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Lessons on balancing heritage and growth



New housing spreading out from Wells impacts on views of the iconic Glastonbury Tor. Heritage is so much more than individual buildings and streets.

Can growth be managed well in towns and cities where heritage needs special protection? A new study comes up with some practical answers, as Louise Thomas reports.

As we reported in *Visions* (July 2020), the Society has been involved in a study funded by Historic England, ***Towards a Better Balance between Heritage and Growth***. Led by the Historic Towns and Villages Forum (based at Kellogg College) with a nationwide group of civic society volunteers and consultants Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners, the project included interviews with civic societies, local planning authority officers and local councillors in twelve case study towns and cities: Canterbury, Chester, Chichester, Lancaster, Lichfield, Malvern, Oxford, Peterborough, Wakefield, Wells, Winchester and Worcester.

The aims were to produce practical, policy-based recommendations to help local authorities tackle the challenges of sustainable growth in relation to heritage and, importantly, to empower local communities to be part of this.

Legislation and policies protecting heritage tend to bite only at the level of the individual building, historic site or limited locality (e.g. a conservation area), but **there is no legislation devoted to historic towns and cities as a whole**. So many struggle to balance heritage, the demands of growth or the need for investment, or indeed what is most sustainable.

Following two years of Covid-interrupted civic society interviews and visits led by our Chair, Ian Green, the study was published last September and launched at Westminster. An extensive two-part report, it concludes with 40 recommendations for national government, Historic England, local planning authorities and civic societies. Some of the hard-hitting national recommendations match some of the Government's latest proposed re-thinking of the planning system on housing targets and include:

- Recognise that funding local authority staff and expertise is key to the conservation and growth of historic towns

Balancing growth and heritage (cont)

and cities. Without this, many decisions will continue to be made on an ad hoc basis eroding the very historic character upon which Britain's economic prosperity depends.

- Devise future house building algorithms to calculate housing numbers informed by the capacity of what can be absorbed locally.
- Promote the re-use of existing historic buildings to reinforce local character and respond to climate change.
- Ensure that the views of local communities are given more weight in the planning process by ensuring that planning procedures are better understood.

Knowing how the system works

A key finding that emerged was the widespread lack of understanding of the planning system and exactly when decisions are made about different issues. This is most evident when objections to planning applications seem in vain: many of the strategic issues that underpin them will have already been agreed in the course of reviewing and updating the Local Plan. This is a source of great frustration to both the public and councils. It demonstrates both the opportunities and benefits of getting involved in draft Local Plans and other guidance or briefs that can be adopted.

Coupled with ongoing funding cuts to planning, design and conservation staffing in councils, greater public involvement can mean the preparation of policies and plans which actively protect and benefit historic places. The study found great



Ian Green, Louise Thomas and consultant Jane Manning at the House of Commons launch of the report

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examples of this type of collaboration. Oxford City Council emerges well in the research as it learned the lessons of controversial past projects and now has an experienced planning, design and heritage team. Its array of guidance documents on climate change and local character are valuable examples of what other places can also do. We are grateful for their input into the project and their ongoing work.

But we know that our Society can do more by making people aware of how the planning system works, involving a wider audience in the city, and bringing the array of expertise available locally to projects that could be done collaboratively. The types of projects are shown in the report's Toolkit, which is also a timeline of the planning system from the start of the Local Plan review to developments being completed on site.

We are delighted that by initiating this research project we have met civic society colleagues nationwide and gained detailed insights into how other cities and towns work. **We would urge you to read the report*** to see how you can be more involved in our vital work of shaping Oxford.

**Download the report at www.htvf.org – see Current/News*

Louise Thomas

Louise is a member of our Executive Committee and Director of the Historic Towns and Villages Forum

Will the next Local Plan fit the bill?

Ian Green reports on the challenge for the City Council

The City Council is starting work on the Local Plan 2040. This will guide the Council's planning decisions on where new homes, businesses and community facilities will be built – so it's vital that it offers a sound strategy.

There are three 'elephants in the room' – the big issues which this Local Plan needs to deal with: the rate and pace of employment and housing growth in Oxfordshire; the role of the city in mitigating climate change; and development funding. To deal with them properly, the planners need to work effectively with neighbouring local planning authorities and other agencies. Currently the mechanism for this is through a Duty to Co-operate.

Housing: where, when, how much?

Housing needs and provision is one of the top issues that the Local Plan must address and where the duty to co-operate is essential. The National Planning Policy Framework states that authorities must work to address housing needs within their housing market area. It also expects authorities to co-operate on meeting one another's housing needs if they cannot be accommodated within the authority where they arise.

