the **Oxpens plans** and the nearby station site when we took advantage of a guided tour of the site. We also had concerns about the imbalance between the 3,000 jobs to be created and the 300 homes proposed on this site.



*Oxford station is to be demolished
Photo courtesy of Roddy Maddocks*

Draft Oxfordshire 2050 Plan

Ian Green says the Society is not convinced

When finalised this Plan will indicate the scale, pace and location of housing and employment growth in Oxfordshire up to 2050. But will it?

We submitted our comments on this Plan in October and found it lacking in some significant ways. It has to be remembered that 85,000 new homes are already committed to in the legally-adopted district and city Local Plans which are in effect until between 2031 and 2035. This leaves the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan to consider employment and housing growth for the last 15 years or so of the period to 2050.

We welcome the attempts to address climate change mitigation and adaptation as well as inclusivity in the draft Plan. But if housing growth for the next 10 to 15 years is already committed can we be sure that this growth is as fully responsive to climate change and inclusivity as the Plan would like it to be?

Worryingly, neither the draft Plan nor the associated draft **Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy** gives a clear picture of the infrastructure needed to meet increasing demand in selected locations. This also highlights another omission, namely the projected cost of various strategy options along

with recommendations for innovative financing. We know that there is a massive shortfall in infrastructure funding.

The draft Plan proposes that three growth projections, provided by consultants advising the Oxfordshire councils, will be used as the basis for assessing the longer-term need for housing growth, which in turn will be used to assess the growth required for the Plan. If the consultants' projections are accepted, growth beyond the period of Local Plan effectiveness could increase the number of new homes needed in Oxfordshire by between 16,000 and 67,000.

Unfortunately, there is widespread public scepticism about these projections. We too are sceptical. An independent review of the whole approach to determining housing and employment projections is needed along with substantial public discussion. **We are ready to host the public discussions.**

We welcome the strong collaborative spirit at the heart of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership (formerly Oxfordshire Growth Board) and we also welcome the good intentions of the proposed Oxfordshire 2050 Plan. But we are not convinced that the Plan is sound in a number of respects.

Why buses matter more than ever

Phil Southall explains why it's vital to take the bus

The Covid pandemic has had an enormous impact on public transport but it's vital that we all get back on the buses for many reasons.

Buses are the most widely used form of public transport, both in the UK and the wider EU, serving cities as well as suburban and rural areas. They are also the most cost-efficient and flexible form of public transport, requiring relatively low investment to launch new routes when compared to other modes such as rail or light rail. One bus is capable of replacing 30 cars on the road which helps ease traffic congestion, improve air quality and lower CO2 emissions.

Buses improve social inclusion, provide access to education, employment and healthcare to all – including those on low incomes, those who do not drive, people with disabilities and people living in remote areas. Buses are also an important link in the chain for those who use several modes of transport to complete their journey.

The fallout of Covid-19

But the pandemic has hit the buses hard. At the height of the first lockdown in spring 2020, patronage fell to as low as 6% of normal following government advice for all but key workers to stay at home. However, the government's often-repeated advice to 'avoid public transport' has left some lasting damage that we need to reverse as a matter of urgency. Some former customers have lost their confidence in using buses and we need to restore this. **The reality is that buses are perfectly safe to travel on** – they present no greater or lesser danger than visiting a shop, restaurant or office and swab tests have shown that there is no trace of the virus on surfaces.

It is VITAL that we encourage customers back onto the buses for the greater good of the city and beyond. With COP26 having just concluded in Glasgow as we go to press, this is a timely reminder of the net-zero targets that we need to achieve and the role that buses need to play (alongside active travel and other sustainable modes) in achieving a shift from private cars to lower CO2 emissions.

An encouraging trend?

Happily September saw a steady increase in bus patronage across our services. On average, three in four passengers have now returned to using buses compared to the pre-Covid situation. This is a 20-percentage point increase compared to June, July and August when patronage plateaued at around 55% compared to the pre-Covid situation.

This follows a month-long 'Back to Bus' campaign being promoted by the main bus operators in the county (Oxford Bus Company, Stagecoach and Thames Travel). The campaign primarily targeted people who previously used

buses to commute to work or places of education and included some special offers, including 30% off the price of a 12-trip ticket. It is important we maintain this momentum.

While the uptick has been encouraging, the overall reduction in passenger numbers compared to pre-Covid means we continue to navigate a challenging landscape. We will keep working on ways to build our patronage, while also examining where our peak demands and shortfalls are in our networks. If we are to decarbonise our fleet of buses, we will need to get to 110% of our pre-Covid patronage as zero-emission buses cost a lot more than even the very clean Euro VI diesel buses.

