

## Paradise lost?



*Work starts on the west end of Broad Street to transform it into a pedestrianised piazza after a successful trial last year. We have been closely involved in this project. Read more about city centre transformations on page 5.*

*Photo courtesy of Roger Grosvenor*

### **We urge the local councils to think again about abandoning the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan. How are we to see a way forward for our region without this vital preparation?**

It was a huge surprise when we heard that the district and city councils had announced the abandonment of the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan. This Plan was one of the commitments made by the Oxfordshire local planning authorities as part of the £215 million Housing and Growth Deal. It was to be a joint spatial plan and it was intended that it would enable the authorities collectively to consider the needs of the county and align their strategies so that future housing and infrastructure is better integrated. It was also intended that the authorities would 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 would also benefit from consideration at a higher level with a consistent approach across all the authorities.

The Oxfordshire Plan was to have been based on the current Local Plans and to look beyond them. It would have given the district councils and the city council a framework for future development planning and strategic infrastructure policies. The Plan would have identified key areas for sustainable growth with associated housing / employment numbers, while considering how to mitigate climate change and flood risk, and improve water efficiency. The districts and city council would have then used this to produce future Local Plans (Local Plan updates to 2040 are now being prepared by the district councils and the city council) which would provide a detailed view of how housing and infrastructure will be delivered and how they will address the climate emergency.

### **Our understanding is that the 2050 Plan was abandoned because different views on growth are irreconcilable.**

We understand that the City and Cherwell District Councils are more in favour of higher rates of growth than are the

# Paradise lost? (continued)



*Oxford's first zero emission zone is now in place. Such measures aim to reduce car use and improve air quality, both factors in any strategic plan.*

*Photo courtesy of Clive Booth*

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils. The position of West Oxfordshire Council is not clear.

Our immediate reaction was to say publicly that a lot of very good work had been achieved in the preparation of the Plan and that this good work needs to be deployed in the updated Local Plans which will still be produced. (This was very well presented in the 11 August *Oxford Times*, including in the Opinion column). In particular the Plan preparations were leading to a pioneer assessment of the cumulative environ-

mental and social impacts of development across the county including a thoughtful approach to addressing climate change. We argued for a public discussion of what can and should be retrieved from the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan preparation and offered to lead this. Discussion on this with other civic and interest groups continues.

## Taking the ox by the horns ...

We asked the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Committee to challenge the abandonment of the Plan and explain how to organise strategic planning (inter-local planning authority) in the county without it. We followed this with a presentation to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership itself. Our presentation made the following points:

- The good planning work achieved in the course of preparation of the Plan should be deployed in the updating of the Local Plans. In addition, the public have responded to Oxfordshire 2050 consultations in various ways and their contributions should not be abandoned.

**We recommend that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership agrees to public discussions on making good use of work**

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**done to date on the Oxfordshire 2050 plan.**

- We recognise that to update the Local Plans of the districts and city, some kind of agreement on Oxfordshire's growth rate and distribution will still be necessary. Without evidence that the Local Plans have been prepared in cooperation with neighbouring local authorities (the 'Duty to Cooperate'), the Local Plans will **not** be approved by the Planning Inspectorate / Secretary of State.

Wise investment in our key infrastructure could be a major casualty of the abandonment of the 2050 Plan – care needs to be taken to limit the damage.

**We recommend that the Future Oxfordshire Partnership identifies and makes public the strategic infrastructure investment implications of each local planning authority establishing its own rate, pace and distribution of employment and housing growth.**

- The links between the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (and its emerging Travel Plans), the Local Industrial Strategy, the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy and Pathways to Net Zero need to be carefully considered. Public discussion needs to continue on strategic planning matters and we will be pleased to contribute to this.

The environmental and social implications of the proposed levels of growth and its distribution will still need to be exhaustively considered and respected and could use some of the agreed principles and guidelines established for the now abandoned 2050 Plan.