If you have a sense of déjà vu it's because the City Council was working jointly on this with neighbouring authorities to produce the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. But no more. Part of the evidence base for that plan included the Oxfordshire Growth Needs Assessment, which set out scenarios for housing and employment growth. The local planning authorities have said they will continue to work together to assign housing requirements across the county according to an agreed spatial strategy. This is a huge commitment but it is not at all clear how it can be achieved through the Duty to Co-operate when it was not achievable when central government was dangling the possibility of major grants in front of them!

Employment: securing our economic future

The Local Plan needs to ensure that the city can continue to play its role in the local and national economy. The City Council is a board member of the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) which has developed the Oxfordshire Local Industrial Strategy (LIS) in partnership with the business community, academic institutions and the other Oxfordshire local authorities. In 2014 it also signed a City Deal with partners and the government to bring around £55.5 million of government funding (over £1.2 billion including private finance) to be used locally to boost innovation and business growth, create jobs and help secure Oxfordshire's place as a world leader in technology, knowledge and expertise.

Close working with the other Oxfordshire authorities and the LEP will be required in this area. However, Oxford's reach as a location for jobs goes beyond the county and will therefore require co-operation with a wide range of local authorities and other bodies.

Provision of retail, leisure and other commercial development in Oxford city centre plays an important sub-regional role and co-operation with neighbouring authorities is essential as current and future populations will not shop exclusively in their own areas, but will travel to others. An update of the retail and leisure study is likely to be commissioned to understand likely need in the plan period.

Mitigating climate change

Managing flood risk will be a key element of Oxford's climate change mitigation plans, involving the Environment Agency, Oxfordshire County Council and neighbouring authorities. Carbon reduction and associated emissions and air quality issues also play a part in preparing the city for changes relating to climate change. Is climate change given enough emphasis in the Draft Local Plan options?

Funding the ambitions

It would be helpful to have funding options included in the assessment of preferred options, both sources of funds and the likelihood of funding being available given that, in the medium term, public spending cuts are expected.

Our working groups will be scrutinising the draft Plan as it proceeds. The Plan needs to be submitted to the Secretary of State in 2024 and we'll keep you posted on opportunities to comment. Read more on the City Council's website:

www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20067/planning_policy/1460/oxford_local_plan_2040



The Institute of Developmental and Regenerative Medicine is the latest new development on the University's Old Road campus. This campus supports dozens of centres at the cutting edge of medical sciences, including those working on vaccines. Photo courtesy of Roger Grosvenor

As I see it ... our future lies in science

Richard Venables salutes the city's innovators

In the second of a series of opinion pieces by our Vice Presidents, Richard Venables examines what's driving the remarkable growth in our city region.

You may have noticed that several new planning applications to the City Council seek to provide laboratory or innovation space in Oxford. These include land at Oxpens, Arc Oxford (previously Oxford Business Park), the Oxford Science Park and the DFS retail warehouse on the Botley Road. But what's driving this new development and is it a good thing for us all?

Our region has been one of the big winners in the otherwise bleak times of the Covid pandemic. The 'Oxford' vaccine has re-affirmed Oxford as a world-leading research centre with Oxford University being not only the world's top-ranked university for an unprecedented seven years but also No.1 for medical teaching and research for the last 12 years.

After a slow start, Oxford University is now commercialising its research and development at a steady pace of approximately 20 new companies per year for the last seven years. Some of these companies have been growing at a phenomenal rate with £billions being raised to support their growth. As a result, the demand for lab space has increased and developers are now reacting to this demand. Over the last five years many redundant offices have been repurposed as labs which shortened the speed of delivery while also saving on construction costs. The construction of purpose-built labs has now become economically viable and investors are keen to pour money in.

The technology coming out of Oxford isn't just focused on life sciences but also includes artificial intelligence, quantum computing, engineering, social sciences and space science. Many such businesses require standard offices or flexible manufacturing space and many developers are focusing on these areas. Office space is now scarce in the city centre and demand is high for businesses wanting to be close to the universities and the pool of postgraduate talent.

University-built innovation space at Begbroke Science Park

Photo courtesy of Roddy Maddocks



Some might say, "Why not redirect growth to other areas as part of the levelling up agenda?", but science and innovation enterprises develop around research bodies such as our great universities. Scientists also like to remain close to each other as collaboration is key to scientific discovery.

Facing difficult economic times, the government sees science and innovation businesses as growth opportunities. Oxfordshire is one of the few areas which is a net contributor to the Treasury. There also appears to be some renewed government interest in the Oxford/ Cambridge Arc.

