

Adapting to a new 'normal'

Annual Review 2021



OXFORD
CIVIC SOCIETY
AN INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR OXFORD
SINCE 1969

Our aims

Aim 1: Influence the development of Oxford as a city where people enjoy living, working and visiting.

Aim 2: Inform members and others about Oxford ... with constructive ... proposals for its further improvement.

Aim 3: Co-operate with residents associations ... to develop community-led solutions to shared problems, including engaging with our diverse and hard to reach communities.

Aim 4: Learn from other cities ... where creative strategies might be helpful to Oxford.

Blue plaques

We continued to support the Oxfordshire Blue Plaques Board which this year placed five new plaques. See the March 2022 issue of Visions for a full account.



Business as usual ...

Our Chairman, Ian Green, picks out the highlights.

Throughout a year still adapting to COVID-19 the worst thing was the lack of personal contact with members. But it was 'business as usual' in many other respects. The **Programme and Communications Groups** improvised with online meetings and continued editions of *Visions* and e-bulletins (November saw the 150th edition of *Visions*). The first eight talks of the year were held online but in September we cautiously restarted in-person talks and our programme of visits.

OxClean had a year of mixed fortunes: no Spring Clean because of COVID restrictions and the theft of our litter pickers, but the generosity of our members, Oxford Direct Services and community groups enabled us to restock and hold three Clean-Ups.

To engage more with communities throughout Oxford we established a new working group, the **Oxford Community Impact Group**. Part of its work is to look at what communities are doing to address inequality and to identify ways community action can be strengthened. This links to our continuing support to the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economic Partnership, a spin-off from the Oxford Strategic Partnership to which we also contributed.

Our **Planning Group** met regularly if remotely. It addressed an increase in major new development proposals and pre-application consultations on developments in the west of the city. A small task force was involved with the Broad Street pedestrianisation project and continued to work with the Council on plans for regeneration of the Covered Market.

The **Transport Group** quickly engaged with the new transport representatives on the County Council and, in association with the Oxfordshire Futures Group, responded to major consultations. It is significant that the five fundamental investments recommended in the

Oxford's Economic Strategy are all related to transport (a new rail station, the Cowley line extension, Connecting Oxford to reduce congestion, improved bus provision and active travel modes). This underlines the importance of the Group.

Working with the Transport Group, the **Oxfordshire Futures Group** (an online group) continued to respond to major consultations and also ran four half-day webinars on *Planning for our future*. The Transport and Housing Groups also contributed.

We do not have an Environment Group as there are many such groups in Oxfordshire but we were pleased that **Chris Church** of Friends of the Earth joined our Executive Committee, helping to link us with relevant organisations. We joined the Oxfordshire COP 26 lobbying group and our *Planning for our future* debates included one on climate change.

On a sad note, **Mark Barrington-Ward** died in October. As Editor of the *Oxford Mail* (1961-79), Mark commissioned a series of articles on the 'erosion of Oxford' which led to the founding of the Society. He served on the Planning Group for many years before also becoming our President 2004-10. A great loss.

The **Executive Committee** continued to meet monthly and in March we were delighted to welcome two new trustees, elected at our online AGM: **Thelma Martin**, a former barrister who is well known for her work with East Oxford communities; and **Jim Girling**, an architect and established Planning Group member.

It has been a difficult year for recruitment of new members and corporate members and we look forward to accelerating this activity in 2022. Our members' support throughout 2021 is much appreciated and I pay tribute to all those who have helped keep up our work in very challenging times. Thank you all for your continuing loyalty.

We look forward to seeing you in 2022!

Consultations aplenty ...

The major consultations we responded to this year included the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy, the latest stage in the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP5) and Oxford's Economic Strategy.



A sincere thank you

Our members' support and the dedication of all our activists is much appreciated. I pay tribute to all who have helped keep up our work in very challenging times.



Major developments

We commented on three in Old Marston: Hill View Farm, Mill Lane and Marston Paddock; St Frideswide Farm, Cutteslowe; Thornhill Park, Risinghurst; Bayswater Brook, Barton; and Oxford North.



