

Planning for the future

Gillian Coates, OCS Vice Chair



Oxford Central West, one of the most underdeveloped parts of the city, with great potential for coordinated planning (see pages 6-7)

On Tuesday 10 October, Oxford Civic Society was delighted to welcome David Butler, Head of Planning at Oxford City Council. David has been in post since January 2023, and the large audience that gathered in the Lecture Hall at Rewley House was keen to hear about the challenges he has faced in his initial 9 months of appointment and his Vision for the City. David has an interesting background: he studied Ancient History and Classical Archaeology at the University of Warwick, followed by a Master's in Spatial Planning at Oxford Brookes. Prior to his current role he worked for Coventry City Council as Head of Planning Policy, and held a variety of Planning and Economic Development roles within Warwick District Council. So, a wealth of experience to help him face the challenges that Oxford presents and the inordinate quagmire of process bureaucracy, political meddling and constant legislative changes.

Where are we now?

David thought that Oxford City was in a reasonable position, but added the caveats that since 2010 we have had 15 housing ministers and 7 major consultations in two years. He likened the demands on local government to the labour of Sisyphus: just when you think you're at the top, you find yourself back at the foot of the legislative hill and must begin again!

Planners, like estate agents, get a bad press, but there was some sympathy from the audience relating to the ever

changing face of planning legislation. Just considering the manifesto offerings from the political parties, local government officers and officials need to run to catch up. All this while funding from central government diminishes, the filling of vacancies for planners in the various agencies is suspended and existing staff are faced with a growing workload.



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Planning for the future (cont)

So where is the government taking us?

Planning is on the agenda of all the political parties, and housing looms large in the rhetoric (see Peter Thompson's article on page 4). But what is the Levelling Up Regeneration Bill (or LURB)? On the government website it is described as

'A Bill to make provision for the setting of levellingup missions and reporting on progress in delivering them; about local democracy; about town and country planning; about Community Infrastructure Levy; about the imposition of Infrastructure Levy; about environmental outcome reports for certain consents and plans; about regeneration; about the compulsory purchase of land; about information and records relating to land, the environment or heritage; for the provision for pavement licences to be permanent; about governance of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors; about vagrancy and begging; and for connected purposes.'

<https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3155>

David focused on a few elements of the Bill and what they could mean for us:

National Development Management Policies: NDMPs will simplify the system and make it more rules-based, making it easier for councils to agree shorter and more locally-focused local plans, for developers to navigate the planning system, and for residents to have greater certainty about what it and isn't allowed.

Plan making: The Government's White Paper plans to overhaul the planning process and build homes more quickly, by cutting the plan-making process down from seven years on average to 30 months.

Duty to cooperate and the infrastructure levy: Nothing has yet been defined.

Local Nutrient Mitigation: A new fund to enable and accelerate the delivery of projects, providing nutrient mitigation to support sustainable development. Any reader interested in the detail should go to

<https://www.local.gov.uk/pas/topics/environment/nutrient-neutrality-and-planning-system>

Oxford Local Plan 2040

Considerable work is ongoing to produce the 2040 Local Plan: so many times the Council has produced, then revised a Plan, with endless public consultations taking place over the last several years. The duty to cooperate across five districts is fraught with disputes on housing numbers and where to build – questions that concern densification, protection of the Green Belt and protection of Oxford conservation areas. These are all considerations that must be addressed, and of course are the hardest to agree upon.

David described the pathway towards the first draft of the Oxford Local Plan 2040, which sets out the Vision for the city and has 5 stated top priorities:

- build more affordable homes
- make Oxford's economy work for all residents
- tackle the climate emergency
- support stronger communities
- protect and enhance heritage

If agreed, the Local Plan will become the legal document that underpins decision-making on all planning applications in Oxford (replacing the existing Oxford Local Plan 2036). The Council consulted with residents and organisations last year and used the comments from 1,730 respondents across two consultation rounds to draft the new document. The draft Local Plan 2040 will be discussed at OCC Cabinet meeting, and if approved it will go out to public consultation – look out for news and respond to the consultation when it opens – potentially between November 2023 and January 2024.

