



Walk Talk

Newsletter of Oxford Pedestrians Association

January 2016

Welcome to Newsletter 117



Frideswide Square

On January 21 members of Oxford Pedestrians Association, including one wheelchair user, surveyed and tested the crossings and permeability for walkers of the newly reconfigured Frideswide Square. There is no doubt that for most people it is both more attractive and more convenient without the lights, pedestrian-deterrent fencing and multiple traffic lanes that characterised the previous incarnation. The premise underlying the design is that with lower speeds and no signs or lights, drivers will be more courteous, so that cyclists and pedestrians will be able to use the square in safety. In the event, those who stood out for their courtesy were the bus drivers, every one of whom slowed or stopped to allow the wheelchair user and the people on foot a safe crossing. However, only a third of car drivers were this considerate. Most drove straight past a man in a wheelchair waiting to cross. Only when we stepped out in front of them did most drivers stop. The busiest route, Hythe Bridge Street, was where drivers behaved the worst. Even when moving slowly or completely paused, most vehicles moved onto the crossing area rather than give us the few seconds needed to cross. In addition the wheelchair user was made more disabled by two aspects of the new square: first, the long ridged lines running across the pavement outside the Said School gave him a bumpy ride (which wheeled luggage and wheeled walking frames will also experience); second, the popular desire line from the dropped kerb to the east of the Said School towards the traffic island leading to the Oxford Royal Hotel cannot be used by wheelchairs owing to the high kerb on the island. In the half hour we observed the square, we witnessed three car drivers aggressively blaring their horns at cyclists they wanted to overtake on the roundabout (constantly overrun) in front of the hotel. We highly appreciated the courtesy shown by the bus drivers, and wonder, how do we teach good manners to other drivers, for the safety, convenience and enjoyment of our beautiful new square?

Pavement Obstruction

The City Council's website states that "if a person without lawful authority or excuse, in any way wilfully obstructs free passage along a highway,

they are guilty of an offence and Oxfordshire County Council - as the Highway Authority - have legal powers to enforce the removal of the obstruction." (note that "highway" includes the

pavement as well as the carriageway). Indeed, Oxfordshire County website states "It is an offence to obstruct a footpath. Please do not park on them even for a moment." So we are encouraged to continue to use no-parking stickers with confidence when we meet with blocked pavement and report other obstructions www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/obstruction-s-road-or-pavement

Download copies of the no-pavement-parking poster from the City's website: www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/2243/pavements_are_for_people_poster

Winter Party: WE DON'T DRIVE

Our guest speaker at the Winter Party was Chris Church, who kick-started a lively discussion on how to represent and empower the UK's 18 million adult non-drivers, and the many more who would like to drive less. Chris is leading an initiative to form a national pressure group, with the working title *We Don't Drive*, which aims to influence policy and public opinion away from car-dependency towards more sustainable travel. He is eager to work with groups with similar interests, such as OxPA and Cyclox, and would welcome help from people who can spare time for this cause. Following Chris's introduction, members of OxPA, Cyclox and OCS contributed to a broad-based discussion, while enjoying our now traditional winter party refreshments.

DfT Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy

The Department for Transport has issued a document entitled 'Setting the First Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy (CWIS)': <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cycling-and-walking-investment-strategy-setting-the-scene>. This short document sets out, for the first time, the DfT's timetable and approach to developing the first CWIS. The CWIS itself should be published in the spring of 2016 and available for consultation in the summer.

On Foot in Oxford

We reported previously that the *On Foot in Oxford* initiative, a cooperation between OxPA, Oxford Civic Society, and Oxford Ramblers, has created a database of walks in Oxford, launched two years ago as the *Walks in Oxford* website: see <http://www.oxfordwalks.org.uk/>. The group, in which Keith Frayn represents OxPA, has continued to meet and to update the database. There are now 78 individual walks listed and the website receives around 1,500 to 2,000 visits per month. The team are always keen to hear of walks they have missed; the criteria are that a description of the walk must be publicly available on the internet or as a publication, and that it must start and end within the Oxford City

boundary. They plan this year to introduce one additional feature: a selection of the walks to be called 'Favourites' that are judged to be especially well described and interesting, and available on-line. Please do send along any of your favourites for inclusion.

Air Pollution

A government plan to meet European air quality limits by letting councils ban diesel vehicles and charge drivers more for parking polluting cars and vans has met with criticism, because it could result in further court cases and tens of thousands of avoidable deaths. The plan, drawn up by the Department for the Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra) in response to a supreme court ruling, proposes individual emission limits for four different vehicle types. Local authorities would be responsible for policing its provisions in urban areas and would be told to incentivise electric, hydrogen and other ultra low-emission vehicles. Critics say the plan offers no extra money or new powers and defers discussion on how the clean air zones might work. The consultation document, launched by the environment secretary, Elizabeth Truss, accepts for the first time that more than 50,000 people a year die prematurely as a result of air pollution in the UK. The figure includes around 29,000 deaths hastened by inhaling particulates, and an estimated 23,500 by the invisible but toxic gas NO₂ emitted by diesel engines. The document says: "About 80% of the nitrogen oxides emissions which are exceeding the law are due to transport. The largest source of emissions is from diesel cars and vans where there has been significant growth in numbers over the last 10 years."

Reminder: Photo Competition

Please send in your photos for the new edition of **A More Walkable Oxford** - including a colour photo for the cover to oxford.pedestrians.association@gmail.com

Meetings:

February 23 7pm Town Hall: details to follow

March 22 details to follow

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