Reasons to be cheerful

Not everyone welcomes growth but for others this is a time of opportunity and I believe we are at the start of a significant transformation and renaissance of Oxford as a place to live and work in. New energy-efficient buildings will improve the urban environment and huge numbers of jobs will be created, benefiting not just postgrads but also others in supporting jobs and spinoff companies. There are of course challenges to be met in providing housing, transport and infrastructure to support this growth – which is why our Society matters.

The West End of the city is likely to change beyond all recognition in the next decade led by the redevelopment of the train station, Frideswide Square, Hythe Bridge Street, Park End Street, Oxpens and Osney Mead. Expanded rail services will provide sustainable travel from a wide area while the opening of the Cowley Branch line would see that area transformed with further job opportunities.

I believe there has also been a sea change in how business, the universities and other local bodies recognise that growth must be meaningful to all. In January the new Oxford Inclusive Economic Partnership launched a charter and invited pledges from businesses and others to work collectively to reduce socio-economic disparity within the county. The biggest change is that Oxford University and the new Vice Chancellor are front and centre of this initiative.

Oxford is often slow to evolve as we like things the way they are but the commercialisation of scientific innovation has always been at the core of our city. Labs and innovation spaces are just the next generational shift which have the potential to offer opportunities for all.

Richard Venables is Head of the Oxford office of CBRE, global property advisors, and our link with the local business community. A keen hockey player, Richard is also involved in sports provision for young people.

We were sorry to learn that Tony Joyce, our longest-serving Vice President and former Chair, is unwell. We send Tony our warmest best wishes.

Some welcomes, some regrets

Gillian Coates reports on the Planning Group

A mixed bag of news on planning matters ...

We were pleased to welcome a **new Head of Planning** for the city, David Butler, and greatly enjoyed a face-to-face meeting with him to hear about his vision for the city. But we still await a decision on whether we are to be allowed involvement with the **Design Review Panel**.

We are somewhat underwhelmed by the current installation on **Broad Street**. A shared space for pedestrians and cyclists is widely supported but we feel the design is unambitious and not acceptable for such a beautiful space. *What do readers think?* Do send us your views.

A decision on the **Covered Market** is pending and we look forward to this long-awaited regeneration. There is clearly an interest in renting the units but we hope that the space will truly function as a market and not simply become another fast-food hall.

The provision of **affordable housing**, for either purchase or rent, is a perennial concern and we continued to challenge

developers and the Council to build more. So we were delighted to note the opening of The Curve on Between Towns Road in Cowley which provides 38 affordable homes. The development was undertaken by Ox Place, the City Council's housing company, on the former Murco garage site. We were equally pleased to see new homes for hospital staff on the **Churchill Hospital site**, built by a housing association. The Churchill site is very badly used and there is scope for much more housing for key workers.

New homes designated for hospital staff on the Churchill Hospital site

Photo courtesy of Roger Grosvenor



Transport plans: working out the impacts

The Transport Group has much to consider, as Andrew Pritchard reports

Transport plans and ideas are coming thick and fast but are the impacts clearly understood?

The Group is divided in its views on **Low Traffic Neighbourhoods**, like the general public, but unanimous that modelling and measurements should be made before and after their introduction, to assess their effects on traffic levels along adjacent roads. A largely unaddressed question is whether **15-minute neighbourhoods** should have connecting roads running through them or at their peripheries.

Recent new developments have too often been based on **cul-de sacs and distributor roads** (as in North Abingdon and Grove, for example), which are wasteful of land and almost guarantee that most transport will be by car rather than by active travel methods or public transport. A grid system is both easier to understand and offers far better connectivity.

In the case of developments at **Didcot**, we are objecting to the planned **HIF1 (Housing Infrastructure Fund) road***, because it segregates roads from development rather than embedding a connecting road for the planned new housing. It isolates facilities directly served by the road, thus almost guaranteeing a car-based community. We are also concerned that it may become a bypass connecting the A34 and M40 east of Oxford. *Read more at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/didcot

A similar lack of modelling and measurement applies to the introduction of the proposed **traffic filters** to reduce traffic through the city centre. We have suggested that, in view of changes proposed to the closure dates for the Botley Road, introduction of these on the eastern side of the city only should be considered for an experimental period. This would enable measurements of their effects on city traffic to be made independently of the proposed filters on the western side, for which it will be impossible to gather reliable data while the Botley Road is closed. We believe that the proportion of traffic crossing the city from east to west (and vice versa) is small and thus would have little effect on any results.

