

Oxford Pedestrians Association

OXFORD PEDESTRIANS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER NO 45

MAY/JUNE 2002

Welcome to Issue 45 of OxPA's Newsletter! The past two months have brought an unprecedented number of complaints and concerns about Oxfor's towpaths, widely used as footpaths. Due to neglect and lack of spending the paths are subsiding dangerously, and actually collapsing into the river in some places. If they were roads the repairs would be done speedily, in the name of danger to users of the road. But because the towpath is 'only' a footway, it looks as if we are going to have to wait, and wait....

1) **Car Free Day.** Although it appeared uncontroversial, a majority of County Councillors turned down a motion to close Broad Street to cars on Sunday September 22nd, saying it was 'an anti-car motion', and that 'Oxford should be proud of its history as a car-maker.' Before the meeting Corinne had contacted all Councillors. Some did express some interest in the motion, but the majority threw it out with ignorant comments. So then, having learned at very short notice that an Executive meeting was scheduled, Corinne gave a speech to the County Executive Group. **Again the motion was voted out**, and the debate was full of mockery, eg. they said Car-Free Day should be called 'Stay At Home Day'. It does not help that the Councillor for the ward (Mr Kyffin of the Kings Arms pub) is absolutely against Car-Free Day (although, confusingly, he also says perhaps it should be moved to next May 1st). **The issue of marking European Car Free day was taken to the Central Area Committee meeting, which was unanimously in favour of closing Broad Street for that one Sunday, so that result will bring the subject before the County again.** However, Corinne also went to an Oxford Friends of the Earth meeting, who are, like us, frustrated with the lack of Council commitment. **OxFoE broached the idea of a street party, whether sanctioned or not, with people in wheelchairs and with pushchairs encouraged to attend.** OxFoE representatives are also writing to County Councillors.

2) **OxPA have been allocated a seat on Oxford Transport Strategy Working Party.** This is very much needed, given the lack of attention to pedestrian needs up to now, and the attitudes of some of the 'shire' Councillors to city walkers' needs. We are awaiting official confirmation of this exciting development. It has been suggested that the post should be a rotating one to give several of us a chance to take part as OxPA's representative at OTS Working Party meetings.

3) **Pavement Parkers.** Local Authorities have the power to legislate against local pavement parking, so it is worth lobbying your Councillors about this. The Special Constables who seemed ready to deal with this menace have not materialised. **So until someone with authority does take on this huge issue, we have to fall back on Ray's wonderful stickers.** Ray said he repeatedly stickered a BT van which was always parking on the pavement outside his house. Eventually they came to the door and told Ray, "We can't obstruct the road, it would slow the traffic (oh dear!), so can we park in your driveway?" **If organisations like BT and plumbing and building firms took on the issue it would very much help, as vans like these seem always and automatically to park on pavements with no thought whatsoever for pavement users.**

4) **Oxford Pedestrians' map.** Local knowledge will be needed to help realise this. Corinne has a map of city core walking routes which can be used as a basis. It looks as if this will be quite a few months work, but will be very useful, incorporating underpasses, footbridges, crossings, towpath routes etc.



5) OxPA has officially decided that for the time being we will neither be a branch of, nor affiliated to, the National Pedestrians Association. This is because being attached to the new centralised set-up would make us worse off than we are, both financially and work-wise.

6) A vision for the future! It has been pointed out that walkers in Oxford city still face great danger crossing roads. There is an urgent and ongoing need for safe crossing points on Beaumont Street, St Giles, Broad Street, and St Aldates, to name but a few. In many places where there are refuges, they are less than 2.2m in width, so that two people walking abreast, and wheelchair users cannot use them. Most push-button crossings are still set to run for too short a time. Even a healthy young fast walker has usually not reached the opposite pavement before the beeps stop, and the traffic starts roaring and lurching forward. **St Giles could have a wide central walkway if real vision were applied. What better way to appreciate the fine buildings on either side of the road than walking along the middle of this very wide sweep? And the walk from Maryrs' Memorial straight to St Giles Church would be a fine one.**

7) OxPA is very unhappy that coach-parking in St Giles is to be made permanent. The current way of allocating highway space is definitely not safe for walkers, who have to see in all directions if they are to use the walkway painted onto the road. OxPA is supported in our objections by many other groups and people.

8) The Local Plan Consultation. Two OxPA members attended the consultation day at County Hall. It was basically a chance to decide where we would put the tens of thousands of houses the Government has ordered built in Oxfordshire over the next ten years. We could not say we did not want them at all! High density and possible car-free housing in urban brown-field sites was the first overall recommendation, and then representatives of groups were split over where the rest of the housing should go. There was the choice of merging Oxford and Abingdon, expanding 'country towns' such as Bicester, building on the edge of the city (eg. expand Kidlington), and creating a new settlement, like a mini-Milton Keynes in Oxfordshire. This was the least popular option, on the grounds of incursion into green belt land and of the cost of starting a new town from scratch. An idea which was not on offer but which was added was the sensitive expansion of villages, with the idea of making local shops and facilities viable again, and reversing the trend of decline. **It is worth noting that development on the scale ordered by the Government will mean taking greenbelt land from somewhere, which begs the question of the value of designating some land greenbelt in the first place.**

Our next two meetings are on Mondays May 20th and June 17th, at 7pm in Oxford Town Hall. Please come, and bring anyone who may be interested. Everybody is welcome!

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