

Building back even better

Annual Review 2022



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 seven new plaques. Read more in the March 2023 issue of Visions.



Extending our reach

Our Chairman, Ian Green, reflects on the year

Accelerating out of the COVID years, in 2022 we maintained our reputation for even-handed constructive recommendations on development planning and management issues in the city region. Our various working groups have wide-ranging skills and much energy and we made progress on all our aims.

In common with other civic societies, our membership grew less than we would have liked in 2022 but numbers were stable. The need for our Society is not in doubt. Major development issues in Oxford and Oxfordshire are of great public concern and policy formulated in collaboration with communities, business organisations and special interest groups is good policy. As the only local civic organisation with an overall view of the economy, built environment, environmental and social aspects of the city and county, we have much to offer the decision makers and the public.

The **Oxfordshire Futures Group** was exceptionally busy. Strategic development planning, strategic transport and other infrastructure planning were all addressed and we made recommendations to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership. The Group is especially concerned about how countywide strategic planning can be managed in the absence of the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan, the preparation of which was abandoned when local councils could not agree on jobs and housing growth rates and distribution.

The **Planning Group's** work reviewing applications for planning approval continued to shape the future of the city. The Group is frequently asked to comment on potential developments before applications for planning approval are made and the Group provides the City Council with commentaries on major developments and major planning consultations – the Oxford Local Plan 2040 for example.

The **Transport Group** continued to influence transport development in the city region. The Group supports the policy to reduce private car use in the city and to provide better public transport and provision for active travel, but is very dissatisfied with the way in which transport policy is being introduced. Much of what is needed is behaviour change but this takes time and needs much better explanations of measures and their implications and benefits. We made recommendations to the County Council.

The **Community Impact Group** focused on the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership as a Steering Group member. The Group's aim is to work with local residents associations and with civic societies nationally, to develop and campaign for community-led solutions to shared problems. We joined several English civic societies in a project focusing on the management of growth in historic cities.

The **Programme Group** provided a very popular series of talks, visits and guided tours for members and the public. We plan more public appearances from our working groups to enable more debate.

After the pandemic disruption, we held a very successful **OxClean** Spring Clean in March with almost 900 volunteers out with litter pickers.

The **Communications Group** spread the word about our work to both members and the public through *Visions*, e-bulletins and social media. Our four websites are envied by other civic societies. We will sorely miss our webmaster, **Tony Turton**, who is leaving Oxford – we owe him a huge debt of gratitude.

2022 will be the last full year of **Sir Clive Booth's** OCS Presidency. Clive has been an outstanding President and we cannot thank him enough for his support.

Finally – most of all we thank our members and corporate members for your continuing support. We hope to see you in person in 2023.



Heritage and growth

We played a leading role in the recent national study of heritage and growth funded by Historic England.

A warm thank you

Our members' support and the dedication of all our activists is much appreciated. We have over 100 volunteers involved in our various groups – with room for more! We have no paid staff. Do join one of our groups – or even start a new one.



Major developments

Among other large projects, we commented on the proposals for the Ellison Institute on the Littlemore Hospital site and the Humanities Building on the Radcliffe Observatory site.



Houses in multiple occupation continued to be a concern. They meet a real need but standards can be unacceptable.



We welcomed housing for hospital staff on the Churchill site.

Monitoring the plans

Gillian Coates reports on the Planning Group

A number of recent changes have been influenced by world events and the impact of the cost of living crises. Moving to a larger house has become very expensive and has fuelled a trend towards staying put and providing extra living space for growing families by opting for extensions, loft, garage and garden building conversions. We saw many such applications.

That said, we noted that the number of planning applications reduced by c.13% (2,209 in 2022 compared with 2,880 in 2021). We scrutinised over a third of these and submitted comments on 56, compared with 88 in 2021.

Conversely, we noted with some concern the numerous major developments that are proposed both in and around the city to build research facilities and innovation centres. This may be good for the economic wellbeing of the city region, but we urgently need housing for the extra workers, not least those on a wage that excludes them from property ownership.

We emphasised this issue in the many pre-application consultations we had with developers over the year, and in many cases it was well received and noted.

We see the proposed redevelopment of the Templars Square site as a significant opportunity to regenerate the area. The developers, Redevco, have stated that they come to the project with a blank canvas so the opportunity is there for the community to contribute to the size, shape and composition of this development. The Planning Group will take an active role in helping to shape this exciting new project in future meetings with Redevco.

