



# Walk Talk

Newsletter of Oxford Pedestrians Association

November 2011

## Welcome to Newsletter 100 of the Oxford Pedestrians Association

There is something very special about reaching newsletter number 100, and recalls to me the day four of us sat in a room in the Quaker Meeting House, around 18 years ago, and thought about what to do in the face of there being no pedestrian officer and no voice for pedestrians in Oxford City. Oxford Pedestrians Association was born that day, with four initial members. If we could have looked ahead to what we have achieved since then how heartened we would have been! We are now a group with over 100 members, running regular stalls, taking part in events and consultations, producing books, and taking the lead on the direction for walkers in Oxford. We are both vital and necessary, and I look forward to being an active member until at least newsletter number 200. *Sushila Dhall, Chair and previous Newsletter Editor for 15 years.*

### AGM

We were fortunate to have Dr Andy Chivers at our October AGM, presenting 'Walking Our Way Into Happiness' about walking from a medical point of view. The gist of his entertaining and clear presentation is that walking is good exercise in a well-rounded way; it is enjoyable, raises the heart rate and burns calories, is weight-bearing (therefore better for bone density than swimming or cycling), can usually be fitted into a daily routine (ie. getting somewhere), it is free, and is accessible to most people. Interestingly, in England and Northern Ireland children exercise less than adults, whereas in Wales and Scotland they exercise more. If children exercise they are then more likely to be active adults, as sedentary habits are easily formed through prolonged TV or computer screen viewing. Sitting a lot is very bad for us, especially when it results in obesity, raising the risk of type 2 diabetes and cardio-vascular disease. In the 1950's people walked an average of 26 miles per week; but this has gone down to nearly zero. Adequate or minimal exercise for health benefits is five half-hours per week. Andy's advice was 'Get rid of the dishwasher and remote control - the sofa is your enemy!' He said walking is good for heart, weight, stronger bones and joints, reducing risk of cancers and diabetes, better circulation, lung function, mental health, and is morally good as

unlike driving it does not contribute to air pollution. In terms of mental health, exercise can be as beneficial as anti-depressants in older patients, and younger people who are less active also have poorer mental health.

### Ray Jones

OxPA wishes to thank Ray, who has been our Treasurer for over 15 years, practically since we began, and is now taking a well-earned retirement from this job. His work has been very much appreciated by us all.

### Stalls

Volunteers are needed for the stall at the Town Hall Winter Fairs on November 19th and December 3rd. Please contact Felicity (01865 251212) if you can spare an hour or so to help publicise our cause while enjoying these festive occasions.

### Folly Bridge blockage.

Conflict can arise when road work contractors block footways with signs, vehicles, and work materials, without providing adequate alternative walking routes. It is not good enough simply to place a sign saying the footway is closed, or to advise pedestrians they must cross the road and walk on the other side. There is an obligation on the part of the contractor to ensure that a safe route is provided alongside the closed-off part of

the pavement. An unconscious bias towards easing the passage of motorists may explain why this obligation is not met - but the law is on the side of pedestrians when it comes to access along footways.

### **Thames Street redevelopment**

Members are asked to have a look at the proposed redevelopment of Luther Court in Thames Street, recently pictured in the local press. We need to get across to Planners how important it is for pedestrians that City centre streets are inviting places for people on foot, with useful and interesting frontages to encourage people to linger and bring life to the area. Buildings which do not have active frontages onto the street discourage pedestrians and make our city a less vibrant and flourishing place. Look out for consultation details in the press and on our website if you want to comment on this development which will have a major impact on the city centre.

### **Oxford Civic Society/Streets for People**

During the last four years Oxford Civic Society (OCS) has collaborated with the City Council to facilitate street parties as part of the "Streets for People" programme. OxPA is now joining the partnership with OCS and the City to promote a wider programme based on Paul Cullen's "On Foot in Oxford", aimed at enhancing the experience for all people on foot in Oxford's streets. For more details of the OCS programme follow the link to a letter from Ros Weatherall through the *News* page of our website. Of special interest to OxPA members is Ros's project to compile a register of walks throughout Oxford. Ros would like to hear from anyone interested in helping to classify these walks: 01865 426805 or [ros.weatherall@gmail.com](mailto:ros.weatherall@gmail.com)

### **Pavement parking**

With OCS, we are proposing to launch a new campaign against pavement parking. Not only do vehicles on pavements intimidate and restrict the freedom of pedestrians to relax in safe territory, but they also damage the fabric of our historic pavements and kerbstones. This a conservation issue as well as one of protecting the rights and safety of pedestrians. Please take photos of vehicles on pavements, or let us know of local "black spots" so that we can build up a dossier with which to go forward. We need examples from as many parts of Oxford as possible.

### **New evidence on shared space**

A new DfT report concludes that Shared Space Schemes can deliver many benefits: "they

appear to support economic activity, improve perceptions of personal security, be popular generally with the public and traders and increase freedom of movement for many people including some vulnerable pedestrians". The report suggests that while level surfaces can create difficulties for some people, they can confer benefits overall, including improved access for some disabled people: "the problems experienced by some disabled people, particularly those with a visual impairment, are not necessarily insurmountable". Report available at: [www2.dft.gov.uk/pgr/sustainable/sharedspace/stage1/index.html](http://www2.dft.gov.uk/pgr/sustainable/sharedspace/stage1/index.html)

### **Air pollution**

The Environmental Audit Committee has reported that failure to meet EU standards on air pollution is "putting the health of UK residents at risk". Bad air quality costs the nation £8.5-20bn per year through poor health, it says, and can cut life expectancy by years. Nationally, the government accepts that air pollution takes seven or eight months off British life expectancy. But for the 200,000 people most directly affected, those who live by busiest roads, the shortfall is two years. It is claimed that air pollution in London causes as many deaths now as in the bad old days of the "pea-soup" smogs: "It is estimated that around 4,000 people died as a result of the Great Smog of London in 1952, which led to the introduction of the Clean Air Act in 1956. In 2008, 4,000 people died in London from air pollution and 30,000 died across the whole of the UK". Under the plans for "localism", local authorities could become responsible for EU fines levied if pollution standards are not met, said ClientEarth's air quality lawyer. How will this affect Oxford's plans to improve the air quality in our city centre?

### **Next meetings**

**November 22nd** Town Hall 7.30pm for open discussion of next year's programme.

**No December meeting** - but see stalls item.

**January 24th 2012** Town Hall 7.30pm, details to be announced.

### **Contacts**

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**Web-site:** [www.oxpa.org.uk](http://www.oxpa.org.uk)

**National Pedestrians Association**

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