The digital presence

Keeping abreast and implementing improvements and innovations are essential for the management, administration and effectiveness of the planning process. Even if this is an issue that the audience were less concerned about, it was still interesting to learn about advances in technology – system renewal, advanced GIS, AI Consultation and ChatGPT. It was suggested that the application of technology could improve the planning experience and go some way towards overcoming the critical shortage of well-trained /qualified human planning officers!

Questions from the audience

The main topics raised related to the Vision for Oxford: the imbalance between the provision of commercial space (offices, research labs, hotels) versus the creation of homes for those who live and work in the city, i.e. a need to regenerate the centre. People suggested opportunities for the conversion of empty spaces: if more people live in the city it would be revitalised, local businesses would improve, and a need to commute by car to work in the city could be drastically reduced. Then people queried policy relating to the protection of conservation areas, and better engagement with neighbourhood planning: in Oxford there are only 4 in place, whereas there are 90 in the county.

Inevitably time ran out, but see more responses to the Plan in the article by Randell and Rowland that follows; and there will be more opportunities for discussion in our future programme of talks.



Response to Oxford Local Plan 2040

Geoffrey Randell and Jon Rowland

In 2003, the Oxford Civic Society published its 'Visions for Oxford in the 21st Century', a fascinating read that set out a diverse range of views on the directions that OCS envisaged for the city. Some 10 years later, the OCS promoted 'Oxford Futures', a more direct appraisal of the future, with a strategic plan for the area that looked at Oxford as it operated as a city region, comprising a 'hub and spoke' arrangement rather than a series of separate political elements. In 2014 Oxford was identified in the Wolfson Economic Prize winners' proposals. These built on the OCS work and showed that the Oxford region could achieve much. Looking at the last 10 years, some of that document's suggestions seem to have been taken on board. Now, on the 20th anniversary of the initial vision, OCS has been challenged by the City Council to give its views on today's city centre and city vision.

The Local Plan 2040, a voluminous document, sets out a series of positive visions that include:

- A healthy inclusive city with strong communities that benefit from equal opportunities in access to housing, nature, social and leisure opportunities and healthcare,
- Continuing advances in life sciences and low carbon sectors, helping to provide solutions to global crisis,
- A strong cultural identity, respectful of heritage, whilst maximising opportunities to innovate, learn and enable businesses to prosper,
- The environment as central in all that we do; it will be more biodiverse, better connected and resilient. The city will be net zero carbon.

Some vision! But how to get there?

There are some fundamental questions, like governance; integration of decision-making by competing organisations; lack of resources, skills and empowerment that seem less developed. Many aspects of vision are hindered by these issues. Maybe we at OCS could also suggest the issue of family housing, crucial to the life and community in the heart of the city. Should we also take a deep breath and say that there is an immense amount of talent in this city – a city that has helped give the world a vaccine against Covid and malaria, but can't fill potholes or envision physical improvement to how the city works? And how can the university and colleges be brought into contributing to the city's environmental well-being?

There would seem to be no collective vision and no narrative to get there. How does OCC answer the question of what sort of city we want to live in? How does one deal with the divisive social and economic nature of its inhabitants? How does one deal with the physical implications? These are the initial steps to a Vision, not with words which can be meaningless unless there are clear directions to that end.

For instance, a strategy for movement in the central area should indicate how it fits into a bigger picture and is not just established without context. That might help ensure public buy-in and determine how we create places, spaces and links, rather than just LTNs. In addition, we must consider Broad Street, the future of Debenhams, the Odeons on George Street and Magdalen Street, the route from the new station, the plan for the West End or stadium. Without an overall strategy, these crucial areas might be irreconcilable with the words of the local plan.

So, what can OCS do to help the City Council?

- Maybe we could hold workshops with both Councillors and officers of the various councils, by helping to influence the development of Oxford as a city where people enjoy living, working and visiting;
- Perhaps work with both universities and colleges helping them step up to the plate and contribute to the improvement of the city, in conjunction with residents' associations;
- Review relevant proposals and plans and put forward some strategic thinking, whether about fiscal, health, movement, environmental, community, business, digital, governance or planning related issues, and quality/resilience;
- Perhaps also OCS could become more representative of the city's population;
- Update the previous strategy and publish a new contribution to the City Council's call for ideas.