**We recommend that, as Oxfordshire strategic plans still need to be well coordinated and synchronised with, and integrated into, the Local Plans, the Future Oxfordshire Partnership should publicly debate how this is done.**

The formal response from the Future Oxfordshire Partnership did not acknowledge the Society's request for public involvement in this discussion. This is disappointing. We believe strongly that future housing and infrastructure will be better integrated if the public can be involved in considering how collectively to steer us towards a well-managed future.

**Ian Green**  
Chairman



# All go on transport

## Andrew Pritchard reports on the Transport Group

**Several major transport plans before the County Council and others will have a huge impact on all our lives if they come to fruition – but will they?**

In previous issues of *Visions* we have discussed in some detail Oxford's four major transport plans: *Connecting Oxford*, *Working Place Parking Levy*, *Zero Emission Zone (ZEZ)*, and *Low Transport Neighbourhoods (LTNs)*. The initial **ZEZ phase** is now in place, and, in contrast to the LTNs, seems not to have attracted lively discussion. There is no progress on a Workplace Parking Levy for the moment, but the bus gate proposals associated with *Connecting Oxford* are attracting much comment.

The effects of these measures on traffic in central and peripheral Oxford are being predicted using traffic modelling and so we met the County's modellers for a seminar on how these work. Unfortunately, despite considerable work on the models, they are currently not able to predict many of the changes that might occur as the result of specific changes, particularly in travel habits.

This is not helped by the lack of data on the exact positioning of the proposed **bus gates**, the exemptions proposed and the periods during which they will operate. The need for space for U-turns for non-exempt vehicles (as outside The Queens' College and in Castle Street for the existing bus gates) does not appear to have been considered. The bus gates are needed to reduce traffic to achieve a 10% reduction in bus journey times, providing savings that will make the introduction of expensive battery electric buses affordable for the bus companies, subsidised by a large government contribution. If the decision on bus gates is not made by November 2022, the government money will be lost.

At our most recent meeting with representatives of the bus companies there was concern that increasing car use was making it more difficult to run reliable **bus services**, not helped by traffic transfer associated with LTNs. There is no strong overall public transport team in Oxfordshire, which is slowing the development of mobility hubs.

### Oxpens and Oxford's new river crossing

We met again with OxWED to see their latest plans for the Oxpens. Funding has been agreed for a new **pedestrian and cycle bridge** across the Thames connecting Oxpens to Osney Mead via the nature reserve on part of the old gasworks site. While this will improve the connectivity between the new developments at Osney Mead, the Oxpens and the rest of the city centre, we regard it as inadequate for what is advertised as a future vibrant international innovation quarter, which needs better access for pedestrians, cyclists and public transport. In the

meantime we are doing what we can to make the best of what is currently proposed.

We note that the proposed connection has been integrated into the latest plans for **Oxpens** and detailed planning is under way to synchronise construction of the bridge with recontouring work on Oxpens Meadow in 2023.

### On and under the rails and more plans ...

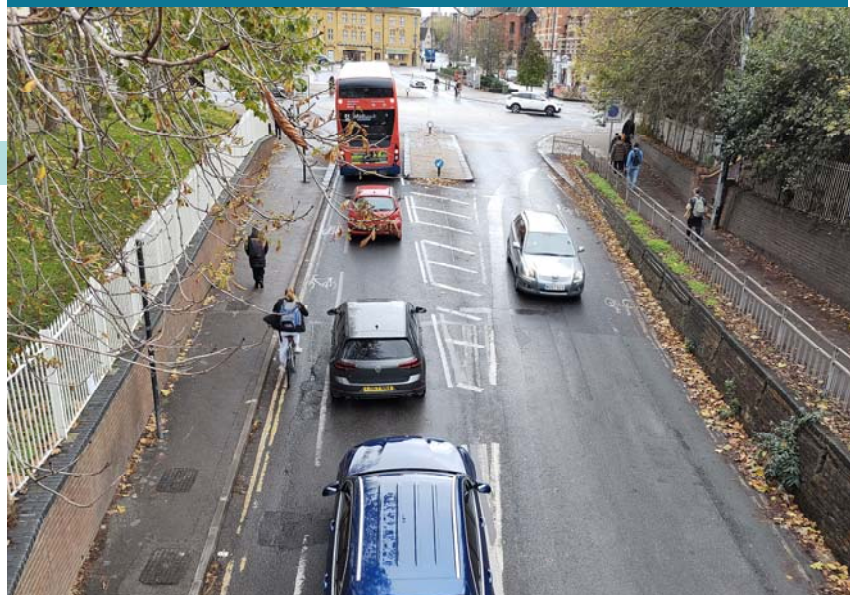
We attended a meeting about the proposed changes to the **railway station and the bridge over Botley Road**, now funded by the government. We suggested that the new western entrance to the station should give direct access by a subway to all platforms, not just platform 4 and the new platform 5.