We are aghast at the apparent lack of coordination between Network Rail and the County over the plans for traffic on the **Botley Road** while the railway bridge is rebuilt. Proposed closure dates are still not fixed and a recent public consultation failed to provide any overall timing plan or transport provisions for the general public while the road is closed. However, the consultation did show the complexity of the utilities and services beneath the road. It is proposed to excavate a new tunnel beneath the railway, into which ducts will be inserted to carry them. In view of the frequent road works in the city to repair services, this seems to be a process that could be used more widely.

OCS Calendar

'Cut out and keep'

March – July 2023

*ticketed events

Tuesday 21 March

AGM 7.30pm
Talk 8pm

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

Rewley House

Wednesday 26 April* 2pm

Oxford Brookes' Headington campus, a tour led by Sir Clive Booth

Thursday 11 May 8pm

Felicia Skene: prison reformer, a talk by Liz Woolley

Magdalen College Auditorium

Wednesday 31 May 6pm

NOTE EARLIER TIME

Oxfordshire on the Home Front 1914-18, a talk by Stephen Barker

Rewley House

Wednesday 14 June 8pm

Oxford's railways: where are we heading? A talk by Nigel Fulford

Magdalen College Auditorium

Tuesday 20 June* 2pm

Rousham House and Gardens

Tuesday 27 June 8pm

Cleaning up our waterways: the Windrush, a talk by Ash Smith

Rewley House

Wednesday 5 July* 10.30am

Exploring Chimney Meadows, a walk led by Lisa Lane, BBOWT

Thursday 13 July* 2pm

Museum of Natural History, a tour led by Chris Jarvis

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 our website www.oxcivicsoc.org.uk/programme/ and click on 'visits & guided tours' 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 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 need to join.



Event	Price
Exploring Oxford Brookes' Headington Hill Hall campus Wednesday 26 April, 2pm	£8
Rousham House and Gardens Tuesday 20 June, 2pm	£22
<i>Please note the cost of this tour is set by Rousham House</i>	
Exploring Chimney Meadows: a walk Wednesday 5 July, 10.30am	£8
Oxford University Museum of Natural History: a tour Thursday 13 July, 2pm	£8



Programme April – July 2023

Talks – all welcome

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

Felicia Skene: prison reformer and friend to the poor

Thursday 11 May, 8pm

Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street

Local historian Liz **Woolley** tells the story of Felicia Skene (1821-99), considered by many in Victorian Oxford to be a 'local saint'. Skene devoted herself to improving the lives of the poor, rescuing vagrants from their "eminently unsatisfactory existence" and girls from prostitution. The first woman in England to be officially appointed as a prison visitor, she was a tireless advocate for prison reform, both in the practical help she gave to inmates in Oxford's gaols and through her prodigious writing.

Oxfordshire on the Home Front 1914-18

Wednesday 31 May, 6pm (NOTE EARLIER TIME)



Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square

Military historian **Stephen Barker** will explain the impact of the First World War on the towns and countryside of Oxfordshire. His talk will focus on fundraising and charitable events, munitions production, recruitment, the effects upon women and children, the fear of invasion and the influx of Belgian refugees.

The future of our railways: the Society's perspective

Wednesday 14 June, 8pm

Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall Street

Nigel Fulford from our Transport Group will describe the impact of current railway developments. Work at Oxford station will allow for more trains to run, a new west entrance to the station and improved routes for pedestrians and cyclists under the Botley Road rail bridge. The construction of a new east-west railway is well under way and will link Oxford directly to Milton Keynes and the West Coast main line. How can this new rail capacity be used to best advantage? What issues need to be considered for further development of the station and links into the city?

Cleaning up our waterways: the Windrush campaign

Tuesday 27 June, 8pm

Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square

Windrush Against Sewage Pollution volunteers investigate the pollution of the Windrush and her sister rivers. WASP Founder **Ash Smith** will relate how their team discovered that untreated sewage was being dumped into the water, sometimes in huge quantities and for long periods of time. This is not just of local significance but for the UK as a whole, as evidenced by the high profile of the campaign in the national media.

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.

Exploring Oxford Brookes' Headington Hill Hall campus

Wednesday 26 April, 2pm

Accompanied by a university officer, our President, **Sir Clive Booth**, will be our uniquely well-qualified guide on this tour of Oxford Brookes' campus. Sir Clive will explain the history of the acquisition of the site lease during his time as Vice Chancellor, will lead a tour of the Hall and give an overview of the Student Village site redevelopment and the Hamilton building.