That way we could help establish what roles the City and the City Centre will play in the future, rather than just commenting on projects where the parameters have already been set. After all, for OCS: appreciating our past, enjoying the present and pursuing a vision for the future are at the heart of what we do.



Some great signage spotted by Geoffrey around town!

Housing – the biggest issue

Peter Thompson, Vice President of Oxford Civic Society

In July this year Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Levelling Up, declared: *“Our health, our happiness, our prosperity, our productivity – all depend on where we live.”* Which is what many of us have been pointing out for years. One does wonder, therefore, why for decades national housing policy has prioritised profit and financial gain for landowners and speculative developers over genuine design quality in urban planning and architecture.

Perhaps, at long last, the steady stream of critiques of government policy and recommendations for remedies is getting through – things can’t go on like this indefinitely. Even the Home Builders Federation, in a recent analysis of how the UK compares internationally, declared: *“The UK housing market is reaching a state of crisis ... a situation where housing is now out of reach for far too many in this country.”*

Whilst most of the rhetoric around housing focuses on the need to build more homes, in truth it is their unaffordability which is the bigger social and economic problem. As Danny Dorling has pointed out, not even university professors, let alone key teachers, health professionals or skilled and unskilled technicians, can afford to live in this city.

But homes are not unaffordable for all; according to Rightmove around 37,000 property transactions took place in Oxford in the last year, with an average price of around £635,000. To a degree, therefore, the issue is of wealth inequality, a subject extending well beyond housing policy. More relevant to the housing crisis is the ideology of reliance on private enterprise and the market as the principal delivery vehicle; selfevidently, this has not worked in a market which is

far from ‘free’, where purchases are geographically constrained and non-discretionary, supply is limited and dominated by a handful of major developers, and in the context of huge wealth inequality. The near exclusion of not-for-profit development (by local councils or housing associations) and disposal of such assets over the last 50 years has greatly exacerbated the situation.

Recovery is not going to come quickly, or without some radical action. It has been suggested (by Martin Wolff and others) that this would need to include:

- removal from the National Planning Policy Framework of the priority of financial viability over Local Plan policy;
- authority and funding freedoms for Local Authorities for compulsory purchase of land at genuine existing-use value;
- uplift in land values emanating from development consent to be shared between landowners and infrastructure providers (Local Authorities);
- taxation on land, not buildings; and
- empowerment of Local Authorities (or statutory non-profit organisations) to build and retain affordable homes.

In the current heightening political tension as we approach a general election, it will be interesting to see how policies are revealed for dealing with what has been frequently described as the biggest issue currently facing the country.



Transport – restoring the vision

Louise Thomas, OCS Executive member and independent urban designer

As OCS members will be aware, a number of traffic management measures are being proposed, piloted and developed in the city, which have drawn the attention of all manner of media commentators.

With Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) in place in East Oxford, Oxford City Council is also proposing to introduce: a Workplace Parking Levy, six trial traffic filters, a city centre Zero Emission Zone (ZEV), and 15 Minute Neighbourhoods (as the basis for the Draft Local Plan 2040). While many readers may not be fans of each, or any, of these ideas for personal or business reasons, this combination of proposals is intended to radically reorganise Oxford's dysfunctional movement network to encourage more walking, cycling and public transport use.



Despite what we might read elsewhere, using the idea of 15-minute walkable neighbourhoods as a structuring principle for town planning is nothing new, and it is a laudable aim. In fact it should 'level up' Oxford's different communities, or as the City Council describes, '*ensure that every resident has all the essentials (shops, healthcare, parks) within a 15-minute walk of their home... to support and add services, not restrict them.*' This is proactive town planning, rather than being led by market forces alone.