The **design of the bridge** uses mainly grey concrete and we warned of possible defacement by graffiti as in the existing pedestrian tunnel. The bridge will have 4-metre pedestrian and cycle routes on each side, though we were told that the design shown was only illustrative. According to Network Rail's provisional estimates, Botley Road will be closed for the whole of 2023 to allow the work to be done though the impacts on traffic and businesses will be severe.

We also made contributions to the Society's formal responses to the consultations on the **Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan** and **Traffic Filters**. We are wondering what the abandonment of the Oxfordshire 2050 plan means for transport planning but meanwhile we shall be considering the 2020-2040 Oxford Local Plan.

*The Botley Road bridge will be totally rebuilt to provide extra rail capacity, a safer route for cyclists and access for taller vehicles. Cyclists and pedestrians will be able to use the route while reconstruction work proceeds in 2023 but all other vehicles will be excluded. Read about the plans on [Network Rail's website](#)*

*Photo courtesy of Roger Grosvenor*



# As I see it ... education matters

## Margaret Maden salutes our thriving education sector

In the first of a series of opinion pieces by our Vice Presidents, Margaret Maden reviews our education sector and its place in civic life.

Education has been my lifelong commitment and enduring interest, so it's good that I live in Oxford, surely an 'education city' through and through. From pre-school learning to the highest levels of research, Oxford scores higher than perhaps any other centre of learning in the world.

We have over 50 primary schools for the start of formal education at age five and seven secondary schools for 11-18 year olds, alongside more than a dozen independent schools catering for both age groups. The independent sector represents approximately 15% of secondary school places in the city – the highest in the UK? Cherwell and Cheney secondary schools are high performers and, alongside all other state secondary schools, are now defined as 'academies'.

We also have a college of further education, City of Oxford College, for students over the age of 16 and adults more generally. We have two universities, the older one founded in 1096 and a much newer one, Oxford Brookes, catering for a wide range of students in both academic and vocational fields of study.

The numbers attached to all this provision are amazing. Over 30,000 undergraduates study at the two universities, 23% of these at the older university being from outside the UK, enrolled at one of its 46 colleges (from Balliol to Magdalen, St Catherine's to Green Templeton). 15,000 students are enrolled in the University of Oxford's Continuing Education Department, primarily on short courses. Over 4,000 students study at the City of Oxford College, mainly part-time, including some 280 students on 'A' level courses and others benefiting from the college's links with Oxford businesses, from BMW engineering to small office-based firms and our two local councils (City and County).

Oxford University's top five ranking in the international league table of universities, alongside Cambridge, Harvard, Yale and the like is a real achievement. In the Research Excellence Framework, it has 'the highest volume of world-leading research', employing some 2,000 staff, part of the 28,000 jobs provided by our two universities.

The range of academic and vocational courses provided in Oxford is really impressive. Oxford Brookes features in the top five ranked higher education establishments for several programmes of study: paramedical science, journalism, midwifery, health professions, physiotherapy. Its well-established links with Formula One in its Department of Engineering and Computing is highly respected – and envied. The theoretical and practical advances in medicine in our older university, as well in most academic subjects, are acknowledged as world class.