Rousham House and Gardens

Tuesday 20 June, 2pm

This guided tour is an opportunity to see inside this historic house, built in 1635 by Sir Robert Dormer and still owned by the same family. The house interior will be familiar to viewers of the recent BBC adaptation of *The Pursuit of Love*. Afterwards, visitors can wander the William Kent landscaped garden and the walled garden.



Exploring Chimney Meadows: a walk

Wednesday 5 July 10.30am

To mark National Meadows Day, we will explore Chimney Meadows National Nature Reserve, near Bampton, led by **Lisa Lane** (Upper Thames Living Landscape Manager for Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust). As well as seeing the internationally-important floodplain meadows, we will cross several meadows created using seed from the NNR and hear about the restoration of the floodplain habitats. This two-hour long walk will require stout footwear, sun hat and insect repellent!



Oxford University Museum of Natural History: a tour

Thursday 13 July, 2pm

A one-hour, behind-the-scenes tour of a museum which holds an internationally-significant collection of natural history specimens. Led by **Chris Jarvis**, Education Officer, we will hear about the first major changes to the displays in more than 20 years, as well as some of the museum's history to help contextualise these changes.

Blue Plaques in 2022 and our AGM

Eda Forbes of the Blue Plaques Board reports on seven new plaques unveiled across the county last year.

Last year we honoured **two Nobel Laureates**: **Sir Charles Sherrington** (1857–1952), OM, FRS, Waynflete Professor of Physiology, at 9 Chadlington Road where he lived from 1916–1934. His ground-breaking work in neurophysiology was seminal to understanding the central nervous system. **Nikolaas Tinbergen** (1907–1988), FRS, ethologist, lived at 88 Lonsdale Road, Summertown from 1956–1988. He pioneered the close study of animal behaviour, a new branch of zoology.

We highlighted three remarkable women: **Mabel Purefoy FitzGerald** (1872–1973), intrepid physiologist, at 12 Crick Road, her home from 1897–1973. She joined J S Haldane's expedition to Pike's Peak in Colorado in 1910, travelling alone often by mule to measure high altitude adaptation in the local population. As a woman scientist ahead of her time, she was constantly thwarted when she sought formal degree recognition. She was finally awarded an Oxford Hon MA at the age of 100.

Mary McMaster (1914–2004), physiotherapist and visionary founder of St Luke's Home in Linton Road (1956) and later of St Luke's Hospital (1982) in Latimer Road and the sheltered housing at McMaster House (1984) where the plaque is installed. Motivated by profound Christian faith, she leaves an important legacy in health and social care.

Alice Batt (1889–1969), heroic VAD in WWI, awarded the Albert Medal (equivalent to the George Cross) for saving life at Rousbrugge in Belgium in 1918, was commemorated at Batt House, 16 Market Square, Witney, home also to five generations of Batt surgeons and benefactors.

In West Oxfordshire we also honoured **Aelfric Grammaticus** (c.950–1010), first Abbot of Eynsham, scholar, teacher and most prolific writer of Old English, at the Bartholomew Room on the Square at Eynsham. Local children welcomed a chance to dress up!



A plaque at Beecham's Cottage, Curbridge, marks the birthplace of **Thomas Beecham** (1820–1907), manufacturer of patent medicines. A poor country boy tending sheep at the age of eight, he rose from rags to riches and fame through his knowledge of herbs, hard work and an astute business acumen. Sir Thomas Beecham, the conductor, was his grandson.

With thanks to Stephanie Jenkins for the photograph.

AGM and talk Tuesday 21 March 7.30pm

Our 54th AGM will be held at Rewley House in Wellington Square followed by a talk at 8pm by the City Council's new CEO, Caroline Green. Do join us!

Please have this agenda with you along with the Annual Review of 2022 which was mailed with this newsletter. The Review is our report to members.

Copies of the minutes of the 2022 AGM and the full accounts for 2022 are available on the website or from me: Vernon Porter, Hon Secretary, email: info@oxcivicsoc.org.uk, 67 Cunliffe Close, Oxford OX2 7BJ

Agenda

- 1 President's welcome
- 2 Apologies for absence
- 3 Minutes of AGM held on 22 March 2022
- 4 Matters arising from the minutes
- 5 Annual report
- 6 Accounts for 2022
- 7 Vote of thanks to retiring Officers and Trustees
- 8 Election of Officers for 2023-24
- 9 Election of Committee Members for 2023-24
- 10 Any other business of which notice has been given

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

Membership costs £15 (£25 for two people at the same address) with concessions for students and residents associations. Corporate rates on application.

You can join online or contact Liz Grosvenor at membership@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

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Letters to the Editor and photos can be sent to Hilary Bradley newsletter@oxcivicsoc.org.uk



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