Houses in multiple occupation (HMOs)

These are often unpopular among residents but help to meet the need for affordable housing for low-paid workers. We are keen to ensure this type of housing meets high standards.



A watchful eye on development

Gillian Coates on the Planning Group

In 2021, 2,880 applications were submitted to the City Council. We scrutinised over a third and submitted comments on just under 100. There was a significant increase in major new development proposals. We are participating in pre-application consultations relating to developments on the west of the city – the land between Park End and Hythe Bridge Streets, Oxford station, Oxpens and Osney Mead. We have also been involved with the Broad Street pedestrianisation project and we continue to work with the Council on plans for the Covered Market regeneration.

Most applications were for domestic extensions, loft, garage and garden building conversions, to provide additional accommodation. We are on the watch for over-development of a site, potentially impacting on neighbours. Poor design and the omission of basics such as bike and bin stores are not uncommon.

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) are a symptom of the growing housing shortage and meet a real need. We examined all new HMO applications and are keen to ensure they satisfy the City's strict criteria.

Influencing the housing debate

Peter Thompson on the Housing Group

We contributed to the debates series by organising one on housing policy, focusing on the unaffordability of housing to many people in Oxford. Most of the potential solutions will require changes in legislation at a national level.

We also began a campaign to introduce land value capture so that, when land is sold with planning consent, the community as well as the landowner benefits. Key players are beginning to take note.

Of talks, walks and visits

Ian Salusbury on the Programme Group

We adapted our programme of talks and visits to suit the changing circumstances. With various restrictions still in place in early 2021, we held our first eight talks online. They made up a varied programme, ranging from art to housing and from the environment to the University of Oxford's development plans. Each talk attracted a good number of attendees on the night and they continue to be watched on YouTube.

It was a pleasure to restart our talks in person in September and we hosted four before the year end. Attendances were encouraging and for those unable or unwilling to meet up indoors, recordings of two talks have since been added to our YouTube channel.

In addition we organised three visits for late 2021 – to Cutteslowe ponds, the sculptor Oscar Nemon's studio and Tap Social, all of which proved popular.

Keeping in touch with you

Hilary Bradley on the Communications Team

We reached a milestone in November 2021 with the publication of the 150th edition of the newsletter. It was a welcome excuse to refer to our archive and to assess how our chief means of communication has changed over the decades. We continued to run four websites and two Twitter accounts and to seek greater exposure in the local press.

Our shop window display (in the High Street) was refreshed several times to feature OxClean and the member surveys we undertook in the year (also open to the public). One survey looked at people's views on the Covered Market, while the other focused on attitudes to the pedestrianisation of part of Broad Street.

The Society on YouTube

Our YouTube channel now has several talks and two 'lockdown films'. A special mention should be made of our most popular online talk, that on rewilding (from 2020) – it has now had over 10,000 downloads!



Taking the pulse

Our survey of attitudes to the pedestrianisation of 'Broad Meadow' revealed general support for the project.

A rail-bus system?

We continued to support the integration of rail and bus services in central Oxfordshire, including new stations for commuters. We also supported the opening of the Cowley line to passenger traffic, with new East Oxford station development – shifting more trips to rail and away from the roads.



Debating the issues

We held four debates in May, including a debate focused on climate change, to reinforce our scrutiny of the County's various plans and strategies. We were pleased that many local leaders attended.

Of active travel and more

Andrew Pritchard on the Transport Group

We commented on several planning documents, outlined on page 3, and were pleased to meet with the transport representatives on the newly-elected County Council. We strongly support their ideas for improving cycling and walking. We also commented on the County's disappointing proposals for improving bus services and are stakeholders in plans to improve the space available for cycling and walking along the Woodstock Road.

We continued to press the University and the City Council/Nuffield College for a direct bridge between the Oxpens and the Osney Mead redevelopments, and to improve connections with the station and Westgate areas, so far without success.

The potential of Oxford's canal and river fronts is being ignored by the authorities in our view and we are considering how it might be realised.

Taking a strategic view

Ian Green on the Oxfordshire Futures Group

The Group continued to anchor its work on the agenda of the Future Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP). The agenda includes all strategic planning in the county and we take the view that if Oxfordshire is planned well the city will benefit considerably.