Writing in the Urban Design Group's journal *Urban Design* this autumn, Councillor Louise Upton describes the city's ambition to become a net zero carbon city by 2040 and that

transport is key to achieving this; yet how many people really engaged in the ideas when they were first consulted in 2019? It is widely acknowledged that public engagement in strategic plan-making is poor. In the same publication, the former Vice Mayor of Vienna, Maria Vassilakou, writes about radical changes that have been made with community involvement in Vienna's streets and public spaces to increase people's quality of life, contributing to it being one of the most liveable cities globally. And the proof is in the pudding, as the photos show.



Mariahilferstrasse: before



Mariahilferstrasse: after

But what we are missing in Oxford is a vision that speaks to everyone and brings everyday life and logic to otherwise well-intentioned proposals, and heals the rifts that have developed. The carrots (i.e. benefits) must be far bigger than the sticks (restrictions), to make it easier to see how everyone's lives would change for the better, rather than expect us to hope that future enhancements will fill in the gaps in the story so far.

Transport – Oxford Central West

Andrew Pritchard, Convenor of the OCS Transport Group

As the mud beneath the Botley Road railway bridge gets deeper, and travellers get wetter waiting for westdeparting buses by Osney Island, let us recall what the Botley Road works are aiming to achieve, and what the Transport Group and other members of the Society put forward in the last decade.

The current works are designed (a) for Network Rail to run a fifth track across the Botley Road on the west side, prepare for a sixth track on the eastern side for a new station, to

provide a new western entrance to the existing station, and space beneath the existing tracks to put some ballast beneath them on the bridge for smoother running; (b) to excavate the road so that the full headroom is provided for standard buses and other vehicles; (c) to provide much-needed 4-metre-wide combined pedestrian and cycle ways on both sides of the road from Becket Street to Mill Street, replacing the narrow tunnel on the south side and the even narrower pavement beneath the north side of the bridge.



We have for several years recommended that any works around the station should take note of the huge redevelopments proposed in what we call West Central Oxford: Oxpens, Osney Mead, the station area and the 'island site' between Hythe Bridge Street and Park End Street, and ensure that they are integrated with each other and the rest of central Oxford. We need to avoid the mistakes made on the Castle site, which is separated from the city physically by the wide Castle Street, and socially by the almost completely blank western face of Westgate. Furthermore, we believe strongly that the railway station should be at the centre of Oxford's main transport hub, relieving much of the historic centre of the other bus stations that disfigure our unique cultural heritage.

