



Walk Talk

Newsletter of Oxford Pedestrians Association

February 2013

Welcome to Newsletter 106

Warm welcome to Pavement Gritters!

Our winter Newsletters usually have to start with a plea to the authorities to consider the plight of pedestrians who have always been neglected when ice and snow make our roads impassable. But this year we are delighted to report that the city has begun to tackle the problem of access for its more vulnerable citizens. After sightings of pavement gritting in action in Summertown and Cowley Road, we made enquiries and were contacted by Streetscene Manager, Geoff Corps. He explained that two swingo machines, normal street sweeping machines which are necessarily idle when streets are snow-covered, have been adapted with a hopper feeder for salt/gritting. Initially in operation in the town centre, it is hoped to extend their use into peripheral shopping areas when more economic subcompact models can be acquired. Meteorological Office forecasts are being used to predict need and so to salt pavements ahead of major freezing to make more effective use of limited resources.

Puddles

And after the snow.... puddles! OxPA has repeatedly drawn attention to the problems created by kerbside water in gutters and on pavements. Passing cars drench us, and some stretches of pavements become impassable without wellington boots. Proper repair of potholes and upkeep of drains are mundane tasks but our streets often seem to lack this basic care. You can report specific problems to gordon.hunt@oxfordshire.gov.uk or ring 792422.

Walking and cycling

As well as planning joint campaigns which can have greater impact by involving both walkers and cyclists, OxPA and Cyclox are now organising events which will be of interest to both groups. The first of these, Thursday March 21st, will be on "**Active Travel - good for your health but how good?**" by Dr Oliver Mytton, followed on Thursday April 18th by "**Understanding Walking & Cycling Report - understanding the non-cyclist's attitudes and barriers to cycling**" by Dr Tim Jones. Both meetings will be at 7.30pm at St Michael's at the Northgate. Our next normal Tuesday meeting on February 26th should also attract a good number of our cycling colleagues (see **Transform Oxford** update below).

St Giles

St Giles is currently a dual carriageway in the middle of Oxford City, flanked from the Martyrs' Memorial at one end to the War Memorial and

St Giles Churchyard at the other by some of the most beautiful old buildings in the public realm. It could one of Oxford's most treasured public spaces. Although it is 4 to 6 lanes wide it is used for most of its length as 2 traffic lanes because of the pattern of roads feeding into it. A lot of space on both sides of the road is wasted in being a no-go area for walkers yet unused by motorised traffic. OxPA has joined a campaign to support narrowing the space available to motorised traffic to make more space available to pedestrians. This could be done without impact on traffic volumes, and would be likely to reduce speeds, since drivers tend to go faster on wider roads. If one side of St Giles were closed off to through traffic altogether, there would be space for a market, a fountain, benches, or art installations. People could appreciate the beauty of the whole street by walking up what is now the middle of the road between Martyrs' Memorial and the War Memorial. This would benefit residents, visitors, students and tourists. Representatives from OxPA and the Civic Society will be meeting with the County Highways department to talk about taking this initiative forward in February.

Winter party

Instead of our normal January meeting, OxPA members met at St Michael's at North Gate to enjoy mulled wine and mince pies with friends from OCS and Cyclox. We all felt this was such a useful as well as pleasant occasion that we intend to make it a regular event.

East Oxford CPZ update

We have been promised that there will be a full assessment of the East Oxford CPZ scheme after the settling in period, when any problems and suggested improvements can be addressed. While this is still pending, residents have reported no evidence of a return of student parking since implementation last autumn. This means there is now surplus parking capacity in parts of the Divinity Road area, which could result in some of the narrowest pavements being restored to solely pedestrian use. Although nearly 600 parking tickets have been issued during the first three months, some illegal pavement parking outside permitted lines continues. More seriously, now that the roads are emptier there has been an increase in dangerous speeding. We will ensure that the need to prevent this negative effect of the CPZ on 20mph roads is included in the forthcoming assessment.

Transform Oxford - update

This initiative to make the experience of pedestrians worthy of a city of Oxford's status was launched in 2008. It soon led to an imaginative resurfacing of Queen Street and removal of most of its buses and bus stops. Financial stringency has called a halt to further improvements since then. However, we hope to hear encouraging news from Cllr Hudspeth when he comes to our February meeting. Do not miss this chance to learn about these important plans from the Leader of OCC.

Railway Station Development

At a well-attended public meeting on January 9th, Network Rail revealed its plans for increasing the capacity of the rail lines, especially for freight traffic, through Oxford. These include extension of the line to Bedford, electrification, and the addition of an existing line which would entail major changes to the rail bridge over Botley Road. The plans do not yet show that the redeveloped station could become a proper transport interchange. If connectivity for all users - pedestrians, cyclists, buses and taxis - cannot be provided at the current site, we need to consider carefully the costs and benefits of moving the station to a less restricted space at Oxpens. The huge investment involved in either case would not be justified if comprehensive connectivity is not achieved.

Street Crossings

Difficulty in safe crossing of busy roads is one of the most frequent problems that OxPA is asked to help with. We are delighted that the campaign by south Oxford residents for a crossing across

Weirs Lane, to which we gave our support, has been successful. We have also been contacted by East Oxford residents about the danger for school children crossing at Rymers Lane.

Magdalen Street East buses

We have joined Cyclox in writing to the bus companies about the danger and inconvenience for pedestrians and cyclists caused by buses parked in Magdalen Street East. While we hope that longer term plans for Broad Street and St Giles will lead to a better solution the current system, we have suggested that for the time being buses parked in Magdalen East should wait well back from the Broad Street corner so as to maintain clear views for all people crossing at this busy junction.

Headington Transport

Headington Action (<http://www.hcda.org.uk/>) is interested in sponsoring a Headington Transport Working Group to represent people living in Headington on strategic transport issues. If you live in Headington and would like to play an active part in this initiative please contact the Secretary (details below). The first meeting will be on Thursday February 28th.

Oxford Green Spaces

OxPA participated in the launch in 2010 of this campaign by CPRE, the Ramblers, and many local groups, to create a nine-mile circular walk connecting Oxford's green spaces. Now Council support is being sought for signposting to make the route accessible in stages for walkers of all abilities. We look forward to working on this exciting project to conserve and raise awareness of Oxford's green spaces.

Next Meetings

February 26th at 7pm in the Town Hall.

Councillor Ian Hudspeth, Leader of Oxfordshire County Council will talk on "*Beyond Transform: update and future of Transform Oxford*".

Thursday 21st March at 7.30pm in St Michaels at Northgate (Cyclox + OxPA)

Tuesday March 26th Town Hall; details later.

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