Lest it be forgot, Oxford schools have over 700 school governors representing parents, teachers, church authorities where relevant, and local employers. This wide base of stakeholders is impressive and important: the Society believes that schools need to be accountable and relate to their local context.

### Driving up standards, embracing diversity

I am especially interested in the achievements of students who don't have many home advantages. As a school governor for two Oxford schools catering for such students, I have admired all the efforts to narrow the gap between high and low achievers. **However, the lack of affordable housing among the 'dreaming spires' is a real problem in recruiting and retaining high quality teachers.** I am encouraged by our older university's recent development to increase intakes from less privileged backgrounds through its UNIQ programme, a mentoring scheme for under-represented groups in our schools.

I welcome our city's educational ambitions and drive; I want as wide a range of student success as is possible, irrespective of social class, ethnicity or gender. This is what 'civic' means at best.

*Professor Maden is a former head-teacher in an inner-city comprehensive school, Chief Education Officer and academic. She is widely known for her work in creating successful schools in less privileged communities. As Vice President she has supported our outreach work in schools as well as encouraging our new Community Impact Group.*

*The Swan School in Marston is our newest state secondary school, opened in 2021*

*Photo courtesy of Tony Turton*



# Revamping the city centre

## Gillian Coates reports on the Planning Group

Some planning issues are progressing and others have stalled but some exciting change is in the pipeline.

### Progress: the Oxford Design Review Panel

In the July issue we wrote about the Panel, sharing our concerns about the lack of transparency in its work. Its *2021-22 Report* was released in May and we met with representatives from Design South East (DSE) and the City Council to discuss the report and to comment on the next steps it identified. We also explored how the Society might formally contribute to the work of the Panel. This was met with enthusiasm from DSE but it will be a decision for the Council (sponsors of the Panel). The outcome is encouraging and we look forward to working more closely with DSE and the Panel itself.

**We would be interested to hear from any of our readers who have interacted with the Panel and learn what issues you would like us to take up on your behalf.**

### Progress: Broad Street and the Covered Market

The installation in **Broad Street** (see cover photo) has been delayed so it is too early to judge whether this new design is fit for purpose. The consultation will open soon and it is important to bear in mind that it is the organisation of the space that is for discussion, rather than the temporary seats and planters that are being installed now. We applaud the removal of the parking but feel better signage on the approaches to the closure would be helpful for motorists.

We recently met with the Council's Regeneration Manager to comment on the revised proposal for the **Covered Market**. In our view it is much improved and we were reassured that a regenerated market will offer a mix of fresh produce, food, and other outlets. The Council's Leasing Strategy will provide incentives for small businesses to occupy units and thus bring vibrancy back to the market. The relocation of the toilets on

Market Street will create the opportunity for a major and welcoming entrance. The public consultation closed on 23 October and the work now is to finalise the design and the cost of this long-awaited face-lift. A decision will be made by Cabinet next February.

### Stalled: Planning and Infrastructure Bill

When the details of the Bill are published we will have the chance to assess the likelihood of achieving a more streamlined and accelerated planning system that works for all and is not simply a developers' charter!

The Communities Department (now led by Michael Gove) has said that building more houses should not mean compromising on quality, beauty or the environment. Government has quietly abandoned the target of building 300,000 new homes a year by the mid-2020s. The *perceived* barriers for developers will be eased to give "greater flexibility on *affordable housing* requirements" to ease requirements for builders to leave land in a better state than beforehand, known as "biodiversity net gain". We look forward to seeing what *to ease* requirements might actually mean.

However, '*affordable*' is a misnomer when applied to Oxford housing which is the second most expensive in the UK – £486,928 median house price, with the average wage just over £39,000. (Winchester is now the most expensive.)

There is no question that more housing is required and by that we must surely mean *social* housing. The ambition to become a homeowner may be less realistic as the cost of living soars. When the Government talks about levelling up will it provide more funds to enable local authorities to build more social housing or schemes for part-ownership? It is a truly worrying situation for the next generation. Working families need government help and we hope there are plans to do just that. We await the outcome with interest.