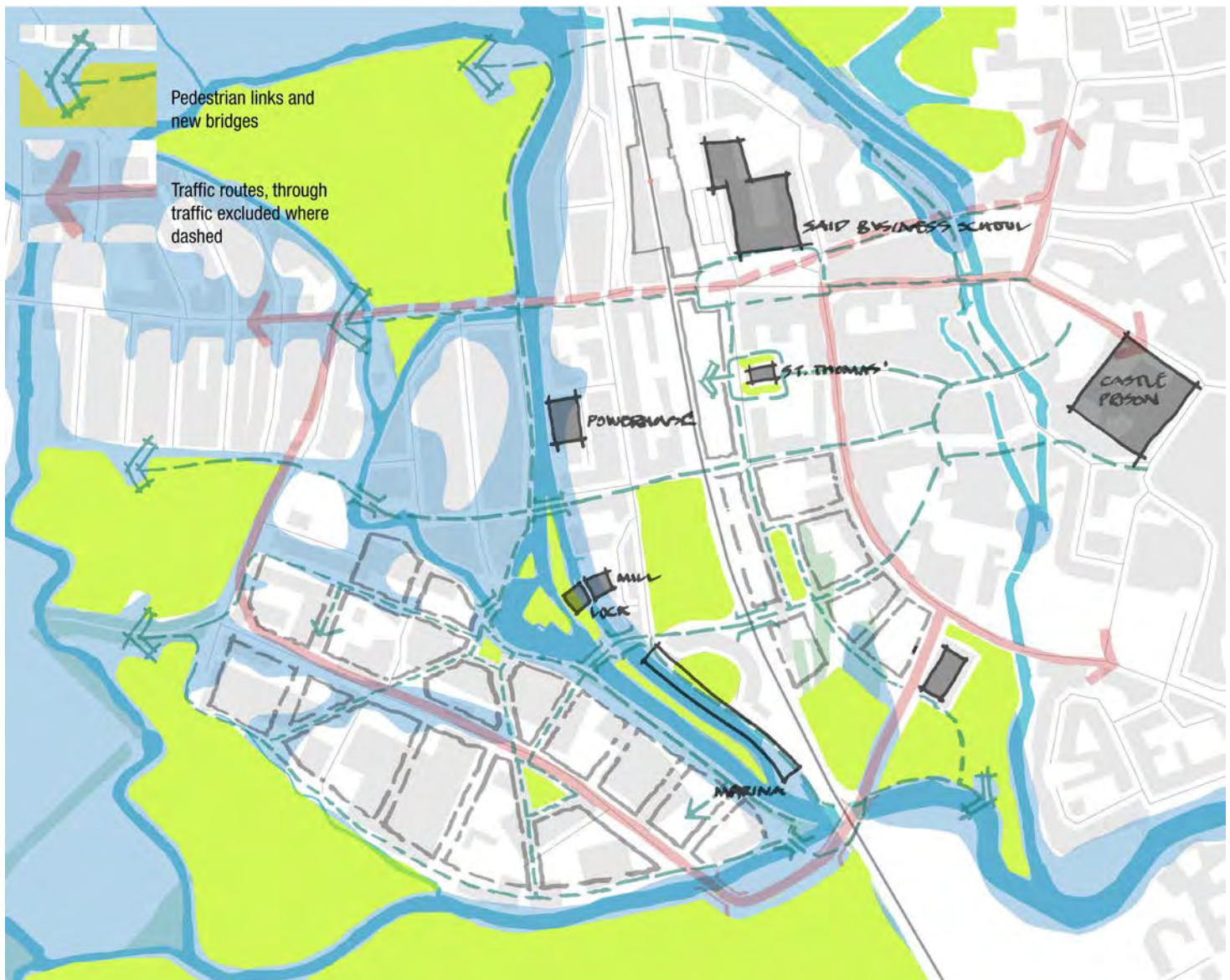


Transport – Oxford Central West (cont)

We suggested a new road from Oxpens Road along the southern end of the Oxpens site, crossing both railway and the river, and joining up with the central avenue of Osney Mead, which will become an important residential area instead of an industrial zone. This could be further extended across the flood plain to the retail parks at the western end of the Botley Road, providing good connections between Westgate, Oxpens and Osney Mead, as well as from the west, and a much safer route for pedestrians and cyclists, avoiding the Botley Road pinch points between Mill Street and Binsey Lane. Its use could be limited to active travel and public transport, except in the cases when the Botley Road has restricting roadworks. It would be a key part of an east west rapid transit tramway, which we believe could offer a step change in Oxford's public transport network.

The station works currently in progress will provide none of this.

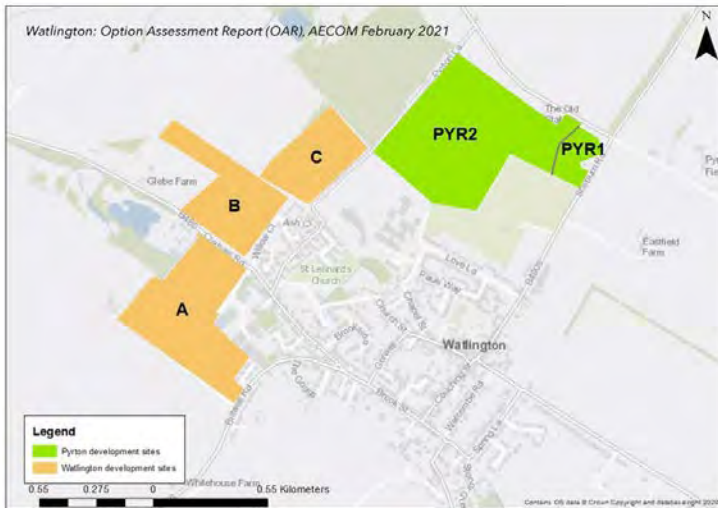
The decision to prepare for a sixth track across the Botley Road suggests that Arup's 2002-04 proposal for a new station on the station car park, which did not envisage the new bridge, and which we strongly supported, could be revisited. It could be built with much less surrounding disruption than expanding on the present station site, which requires the sixth track to run through the existing station hall, and reducing the forecourt area. It could also be accessed from our proposed Oxpens Osney Mead road.