We monitored all FOP and associated scrutiny committee meetings and addressed some of them. We responded to the key consultations (set out on page 3) and requested a review of the Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment. We welcomed the establishment of the FOP's Environmental Group and held meetings with the leaders of the newly-elected County Council.

Looking at inequality

Gillian Coates, Oxford Community Impact Group

We set up this new working group to consider what role we can play in reducing inequality in the city region. Future growth in the region needs to benefit all of our communities.

We began by becoming involved with the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership, an initiative of the Oxford Strategic Partnership. This aims to develop an inclusive economy agenda countywide. We have representation from our Executive Committee on the working groups focusing on educational attainment, place-based interventions and inclusive employers.

Our own group is looking broadly at what communities are doing now to address inequality. To this end we designed and issued a survey for resident and community groups. We hope the results will not only support the project but also give us a view of and link to what is happening at the grass roots.

Tackling litter, changing attitudes

Natasha Robinson on OxClean

Our usual Spring Clean was not possible because of Covid restrictions, then in April we suffered a major setback when all our litter pickers were stolen. But thanks to the generosity of our members, Oxford Direct Services and community groups we were able to replace them. So we were able to stick to our plans for three Big Saturday Clean-Ups in May and June. Over 700 people in 80 groups gallantly supported these events. Between them they collected 1.5 tonnes of rubbish and recycling from all over the city.

Behind the scenes we worked with schools to encourage young people to get involved through the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme.

Unequal Oxfordshire

The inequality in our city region is most evident in life expectancy figures. Men in the north of Oxford live on average up to eight years longer than those in the south of the city.



*With thanks to our members for the use of their photos:
Hilary Bradley, Gillian Coates,
Roger Grosvenor, Stephanie Jenkins,
Roddy Maddocks, Peter Thompson
and Tony Turton*

Income - £16,673

(£31,247 in 2020)

- Subscriptions and donations £9,980
- Guided tours and visits £478
- Gift Aid £1,810
- Other £2,185

Expenditure - £11,854

(£10,102 in 2020)

- Newsletter £3,538
- Guided tours/visits £345
- Talks £2,659
- IT/Website £1,269
- OxClean £1,887 (replacement litter pickers incl)
- General publications £365
- Blue Plaques £293
- Donations and subs £525
- Special Projects £366
- Other £607

Surplus £4,819

(£21,146 * in 2020)

Legacy expenditure £2,500

Assets £53,798*

(£51,480 in 2020)

*including unspent legacy monies

Reserves policy

We hold sufficient to cover our liabilities and to enable us to take professional advice as needs arise.

Public benefit

We hope this review has given an insight into how our work is helping to improve Oxford for everyone.

*OCS is a registered charity
number 1116739*

Our finances in 2021

Richard Dodd, Hon Treasurer, summarises.

We increased our subscription rates in 2021 so, with a corresponding increase in Gift Aid, our unrestricted income increased. (Last year a £20,000 legacy, which we are administering on behalf of the Pedestrians Association, was included in income. It is now classified as a restricted fund and related expenditure is shown separately in the accounts.) In addition we raised £2,184 through a Just Giving campaign to replace our stock of litter pickers, stolen early in the year. £646 remains available for further replacements.

The impact of coronavirus continued into 2021, curtailing our project work, causing the President's Reception to be cancelled and slowing progress with expenditure of the legacy. £2,500 of this was contributed towards the development of the Cutteslowe Park Woodland Trail and we expect the remainder to be spent in 2022 in consultation with the donor's family.

Recurring items of expenditure, including our support for Blue Plaques, our membership of Civic Voice and the extended programme of online talks, were broadly in line with 2020, resulting in a year end surplus of £4,819.

We'd like to thank all our members for their loyal support.

*The full accounts are on the website, or please contact:
treasurer@oxcivicsoc.org.uk*

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

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

President: Sir Clive Booth

Chairman: Ian Green Vice Chair: Gillian Coates

Hon Secretary: Vernon Porter Hon Treasurer: Richard Dodd

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