



Walk Talk

Newsletter of Oxford Pedestrians Association

August 2012

Welcome to Newsletter 104

20mph: good news for Oxford's pedestrians! Three years after the implementation of 20mph zones throughout Oxford's residential areas, Thames Valley Police have made a very welcome, if belated, announcement that in response to pressure from local communities, they will now be enforcing the 20mph speed limit. This is good news for pedestrians and cyclists; the Oxford Times poll reflected its popularity with 80% voting in support. While signage alone has had a calming effect, there is no doubt that police action will be a timely reminder to drivers who do not respect the speed limit. The result should be a safer and more pleasant street environment for people in Oxford, and the chance for other Oxfordshire towns to benefit from our experience.

July Evening Walk in Headington Hill Park

On a perfect summer evening a group of twenty or so met for a fascinating tour of the trees, grounds and curious history of Headington Hill Hall, led by Dr Ian Gourlay. The park, originally planted with many unusual trees during its period as grand house of the Morrell family, is now open to the public, cared for by the City Council, while the mansion is occupied by Oxford Brookes University. We are very grateful to Ian for giving us his time and sharing his wide knowledge in such an entertaining way, and hope there will be further opportunities to learn about Oxford's trees .

East Oxford Controlled Parking Zones

Implementation of CPZs in two of the East Oxford zones has now begun, with white lines painted on many of the pavements. OxPA has always opposed the use of pavements for parking motor vehicles, especially where access for wheelchair users and mothers with children would be jeopardised by any reduction of the already narrow pavements. We are therefore very disturbed to find that the promised minimum 1.2m width, specified in the Community Impact Assessment, seems not to be observed in many places. We hope that this discrepancy will be corrected before final painting takes place. We have requested that appropriation of pedestrian space for parking will be reversed if, as is hoped and expected, the number of cars clogging these streets diminishes once parking is by permit only.

Pedestrianisation of Turl Street?

In the city centre some roads have been pedestrianised, but the job is far from finished. Turl Street and Ship Street, connecting the two main shopping roads to Broad Street, are

bustling with local residents, students, shoppers and tourists, with the occasional passing motorist or a build-up of stationary vehicles obstructing pathways and creating fumes and visual pollution in front of the beautiful heritage buildings of Oxford. The question being asked by a student charitable organisation based in the Turl, is, should Turl Street and Ship Street join the pedestrianised roads, improving pedestrians' freedom and the street environment during busy city times? Please come with your views to our next meeting or write to info@oxpa.org.uk.

Oxford railway station

OxPA was approached for our opinion on a proposal to move Oxford Railway Station to Oxpens. This proposal currently has no solid backing, but has some support amongst bodies who favour the idea of a bigger station with more platform space. OxPA members looked at the plan, and were talked through it at our June meeting, but could not see how access arrangements would work. So in July we took a walk around the site, and tried out several possible routes to and from it (Park End Street, St Thomas's, and past the back of the Westgate car park). However, we concluded we could not support or oppose the proposal without knowing where entrances, parking, bus stops, and cycle stands would be. There is therefore little idea of where pedestrians would access the site. We will wait to see if more worked-up proposals come forward before commenting in any detail.

Old Road Campus

OxPA representatives attended the presentation of proposals to develop the site in Headington where at present the ex-Highfield Unit stands in large green grounds adjacent to Old Road Campus. The City Council's Planning Policy

documents state that any proposal for this site should include reduced car-parking capacity as the roads around this area are highly congested and polluted. In contrast, the proposal from Oxford University's Research Sciences Group is to double car parking on the site. The justification offered is that the arrangement should count as a reduction in parking if proportionally fewer of the much increased number of employees on the site will be driving all the way in to work. Moreover, it is claimed, in 20 years time there will be CPZs everywhere so fewer drivers will park on streets. Much was made of the trees to be retained (a few of the very oldest existing trees), and plans for more planting around the edges of the site to screen the extreme tallness of the buildings from local residents. Also presented as a positive feature was the "permeability" of the site - narrow corridors between buildings mean pedestrians and cyclists should be able to cross the site between buildings. There will also be a couple of small 'squares'. On the whole the proposal seems to be to cram in as much building work as possible, including a large multi-storey car park.

The Blavatnik School of Government

This proposal, also from Oxford University, is for the Radcliffe Infirmary site to the south of Freud's Café (once St Paul's Church) on Walton Street in Jericho. Opposite OUP and backing onto Somerville, it is for another enormous structure, twice as tall as Freud's and covering an area of ground three times as great. It is proposed as a series of disc-shaped floors with the smallest at the top, all constructed of concrete and glass. The building leaves no room for landscaping, and although it is said that there will be planting on the roof, this will not be visible from the street. The pictured proposal showed the building minimised, with giant people walking about, and with the building almost invisible as if made of something transparent, so it was very hard to assess what it will actually look like.

Both of the above will be coming to the City Council for planning consent in the near future. It is important that OxPA members scrutinise the plans and submit comments, especially on the pedestrian experience of the buildings and their appearance, and on any traffic issues.

Pedestrian road deaths increase

Bad news from Roadpeace (August 2012): "After nine straight years of decline, the number of people reported seriously injured or killed on the roads increased last year (2011). Those

reported seriously injured increased by 462 to 23,122; deaths increased by 51 to 1,901. Compared to 2010, an additional family each week suffered a sudden and violent bereavement. With the government ending central funding for speed cameras, and thus speed enforcement, no one should be surprised by this rise in road death and injury. Speed may not be a factor in all crash causation, but it will almost always be a key determinant in how serious the casualties are, and the risk of death. At a time when our streets need to be made safer so that more will adopt healthier and more sustainable lifestyles, the toll is increasing. Especially alarming is that pedestrians, those who pose the least risk to others, should have suffered the greatest increase (12%). Nor should it be forgotten that these are underestimates. The Department for Transport's road casualty database defines road deaths as those occurring within 30 days of the crash; according to the Department of Health, this is the only cause of death that is time limited. RoadPeace fears the true death toll will be over 2000 with some further 100 families having a loved one succumb to their injuries after 30 days. And the under-reporting is even worse with those injured, as acknowledged by the Department for Transport..... We know what works. We just need the government to prioritise safety and health over speed and convenience."

STOP PRESS

Join us at the Elder Stubbs Festival OxPA stall on Saturday August 18th from 12-6pm. Phone 779663 for details.

Next Meetings

No meeting in August.

September 25th 7pm Town Hall, discussion of further pedestrianisation in the city. Come and add your views.

October 23rd 7pm town Hall. AGM with guest speaker Oxford city officer Roger Pittman on pollution in Oxford; more details to follow.

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