The City Council's Plans for the regeneration of the Covered Market and Broad Street continued to take shape; we were much involved in both exciting projects.

Of talks, tours and visits

Ian Salusbury reviews the Programme Group

It was a pleasure to return to a full programme of in-person events during 2022, following the two years of pandemic disruption.

The 10 talks in our programme ranged from history and archaeology, to architecture, local history, the environment and health. We experimented with different start times for talks, in order to attract new audiences, and attendance figures grew through the year.

One of the highlights of the year was our sell-out screening of the *Riverwoods* rewilding documentary at the Ultimate Picture Palace, which was followed by a panel discussion.

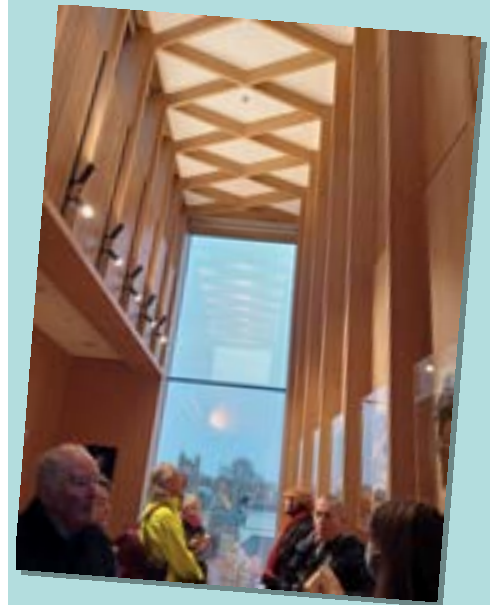
Our 11 visits and guided tours involved such varied locations as the Rhodes House redevelopment to Didcot Railway Centre, and from imagining the sights and sounds of Oxford during the Civil War to a guided tour of Dorchester.

In touch and in the news

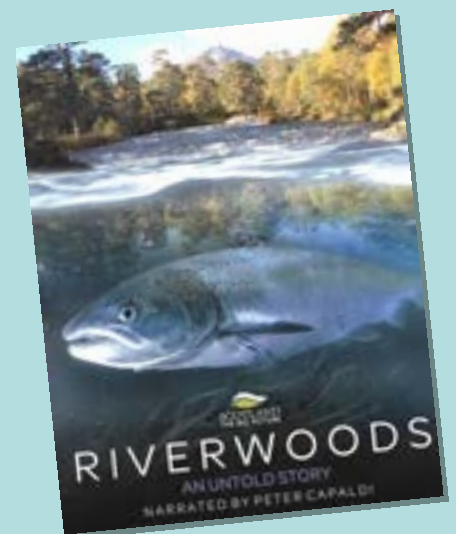
Thelma Martin on the Communications Team

The Team continued to strive to keep the Society's aims and initiatives in the public eye. We ran our four websites, twitter accounts and a Facebook page. We contributed to informed debate in the local press. Management of the websites was transferred to their original designer in the light of the planned retirement in 2023 of our webmaster, Tony Turton, who has made an outstanding contribution to our work. The publication of *Visions* continued to bring news of the Society's work to members and friends.

The High Street shop information window had eye-catching dressings for Christmas and for Oxclean, a Society initiative which enjoys great public support from community groups across the city.



*A visit to the Jesus College
Cheng Yu Tung Building on
Cornmarket Street.*



Contributing to the plans

The Transport Group made major contributions to the Society's comments on Oxford's Economic Strategy and the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan. We were critical of the lack of any detailed targets and time-scales in both, or of any reference to LTP4, its predecessor.



Oxford's first zero emission zone was introduced in part of the city centre in 2022.

About the OIEP

Inequality affects many areas of residents' lives. The Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership has working groups looking at Educational Attainment, Place-based Interventions, Inclusive Employers and Social Value and Procurement.

Travel and transport matters

Andrew Pritchard reports on the Transport Group

We were one of the stakeholders in a plan to re-allocate space along the Woodstock Road, improving conditions for cyclists and walkers. We are dismayed that this project has been dropped for now.

We continued to be critical of the lack of any modelling or plans to assess the effects of introducing LTN's, 15-minute neighbourhoods or traffic filters. We suggested to the County Council that useful data might be obtained if the traffic filters were first trialled on the east side of the city.