Towards a new national strategy

The government announced a 'National Bus Strategy' earlier this year and I am pleased to say that all Oxfordshire bus operators are now working with Oxfordshire County Council on a 'Bus Service Improvement Plan'. In late October the County Council worked with bus operators to put in a bid for £56 million from government to further improve buses and provide the infrastructure we need to encourage more people 'Back to Bus'. A legally binding 'Enhanced Partnership' will need to be developed to start delivery from April 2022. We must do this to protect the future of our great county.

Phil Southall is the Managing Director of the Oxford Bus Company. The company is a long-standing Corporate Member of the Society and we are proud to have their support.

Spring 2020 and an almost empty bus leaves Thornhill Park & Ride. Buses had to run throughout lockdown to get key workers to their workplaces but income took a nosedive. Bus companies survived thanks only to public subsidies.



Oxford's suburban waterfronts

Ian Green welcomes a new focus

Oxford has miles of waterfront (more than Venice?) and some is undergoing significant renewal.

Writing in our newsletter in January 1984, Reginald Cave described Oxford's waterways: "two almost encircling rivers, Thames and Cherwell, with their plethora of meanders and channels ... fashioned ancient Oxford, kept North Oxford long and slim, partly determined the East Oxford fan, made it possible to walk within minutes from the city's central streets into green riparian landscape of great beauty, made a perfect setting for the unique city itself". He might have added that the Oxford Canal too brings a ribbon of green space right into the city. But he bemoaned the "factories in lieu of fritillaries" in the emerging industrial estates and the "huge invasion by traffic of the previous peace of West Oxford".

Much of the waterways' natural beauty has been compromised but in recent decades some of the damage has been undone by transforming industrial and derelict land into water-side residential areas. Now we have once-in-a-lifetime opportunities to transform other such areas in vital locations.

The West End and Oxpens on Thames

In particular the emerging plans for the West End of Oxford's city centre include significant water frontages. The 'Island' site bounded by Hythe Bridge Street and Park End Street offers opportunities to enhance the towpaths linking Port Meadow to Iffley Lock. The Oxpens site includes waterfront as does, to a much greater extent, the Osney Mead industrial area which will be redeveloped by the University in the near future. There are other waterway frontages in the city which cry out for improvement. The debate about the development of the Jericho wharf continues.

In the case of Osney Mead, and the other West End sites, there is now the opportunity to transform the site from a large industrial estate into a mixed development with housing and commercial property. The extensive waterfront can be transformed too.

Waterways management is a responsibility the City and County Councils share with the Environment Agency and the Canal and River Trust. In 2019 these agencies sketched out a vision of the full contribution of Oxford's waterways, leading to themes for future development. The Society recommends that these themes are borne in mind as regeneration plans are prepared for all waterfront sites.

Environment – too often, the river and canal are not considered, an oversight that ignores the possibilities for enhancing their ecological value. Our waterways are host to huge biodiversity of wildlife and plants. This role needs to be recovered and protected.

Active communities – active travel and exercise are increasingly seen as vital to our wellbeing. There are eight water activity clubs for the public while 1,600 anglers hold a licence to fish. Can we develop more water-based exercise such as clean, safe bathing places for wild swimming?

Moorings and service provision – over 400 boats are moored in Oxford and about 180 households live on boats. Are more moorings needed and how will existing and additional moorings be serviced?

Tourism – there were 21,000 overnight stays on boat moorings in 2017 and approximately £4 million pounds was spent in Oxford by boat-based tourists in the same year. There are 13 pubs and restaurants close to a waterway, five miles of Thames Path National Trail, boat trips and punt operators. What further contributions should the waterways make to tourism to support the local economy?

While we have some mechanisms for protecting our environment, such as water-quality regulations, environmental considerations are often an afterthought in urban riverfront planning. Yet the manner in which these riverfronts are developed can have a tremendous impact on water quality and other environmental concerns. Let's make more of our watery assets.



The Oxford Canal is enjoyed by boaters, anglers, walkers and cyclists. Some of the boats here and on the river provide affordable homes for about 180 households.

Photo courtesy of Roger Grosvenor

'Build back better': can design codes help?

Gillian Coates reports on the Planning Group's concerns

Work on a national design code is proceeding apace. But will it help or hinder good design?

What has become of the Planning Bill which featured in the Queen's Speech? The Minister is keeping his thoughts to himself so we await an announcement. However, at a recent webinar, Joanna Averley (Chief Planner at the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities) caused a ripple of anticipation when we thought there might be a hint or two on current strategy relating to the Bill. *But no.* The thrust of the talk was the Government's new focus on design codes.

The purpose of the *National Model Design Code* is to provide detailed guidance on the production of design codes, guides and policies *to promote successful design*. It expands on the ten characteristics of good design as set out in the *Guide*, which reflects the Government's priorities and provides a common overarching framework for design. The Department is undertaking 14 pilots nationwide and by March 2022 when testing ends and the analysis is completed, a manual for streets will be issued.