Transport – The Watlington Relief Road

Graham Smith, urban designer, member of OCS Transport Group

This is an important case study, because it exemplifies the attitudes of Oxfordshire Highways authority countywide, especially where new development sites are concerned but also in all other interventions. In this case study we are looking at the proposal for development sites around Watlington, Oxfordshire.



Proposed development sites in Watlington and Pyton

The County introduction to the Watlington project states: "Its aim is to alleviate congestion, noise and air pollution in the town centre and enable future housing developments in the vicinity of Watlington by offering more sustainable modes of transport including public transport, cycling and walking."¹

This is indeed a sentence of two halves:

Yes: A new road to the north-west will be an alternative for many motor vehicle journeys and so could reduce the passage of vehicles and congestion in the old centre.

Yes: The road does give access to new housing sites.

No: The propensity to induce traffic otherwise deterred by congestion is not adequately considered.

No: The 'offer' of cycling provisions is naive. Located only on the south side of the new road and (in this version) with limited connectivity into the areas of housing or even across the road. As shown, the journey by bike is almost as constrained as the journey by car.

No: Walking permeability, whilst effusively indicated, fails even to reach nearby St Leonard's Church, let alone the centre of Watlington.

No: There is little prospect of additional public transport accessibility.

The cause of the limited permeability is the impenetrable nature of the cul-de-sac developments to the west of Watlington, a result of 1970s road layout guidance.² The claim then in 'DB32' was to make better places to live, with less traffic, by using culs-de-sac, and separating passing traffic onto a limited access Distributor Road. But the unforeseen consequence for the resulting pods of development, often residential 'single use', is an inevitable maximisation of car use by making other destinations more distant and therefore less desirable to reach by active travel modes.

Despite that national guidance being withdrawn in 2007,³ the belief in a disconnected layout, with separated Distributor Roads, continues unabated today. Oxfordshire Highways is one of those authorities holding this shibboleth.



The Watlington Relief Road is a Distributor Road designed for motor traffic. It is a 'withdrawn' type. As such, fears of inappropriate speeding have contributed to emphasising a 'wiggleness' that is quite alien. There may be no other road with quite such a profile of gratuitous curves. This is history in the making, as roads, once laid out, endure for centuries, inconveniencing travellers, wasting time and energy for centuries to come.

1. Why does the road wiggle so much?

- Is this the whim of the housebuilders or
- is it a positive intention to make speed control curves?
- It looks quite a nuisance to drive.

¹ <https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/watlington-relief-road/widgets/61088/faqs#question16665>

² Residential Roads and Footpaths, layout considerations', Design Bulletin 32 (DB32), 1977, HMSO

³ (See page 5) <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7e0035ed915d74e6223743/pdfmanforstreets.pdf>

The Watlington Relief Road (cont)

2. The roundabouts are described as being a 'compact roundabout junction' but they seem closer to a 'normal' roundabout design in many respects.
 - Why are there roundabouts?
 - As proposed, they are inconvenient for walking and cycling.
 - The crossings which exist on some arms look as if designed according to 'normal roundabout' principles, including wide flares, and not at all like an urban junction.
3. The shared-use cycle path looks to be quite constraining, being on one side of the Distributor Road.
 - Will the design be made compliant with current guidance, LTN1/20?
 - Will there be straightover, raised crossovers at junctions?
 - Will Cuxham Road etc. be linked by provisions that are cycle paths rather than footpaths?
4. The culs-de-sac arrangement seems entirely old-fashioned.
 - Why are they used?
 - The blocks of housing seem to be very small compared with older Watlington.
 - The housing layouts present no similarity to Watlington's older patterns of development.
5. Boulevard potential:
 - The private driveway along almost all of the Distributor Road and on both sides, together with the

hammerheads, almost make a 'boulevard' arrangement with a main carriageway and slip roads at the sides.

