



Walk Talk

Newsletter of Oxford Pedestrians Association

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Welcome to Newsletter 118



Queen Street and St Aldates

The decision in 2009 to reduce the number of buses and bus stops in Queen Street has led to much safer and more pleasant conditions for pedestrians, both because buses come along less frequently and because they comply with the very low speed limit. At the time OxPA welcomed this improvement in terms of safety, convenience, air quality and attractiveness of the street. Now, as part of the Westgate re-development, there has been a consultation on full pedestrianisation of Queen Street, which has been the aim of the developers from the start. We wanted to welcome this, but OxPA has been concerned for many years about the knock-on effect a complete re-routing of buses could have on nearby streets which are also highly important to walkers, especially St Aldates. St Aldates already suffers from serious traffic congestion and very high levels of air pollution which recent reports have highlighted as dangerous to health. If all buses were taken out of Queen Street they would be re-routed through the new development and up St Aldates, causing a worsening of conditions in this important thoroughfare. OxPA therefore responded by saying that we could only support the full pedestrianisation of Queen Street if there were a commitment to introducing a form of public transport which would be cleaner, quieter, and less space-consuming than our current gigantic buses. The narrow roads and pavements of our ancient city are simply not suited to the buses and coaches currently in service. The trial period of complete re-routing of Queen Street buses during major Westgate works has now begun and we hope that the situation in both Queen Street and St Aldates will be properly monitored by our Transport Authority to provide evidence for future planning. While buses are being excluded from Queen Street there has been a petition to allow cyclists to use this east-west route throughout the day, not just outside shopping hours. OxPA appreciates that the lack of a good east-west route is a disincentive to cycling and generally we support measures that encourage all forms of active travel. However, we are aware that many of our members, especially the less agile, are opposed to mixing pedestrians and cyclists in a shopping street where people want to be able to loiter and move freely in all directions without having to be constantly alert.

Access to Headington

Employment in Headington has increased enormously in recent years but housing has not kept pace. The consequence is large volumes of commuter traffic, blocking the roads and making life less pleasant for those who live there.

'Access to Headington' is a £12.5m project by the County Council, essentially to improve commuting by easing the flow of buses and facilitating cycling and walking. It has been through three stages of consultation and was finally signed off in June by David Nimmo-Smith, County Council member for transport. OxPA commented at an early stage, mainly to the effect that improving bus flow is also likely to improve car flow and hence not especially improve the situation. However, we did welcome some improvements for pedestrians. There will be some new road crossings: a much-needed one on London Road, for which we campaigned, near the junction with Osler Road (a route used by many people when walking between hospital sites), and a new Tiger crossing of Windmill Road, the first in Oxford. (A Tiger crossing combines a pedestrian zebra with a crossing for people on bikes.) The Marston junctions of Marston Road, Headley Way, Marsh Lane and Cherwell Drive, which at present consist of two roundabouts, are to be transformed into traffic light-controlled junctions – odd, considering that Frideswide Square has just been transformed in the other direction, and we consider that works well for pedestrians. An existing light-controlled pedestrian crossing there will be moved and staggered to accommodate increased carriageway width – this is not making life easier for pedestrians. Some more shared pedestrian and cycle paths will be created, especially along Windmill Road, something we have objected to previously. Introduction of a 20 mph speed limit in Windmill Road is still under consideration. All in all, there will be some benefits for pedestrians and some disadvantages. But overall we consider that the scheme will not reduce car usage unless it is coupled with financial measures such as a workplace parking levy.

Headington Festival Stall

Headington Festival takes place every year at the end of the May half-term week. On the Sunday there are many stalls and entertainments in Bury Knowle Park, and OxPA has been present for the past 4 years. This year's Headington Festival was a sunny day, and OxPA's stall, thoughtfully situated next to Cyclox, was an attraction for many people, who signed our St Giles petition and agreed that St Giles would and should make a perfect and beautiful public square. We also gained a new member who signed up there and then. Being on the stall was a pleasure, as

everybody is a pedestrian, and there is nothing threatening to anybody about our policy aims. Several people took pavement parking stickers wanting to tackle the issue in their areas. Nearby our stall was music and dancing, and there was cake aplenty, plants, children with face paints, and walkers on stilts who were highly amusing. Altogether a pleasure to be on our stall at this event.

Broad Street lights

The traffic lights outside the New Bodleian were recently shrouded and put out of action, immediately creating the friendly and functional space we have long advocated. However, enquiries revealed that this was not the long hoped-for preparation for a light-free crossing, merely damage to the signal controller. We will continue to press for a monitored trial period without lights which we expect would show improved function and financial savings.

Westgate Development The enjoyment of walking through a truly bus-free Queen Street is quickly soured for pedestrians and cyclists at the western end, as they are corralled through the narrow passage outside the COOP bank. It is a pity that planners were not able to insist on better provision for the many people on foot in this busy stretch.

Dangers of smartphones: from our German

Correspondent: After the death of a pedestrian so engrossed in her smartphone that she stepped in front of a streetcar, the city of Augsburg has decided to experiment with embedding rows of red LED lights in the pavement near streetcar stops. Recognising that people will not easily be weaned from using their smartphones as they walk along, the City hopes that pavement lights will be more effective for such preoccupied pedestrians than traditional traffic lights alone.

Meetings

June 28th 7pm Town Hall: Guest speaker David Early, Oxfordshire Transport Planner, on **LTP4 and Active Travel in Oxford.**
July 26th details to follow

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