Averley was unmoved by the negative audience reaction to this proposal – who or what defines beauty; how are local councils expected to operate yet another administrative system and recruit and train staff while they experience both financial and staffing cuts? She expressed great confidence in the proposed system which would implicitly guarantee that consultation with communities would happen.

The Oxford Design Review Panel

Sadly we have concerns about the city's Design Review Panel. ODRP, reconstituted at the beginning of 2021, is an unproven entity. The new panel of experts is currently working on four projects but we don't know how they are proceeding. South East Design, to whom the Panel is accountable, will release a report at the end of the year which will assess the impact and effectiveness of the Panel. Who defines these criteria and what about value, independence, impartiality, and evidence of trends?

While the projects are assessed and before a report is written the Society would like to have the opportunity to work with the Panel or at least to meet and discuss these projects. Design codes assigned in an arbitrary way from a team of externals are inappropriate in our view. Our Planning Group has urban planners, designers and architects among its membership and can offer both expertise and local knowledge. Do we want our new developments to be decided in camera using a national standard? The application of design codes could produce uniformity in design and appearance if applied by unimaginative developers.

Student Castle, a private development of over 500 student rooms and flats, is one of the new buildings transforming Oxpens. Plans for the rest of the site are still being consulted on.

Photo courtesy of Roddy Maddocks



Transforming North Oxford

We continue to be concerned about some major developments in North Oxford. The St Frideswide Farm site for 129 dwellings is adjacent to an even larger development (PR6A) on Christ Church land, submitted to Cherwell District Council. PR6A will provide 690 homes together with a primary school, local centre and public open space. As these two sites will physically interconnect and will share the infrastructure that is needed to create a thriving community we have once more stressed the need for collaboration between the developers. If these two projects proceed, and let us also not forget Oxford North, there will be some major challenges to utility providers, in particular Thames Water.

Sharpening our focus

The Covid pandemic has led us to review the Group's activities and we have introduced a formal meeting into our regular schedule, alongside the scrutiny of applications, to enable us to focus on more planning-related issues. This has seen an increased involvement in pre-application consultations with developers, the universities and colleges.

It has also led to the introduction of regular meetings with Council officers. These meetings are seen as mutually beneficial, will facilitate a closer working relationship and provide a better understanding of the challenges we face in this period of 'Build back better'.

Booking details

Booking made easier

We are now using Eventbrite to take bookings for all our tours and visits.

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.

Event	Price	Link
Rhodes House redevelopment Tuesday 25 January 4pm	£6	https://bit.ly/ocs_rhodes
Barton Park: the estate with a difference Wednesday 16 March 2pm	£8	https://bit.ly/ocs_barton
The regeneration of Blackbird Leys Wednesday 6 April 2pm	£8	https://bit.ly/ocs_bbl



OCS Calendar

'Cut out and keep'

January – April 2022

*ticketed events

*All talks/AGM this term are at
Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square*

Wednesday 12 January 8pm
Oxford in the Civil War 1642-46, a

Tuesday 25 January * 4pm
Rhodes House redevelopment, a visit

Wednesday 9 February 8pm
Life in the flood plain,
Joanna Innes in conversation with
Patrick McGuinness

Thursday 24 February 8pm
**Oxford's 'base and brickish skirt':
the development of the suburbs
1850 – 1914**, a talk by Liz Woolley

Thursday 10 March 8pm
**River bathing in Oxford – past,
present, future**, a talk by George
Townsend, Richard Mills and
Eleanor Blyth

Wednesday 16 March * 2pm
**Barton Park: the estate with a differ-
ence**, a guided tour

18 – 20 March and 25 – 27 March
OxClean Spring Clean – read more
on the OxClean website
www.oxclean.org.uk/

Tuesday 22 March 7.30pm
AGM and open forum

Wednesday 6 April * 2pm
The regeneration of Blackbird Leys, a
visit

Do bring a friend to our talks. If they
wish they can join the Society at our
welcome desk.



Programme January – April 2022

Talks – all welcome

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

This term ALL TALKS AND THE AGM WILL BE HELD AT REWLEY HOUSE, 1 Wellington Square

Oxford in the Civil War, 1642-1646

Wednesday 12 January at 8pm

Stephen Barker, an independent heritage advisor, looks at Oxford's role as Royalist capital through the eyes of some of the people who were present, assesses the impact of the war on the city and surrounds and highlights what remains of the defences to this day. He also considers the impact of the tension between town and gown and the extent of the city's rapid population growth.

Life in the flood plain

Wednesday 9 February at 8pm



Historian **Joanna Innes** has lived in Iffley Fields for over 30 years. In the pandemic, she "started exploring and reflecting on the open spaces in ways that I had never done before" which led to her Flood Plain blog (<https://jminnes.wordpress.com>). Joanna will be in conversation with **Patrick McGuinness** (author of the recent book *Real Oxford*) to reflect on what she learned and experienced.