*A pedestrianised Market Street as it might look in future with a new entrance to the market and pavement cafés. A decision on this much-heralded improvement is expected early in 2023*



Image courtesy of Oxford City Council

# OCS Calendar

'Cut out and keep'

January – March 2023

\*ticketed events

Wednesday 11 January\* 2pm

Jesus College's new Cheng Yu Tung Building, a visit

Tuesday 17 January 8pm

Memory Lane, the *Oxford Times* and *Mail's* feature, a talk by John Chipperfield

Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square

Wednesday 8 February 8pm

How can we prepare for the next global pandemic?, a talk by Sean Elias

Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street

Friday 17 February\* 11am

The Weston Library, a visit

Thursday 9 March 6pm

[NOTE earlier time]

Managing Oxford's city centre, a talk by Diana Fawcett

Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square

Saturday 18 March\* 2pm

The parish of St Thomas the Martyr, West Oxford, a guided tour with Liz Woolley

Tuesday 21 March

AGM 7.30pm

Talk 8pm

Your City Council today: the CEO's in-tray, a talk by Caroline Green

Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square

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

# Booking details

## How to book tickets

We are now using Eventbrite to take online bookings for all our guided 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 so that we can arrange an alternative booking route for you. Note we no longer have an 'office' phone but you can contact us by email [events@oxcivicsoc.org.uk](mailto:events@oxcivicsoc.org.uk) or by post (see the back page). Please tell us which event/s you are booking for, how many tickets you need, and enclose a cheque payable to Oxford Civic Society (one cheque for each event).

**Please note:** our guided tours 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
Jesus College's new Cheng Yu Tung Building, a visit Wednesday 11 January, 2pm	£8	<a href="https://bit.ly/ocs-jesuscollege">https://bit.ly/ocs-jesuscollege</a>
The Weston Library, a visit Friday 17 February, 11am	£9	<a href="https://bit.ly/ocs-weston">https://bit.ly/ocs-weston</a>
The parish of St Thomas the Martyr, West Oxford, a guided tour Saturday 18 March, 2pm	£9	<a href="https://bit.ly/ocs-stthomas">https://bit.ly/ocs-stthomas</a>



# Programme January – March 2023

## Talks – all welcome

Talks are free and don't need to be booked ahead, just turn up.

### Memory Lane, the *Oxford Times* and *Mail's* feature

Tuesday 17 January at 8pm

Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square

**John Chipperfield**, former assistant editor/news editor of the *Oxford Mail*, who retired in 2008, will talk about the work he still does for the *Mail* – the weekly Memory Lane section recalling times past in Oxford and the county.

### How can we prepare for the next global pandemic?

Wednesday 8 February at 8pm

Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street



The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us that academia can deliver transformative scientific advances with global impact, as seen with the University of Oxford's successful COVID-19 vaccine and RECOVERY Drugs trial. The Pandemic Sciences Institute launched earlier this year is a multi-

disciplinary, university-wide initiative which aims to build upon the model of innovation, collaboration and agility that yielded these successes. In this talk **Dr Sean Elias** will discuss how this approach will help us prepare for the next global pandemic.

### Managing Oxford's city centre

Thursday 9 March at 6pm [NOTE EARLIER TIME]

Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square

**Diana Fawcett** has been Oxford City Centre Manager since April 2022 and prior to that was Aylesbury Town Centre & Regeneration Manager. She will provide an update on the City Centre Action Plan and the projects planned within it for the next eight years to ensure that Oxford is a 'world class city'.

### Your City Council today: the CEO's in-tray

(preceded by the Annual General Meeting)

Tuesday 21 March, AGM at 7.30pm, talk at 8pm

Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square

**Caroline Green**, Chief Executive of the City Council, will talk about the council's priorities in a post-pandemic Oxford. The council aims to deliver on a wide range of issues from a more inclusive economy to more affordable homes, from the race to zero carbon by 2040 to tackling inequality in our diverse communities.



## Members-only visits and guided tours

Tickets are needed for these events: tickets on a first come – first served basis. See page 6 for details.