- If such a design were purposefully implemented, it would make a more desirable provision for walking and cycling.
6. There seems to be no pedestrian or cycling accessibility into Watlington (or to nearby St Leonard's church) even though there are many references implying it.

Conclusion

The design of both the Watlington Relief Road and associated housing is deeply flawed. The recent development of the South and Vale Joint Design Guide has had little impact on the proposals.

"The delivery of the Watlington Relief Road project will actively support the following key themes within Oxfordshire County Council's Corporate Plan 2020-24:

1. **(a) Providing services that enhance the quality of life and protect the local environment** – *The Watlington Relief Road project will promote the modal shift away from private cars and into the more sustainable modes of travel of public transport, cycling and walking. This will be for both existing traffic as well as supporting future development in the area, enabling a culture change from the outset driven by the provision of quality infrastructure, rather than attempting to 'retrofit' afterwards."*

The claims made by the Corporate Director Environment and Place to County Cabinet in September 2021 seem to me to be largely hubris.

SITES B AND C: INDICATIVE LAYOUT



OCS Calendar

'Cut out and keep'
January–April 2024

*ticketed events

Saturday 27 January* 2pm
[St Mary's Church, Iffley](#)

Tuesday 6 February 8pm
[Oxford in Maps](#)
A talk by Stuart Ackland
Magdalen College Auditorium

Thursday 7 March 6pm
NOTE EARLIER TIME
[James Sadler, Oxford's 'King of all Balloons', and his aeronaut son, Windham](#)
A talk by Mark Davies
Rewley House

Wednesday 20 March* 2.30pm
[Somerville College](#)

Wednesday 27 March 6pm
[Pevsner's Guide to the Buildings of Oxford and South-East Oxfordshire](#)
A talk by Dr Simon Bradley
[followed by the Annual General Meeting](#) 7pm

We plan to keep the formal business as brief as possible to allow time for your questions. Nominations for the Officers and Executive Committee and items for the agenda should reach Vernon Porter no later than 12 March: email info@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

Rewley House



Tuesday 16 April* 10am
[RSPB Otmoor](#)

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.

Our booking process has so far included an option for members to book for our Guided tours and visits via post. However, we have reluctantly decided that we will have to restrict bookings to the online-only route as of the start of the 2024 programme, bringing us into line with most other events organisers. This change is partly due to the added administrative work that postal booking involves. In addition, many of our events now book out within days of becoming available, so those trying to book via post are often disappointed anyway. We apologise for any inconvenience this change in policy causes.

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
St Mary's Church, Iffley Saturday 27 January, 2pm	£8
Somerville College Wednesday 20 March, 2.30pm	£8
RSPB Otmoor Tuesday 16 April, 10am	£8



Programme January - April 2024

Talks – all welcome

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

Oxford in Maps

Tuesday 6 February, 8pm

Magdalen College Auditorium

Oxford as a city has been well mapped, from the straightforward street plans to maps of war, disease and the evils of drink. Our guide to such maps and others that show the city under siege, beset with cholera and divided by class, will be Stuart Ackland who has worked in the Map Room at the Bodleian Library since 1990.



James Sadler, Oxford's 'King of all Balloons', and his aeronaut son, Windham

Thursday 7 March, 6pm [NOTE EARLIER TIME]

Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square, OX1 2JA

Mark Davies, a local historian, will tell the story of the aeronautical Sadlers. James Sadler (1753–1828), pastry cook of the High, was the unlikely first Englishman to build and fly a hotair



balloon, in Oxford in 1784. After subsequent spells as a laboratory technician, engineer, naval chemist and designer of armaments, Sadler returned to professional ballooning, joined by his son Windham (1796–1824). Individually they set many aeronautical records, but in 1824 Windham tragically became the second aviation fatality that year – these were Britain's first ever – hence the timing of this 200th-anniversary talk.