We lamented the lack of information about changes to bus services and frequent changes to the proposed closure dates for the Botley Road while the railway bridge is rebuilt. Discussion with the project director failed to produce any overall plan other than relocating utilities in a new duct beneath the railway.

Tackling inequality

Gillian Coates on the Community Impact Group

We work alongside the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership, set up in 2021. OIEP has worked to launch an Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Charter and pledge scheme for businesses and residents to pledge commitment and resource to work on inequality. We saw this as an opportunity to engage with residents associations and community groups, to reach areas where we have no representation. Sadly our survey sent to city councillors produced a disappointing response so we had to rely on data collected by the Council in their own independent survey.

Happily the Charter was officially launched in January 2023 at the Old Fire Station, attended by over 100 organisations. We wait to see what emerges and whether the inequality that blights our city can start to be eroded.

Looking at the bigger picture

Ian Green on the Oxfordshire Futures Group

With its focus on strategic development planning in the city region, the Group enthusiastically supported the preparation of the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan, including preparing a major report on the integration of other strategic plans in Oxfordshire.

So we were astonished when work on the Plan was abandoned because agreement could not be reached on the countywide rate and distribution of employment and housing growth. We recommended alternative methods of achieving effective strategic planning: relying on the Duty to Co-operate is not likely to succeed.

A linked concern is infrastructure planning as evidence grows of inadequate and inappropriate strategic energy provision and wholly unsatisfactory sewage treatment capacity and management in the county.

The Group also carried out preliminary studies of the risks of a County Deal in Oxfordshire which could lead to the abolition of the city and district councils and the establishment of a Unitary County Council.

Sprucing up our city

Rosanne Bostock reports on OxClean

Our 15th annual Spring Clean ran over two weekends in March and brought out nearly 900 volunteers in 70 groups to do two-hour litter picks. Many areas of the city were spruced up – allotments, verges, alleyways, playgrounds, parks ... Our thanks to everyone who helped to run the event or took part.

We are very proud of this, our biggest community project, but regret that the message about dropping litter is not getting through to many. So we were pleased when the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme recognised litter as an environmental issue. We hope to get more schools and young people involved.

The green agenda

The Oxfordshire Futures Group is doing preliminary work on how the planning system might incorporate Zero Carbon ambitions.

Work on the station and the



Botley Road bridge is one of few infrastructure projects in the pipeline.



With thanks to our members and others for the use of their photos: Divinity Road Residents Association, Roger Grosvenor, Stephanie Jenkins, Pauline Massey, Roddy Maddocks

Income - £18,679
(£16,673 in 2021)

- Subscriptions/donations
£12,722
- Unrestricted legacy £1,000
- Visits/guided tours £1,927
- Gift Aid £1,832
- Rewilding film show £854
- Other £343

Expenditure - £11,542
(£10,102 in 2021)

- Newsletter £3,752
- Visits/walks £838
- Talks £2,953
- IT/website £608
- OxClean £1,002
- General publications £365
- Blue Plaques £459
- Donations and subscriptions
£525
- Rewilding film show £652
- Other £752

Surplus £ 7,137
(£4,819 in 2021)

General Fund Assets
£43,435

(£36,298 in 2021)

Restricted Fund Assets

£17,500

(£17,500 in 2021)

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.

Registered charity no. 1116739

Money matters in 2022

Richard Dodd, Hon Treasurer, summarises.

We received more income than expected in 2022 through the gift of an unrestricted legacy and a substantial donation. Our programme of visits and guided tours was popular following the lifting of coronavirus restrictions and, together with the screening of a rewilding film, led to an increase in both income and net income.

Increased expenditure resulted largely from the reintroduction of live talks and the costs of the programme of visits and guided tours. Our previously stolen litter pickers continued to be replaced during the year using money generated from a Just Giving campaign. £144 remains available for further replacements.

Final expenditure of the remaining £17,500 of the restricted legacy received in 2020 is expected in 2023. Consultations continue with Oxford Pedestrians Association.

Recurring items of expenditure, including our support for Blue Plaques, our membership of Civic Voice and our administrative costs, were broadly in line with 2021, resulting in a year end surplus of £7,137. **We are now well positioned to undertake an increased programme of project work in 2023.**

The full accounts are on the website, or please contact me for a copy at treasurer@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

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

**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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