

OXFORD PEDESTRIANS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER NO. 61
JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2005

Welcome to Issue no. 61 of OxPA's Newsletter, which marks the beginning of a new decade for us! And a happy year's walking in the city to all our members!

Over the festive period, as annually happens, Oxford city goes quiet. Not that there are fewer people in evidence, but far fewer cars. No school run, students, visitors coming by car, or driving commuters. So for a little over a week those people who remained in Oxford walked easily along the nice flat well-drained middles of roads, abandoning our narrow, badly maintained and obstructed pavements. We breathed the sparkling clean air and wondered why it cannot always be this pleasant living at the peak of civilisation. Alas, all good things end. As your Newsletter Editor types this, the city centre has returned to its usual state, with endless traffic jams and murky air smelling of exhaust fumes. Pedestrians are relegated once more to our bumpy pavements and absences of convenient direct crossings. Unless we can change things very fast, it will be another year before the streets are clear and the air that clean again!

- 1)** Please note that our next meeting is on Tuesday January 25th, at 7pm, at Oxford Town Hall. From now on OxPA's meetings will be on the fourth Tuesday of each month, in the Town Hall.
- 2)** The 20mph zone in Jericho and part of North Oxford has come into effect. Unfortunately it seems to have made very little difference on the ground, and most cars are going at the speeds they always did. Although signs have been put up marking the 20mph zone there has been no installation of narrowings, speed cushions or signs painted onto roads, so it is possible drivers are actually unaware of the zone. This is a great pity because the zone is a highly populated walking area, with high numbers of children and elderly residents. OxPA would like to see enforced 20mph zones in all residential, shopping and school areas. As it is both National Government (DfT) and Local Government (LTP) policy to increase walking and cycling and decrease car-dependency, widespread 20mph zones are an ideal way forward.
- 3)** Air pollution in the city centre. Many streets in Oxford city centre have been declared Air Quality Action Management Zones, which means there is a legal requirement on the part of the Councils to do something about toxins in the air on these streets. Streets affected include the **Station Square, Hythe Bridge St, Beaumont St, George St, Queen St, parts of St Giles, Longwall St, High St and St Aldates**. These are all streets with high pedestrian flows. The Councils are being very weak about meeting their targets, mostly saying that bus companies need to 'clean up their acts'. If bus companies were to go for low polluting engines this would help with the problem on Queen St, St Aldates and High St, but would do nothing to mitigate the effects of air pollution on the unofficial inner ring route for traffic driving through the city centre. Meanwhile, County officers are concerned that any publicising of the actual air pollution figures may scare people, and have tried to discourage concerned representatives from making the figures available to the general public.

- 4) **Oxfordshire County Council's Executive Board rejected calls to appoint a Pedestrian and Cycle Officer, on the advice of their officers.** Their argument remains what it has been for decades; that awareness of the needs of vulnerable road users should be spread amongst all relevant officers. But as OxPA argued at the meeting on December 7th, **walking and cycling targets in the current Local Plan are not going to be met**, quite apart from the issue of air pollution.
- 5) **Oxford Transport Strategy.** Looking at our city centre in the light of OTS can be quite depressing, with cars illegally nipping through the High St. bus gate all day long, delivery vehicles on Cornmarket and the west end of Broad St throughout the day (in breach of the traffic order), Cornmarket looking like a road with the tarmac in the middle and traffic lights at the end, George St highly dangerous due to fast traffic where pedestrians cross all day long, and the walking route to the station congested with traffic and pollution, and overfull of slow crossings. **The next thing that was meant to happen; the pedestrianisation of Queen St; does not currently form part of the plan for the Westgate expansion. So there is a great deal to campaign on, from the proper enforcement of current traffic restrictions, to the moving on of the Strategy in the right direction.**
- 6) **Kim Wilkie's study of Broad Street has been completed.** To summarise the content: much of the study is taken up with the historical aspects of Broad Street. **The main points in pedestrian/traffic terms is that Kim Wilkie wishes to see the eastern end of Broad Street largely pedestrianised (i.e. outside the Sheldonian) and the west end (currently pedestrianised but not well-enforced) 'reconnected' in traffic terms i.e. opened to traffic again.** OxPA needs to respond to this. The problem with the study is that there is no indication of where traffic would go to and from. **The streets leading onto Broad St (Magdalen St East and George St) are already highly polluted by traffic fumes, and indeed the onus is on the Councils to somehow reduce air pollution on these routes.** Then there is the issue of where traffic would go from Broad St – would there be a turning circle, or would the exit be through Turl St, which would mean going against the current traffic order closing Turl St to through traffic? If a turning circle, where would traffic exit, as Magdalen St West is currently chock-a-block with buses? There is no transport map with the study to show how in real terms the street would work.

To discuss this and other vital aspects of being a walker in Oxford city, please join us at our monthly meetings. Our next two meetings are on Tuesdays January 25th and February 22nd, at 7pm, in Oxford Town Hall. Please come, and please bring a friend. Everybody is welcome!

Contact Numbers

Ray Jones (Membership Secretary and Treasurer).....865070
Michaela Philbin (Minutes and Stalls).....201541
Jill Haas (Back-up and Press Officer).....766368
Corinne Grimley-Evans (Representative at External Meetings)....779663
Sushila Dhall (Newsletter Editor)...553415
Patrick Lingwood (Technical Advisor).....553415

National Pedestrians Association (Living Streets).....0207 820 1010