Pevsner's Guide to the Buildings of Oxford and South-East Oxfordshire,

followed by the Annual General Meeting

Wednesday 27 March 6pm followed by AGM at 7pm

Rewley House, 1 Wellington Square, OX1 2JA

This newly updated guide addresses half a century of change and development since the previous edition, including a wealth of ambitious new buildings for the University of Oxford and its colleges. Dr Simon Bradley, series editor of the Pevsner Architectural Guides and author or co-author of four other Buildings of England volumes, will explain how this classic guide has been updated.



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.

St Mary's Church, Iffley

Saturday 27 January, 2pm

This will be an hour-long tour of the Church of St Mary the Virgin, Iffley, a fine example of late Romanesque architecture built in the 1160s. After the tour, an (unguided) walk through the village and down to Iffley Lock and the river can be recommended.



Somerville College

Wednesday 20 March, 2.30pm

Do join us for a tour of Somerville College, led by the college librarian, Sarah Butler. Formerly a women's hall, founded in 1879, it voted to admit male students and fellows in 1992. The tour will last approximately 90 minutes, and will explore the college's history through its architecture.



RSPB Otmoor

Tuesday 16 April, 10am

The peaceful marshes of Otmoor have witnessed surprising violence: the Otmoor disturbances raged from the 1780s to the 1830s in protest against enclosure. Now, since its acquisition by the RSPB in 1997, Otmoor has returned to being an undisturbed habitat of wet meadows, wetland and reedbeds. Our tour will be led by volunteer wardens at Otmoor and will last around 90 minutes. Booming bitterns, migrant warblers and cuckoos are some of the birds we might hope to see or hear. Stout footwear and waterproof clothing will be required and ideally binoculars. Unfortunately this visit is not accessible to those with mobility issues.



Aims and Values

Ever since 2018, we have reviewed OCS's specific Aims and Values each year, as part of our annual review of achievements and preparation of a plan and budget for the following year. That time is now: over November and December 2023 our priorities for 2024 will be set and our budget aligned to the priorities.

Step 1 is to review our aims and values, as set out below. Could you please respond to the following:

1. Do you agree with the Aims? If not, how would you change them?
2. Do you agree with the Values? If not, how would you change them?

Step 2 is to decide on priority activities for 2024.

3. What should our priorities be in 2024? Perhaps you have a priority activity for each of the Aims?

THE OXFORD CIVIC SOCIETY AIMS TO:

- Influence the development of Oxford as a city where people enjoy living, working and visiting;
- Inform its members – and others – about Oxford; its key qualities, as well as its problems, with constructive and soundly based proposals for its further improvement;
- Co-operate with Oxford's residents' associations and civic societies nationally to develop – and campaign for – community-led solutions to shared problems, including engaging with our diverse / hard to reach communities.
- Learn from other cities, in both the UK and abroad, where creative strategies might be helpful to Oxford.

THE OXFORD CIVIC SOCIETY'S VALUES ARE:

- Active appreciation of our existence as a voluntary membership-led organisation
- Taking pleasure in working with and through members' interests and commitment to urban improvement;
- Sustainability in the design, construction and maintenance of buildings, transport developments and in energy and natural resource conservation;
- The provision of independent and properly informed policies and proposals;
- Continuing commitment to Oxford's enhancement and inclusivity, both physically and socially.

Would you also like to join one of our working groups to work on priority activities in 2024? All the working groups are composed of volunteers, so we rely on you to give your time to these important issues.

Finally, do you know of anyone who is not a member and could be persuaded to join? Joining instructions are on the website.

Ian Green, Oxford Civic Society Chairman

Replies please to chairman@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

Picture Quiz

Can you identify these pictures? Each one relates to an article in this issue of *Visions*...



Answers from top left: Artwork by Jon Rowland, 'Seas of Pleasure', p.3; Sir Nikolaus Pevsner, p.11; the Howard Street bollard, p.5; George Street Odeon, p.3

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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Visions is published in March, July and November ISSN 2051-137X

We are a registered charity No. 1116739