### Jesus College's new Cheng Yu Tung Building: a visit

Wednesday 11 January, 2pm



A tour of the latest addition to the College's site, including its new raised fourth quad and student accommodation, Tower Room and state-of-the-art digital hub. Learn about the College's plans to become more outward-facing and community-focused, and how its students and academics are using these new spaces to

learn and carry out globally-important research in the digital age.

### The Weston Library: a visit

Friday 17 February, 11am

The Weston Library is the Bodleian's Special Collections Library, housing its world-renowned rare book and manuscript collections,

acquired over 400 years of collecting. Designed by Giles Gilbert Scott and built in 1937-39, the Library was extensively remodelled internally in 2012-15 to a design by Wilkinson Eyre Architects. A tour of the building will explore how new and old have been blended to bring this Grade II Listed Building up to date, to preserve its priceless contents, to improve research facilities and increase public access.

### "A tough but full-blooded area": the parish of St Thomas the Martyr, West Oxford: a guided tour

Saturday 18 March, 2pm

This guided walk led by local historian **Liz Woolley**, takes us around one of the most ancient and historic areas of the city. St Thomas's was among Oxford's earliest suburbs, first inhabited in Saxon times. In the 12<sup>th</sup> century it stood on the direct route between the castle at the west gate of the city and the great Augustinian Abbey of Osney. The walk takes about two hours (including a visit to the church, which is normally locked).

# Looking ahead: our AGM, Spring Clean...

## Dates for your 2023 diary and more ...

### AGM Tuesday 21 March

Please join us for our **AGM at Rewley House**, starting at 7.30pm. We plan to keep the formal business as brief as possible to allow time for your questions. **Nominations** for the Executive Committee and **items for the agenda** should reach Vernon Porter no later than 7 March – email [info@oxcivicsoc.org.uk](mailto:info@oxcivicsoc.org.uk)

We're delighted that the City Council's new CEO, **Caroline Green**, will give a talk after the close of the AGM at 8pm. Caroline takes up her post at a time of immense pressure on local government so it will be fascinating to hear how her ambition is surviving the realities of the day.

### Getting ready for OxClean Spring Clean!

Once again we are organising a city-wide two-hour litter pick to spruce up for spring. This is our 16th such event and we're really proud we managed to carry on during the pandemic.

In 2023 we're running the event over two weekends: **Friday 3 March–Sunday 5 March** and **Friday 10 March–Sunday 12 March**.

**Registrations** will be open from early January and you can register your group or yourself. We supply all the kit you need, Oxford Direct Services collects the rubbish and recycling and you do the rest. If you're a Spring Clean novice read more on OxClean's website: [www.oxclean.org.uk](http://www.oxclean.org.uk)

Don't forget to send us your photos!

### Looking for a new challenge? Or more contact?

New members are always welcome on our **working groups** or, if you'd like to know what goes on without being on a committee, please consider becoming a 'corresponding member'. Email us with your details (see right column) and someone will ring you for a preliminary chat. Our working groups include Planning, Transport, OxClean, Oxfordshire Futures, the Programme Group and Communications.

If you'd like to consider taking on a specific role please see the 'Volunteers' page on our website. Right now we need help with our websites and in the Communications team, for instance editing/production and window display. See [www.oxcivicsoc.org.uk/membership/volunteers/](http://www.oxcivicsoc.org.uk/membership/volunteers/)

We'd also like a **new shop window** having been in the High Street for two years. Bright ideas and offers anyone?



Members enjoyed a guided tour of North Oxford's treescape in October, one of the events arranged by our lively Programme Group  
Photo courtesy of Roger Grosvenor

### Christmas is coming ...

We all have people in our lives who are hard to buy for at this time of year. So do consider buying a **gift membership** so that your friend/family member can enjoy our year-round series of talks and events. Our Membership Secretary, Liz Grosvenor, will gift-wrap it for you! The rates are shown below as is the email address. **Merry Christmas everyone!**

**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](mailto:membership@oxcivicsoc.org.uk)

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