Oxford's 'base and brickish skirt': the development of the suburbs 1850 – 1914

Thursday 24 February at 8pm

In 1850 Oxford was still largely contained within its medieval town walls. By 1914 its footprint had quadrupled as thousands of new brick terraced houses had been built. Local historian **Liz Woolley**

examines why the suburbs grew so rapidly, how they developed differently to the north, south, east and west of the city, and the effects that suburban growth had on Oxford and its residents.



River bathing in Oxford – past, present, future

Thursday 10 March at 8pm

In the Covid summers of 2020 and '21, our riverbanks became the city's own holiday resorts and a handful of half-forgotten names re-emerged from the city's memory: Long Bridges, Tumbling Bay, Parson's Pleasure, Dame's Delight...

Cultural historian **George Townsend** surveys the early evidence of river bathing and swimming. Local historian **Richard Mills** sheds light on the rise and fall of official bathing places. **Eleanor Blyth**, who has been central in efforts to establish official bathing water status here, surveys current river users and outlines plans to rejuvenate Long Bridges.

AGM and open forum

Tuesday 22 March at 7.30pm

See the back page for more detail.

Members-only visits

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

Rhodes House redevelopment

Tuesday 25 January at 4pm

Rhodes House is constructing a conference centre in its basement, as well as restoring the existing building. This visit will provide an overview of the plans and will include a tour of the site.

Barton Park: the estate with a difference

Wednesday 16 March at 2pm

Barton Park is being developed by the City Council and its partners and takes a fresh look at the planning of a large edge-of-city estate. This tour will highlight the aspirations of the Council, the constraints they have had to surmount; it will allow us to judge the success in creating Oxford's newest residential neighbourhood.



The regeneration of Blackbird Leys

Wednesday 6 April at 2pm

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

Dorchester: a guided tour

Save the date: Saturday 23 April, 2.30pm

More information in the March issue of *Visions*.

Our AGM, Spring Clean and more

A streamlined AGM

Our next AGM will be on Tuesday 22 March at 7.30pm. Please save the date.

Held at Rewley House, the AGM's formal business will be as short as we can manage to allow time for an **open forum**. We hope to continue this in the bar afterwards.

There is a lot happening in Oxford and this is a great opportunity to discuss how to help formulate our responses.

Nominations for the position of Chairman, Vice Chairman, Hon Treasurer, Hon Secretary and membership of the committee plus items for the Agenda should be sent to Vernon Porter, the Hon Secretary, by **7 March** – see below for the address.

Gearing up for OxClean Spring Clean 2022

Natasha Robinson and the rest of the OxClean team are well ahead with plans for the big Spring Clean 2022. More dates for your diary!

Next year the annual litter pick will be held over two weekends: **18–20 March** and **25–27 March**. We will be registering groups and individuals who want to take part early in the new year. You can register via OxClean's website – oxclean.org.uk

If you're new to OxClean, this is our biggest-ever campaign and community event involving around 1,000 volunteers who do a two-hour litter pick. We lend the equipment and the City Council picks up the waste. Our aim is to spread the word that litter is ugly, dangerous to wildlife and totally unacceptable. We love OxClean litter picks because they're fun!



Listening to you

Our survey of members in 2020 showed that many of you want to be more involved in our discussions.

It is never easy to capture the views of several hundred members but our recent surveys on the Covered Market and the Broad Street meadow project have shown that we can use this mechanism to tap into your views. **Look out for our next survey on Oxford's waterways.**

We'd be glad to hear from you as to whether you like this approach, whether we're sending surveys too often or not enough, and what topics we should be covering. Comments to newsletter@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

The Holly legacy

Keith Holly left £20,000 in his will to encourage walking in the city and a first tranche of it is now being spent.

£2,500 is going to the Friends of Cutteslowe and Sunnymead Park (FCSP). The project will make the paths through the wooded area in the south-east of Cutteslowe Park accessible in all weathers and seasons, while keeping the natural feel. Keith lived close by and was an enthusiastic supporter.

It is currently proposed that the balance of the legacy should be used to provide benches at various locations to enhance and encourage the experience of walking. The City Council will install and maintain privately-funded benches so we are considering suitable locations on this basis. If you have any suggestions please contact us.



The perfect gift

'Shop early for Christmas' is the advice from many retailers. A gift membership of the Society is guaranteed to please – and it won't get delayed at the ports or stuck in the Suez Canal! If you'd like to buy someone a special experience please contact Liz Grosvenor (see below) who will happily gift-wrap and deliver it for you.

Membership costs £15 for an individual, £25 for two people at the same address.

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

Oxford Civic Society

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



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