

Oxford Pedestrians Association



OXFORD PEDESTRIANS' ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER NO 33
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Welcome to Issue No. 33 of our Newsletter! Roadworks blocking walking routes has been the flavour of things over the past couple of months. No sooner had we got Cornmarket for walkers than it was time to drill and dig large holes, fencing off parts of the street. Then your Newsletter Editor counted 37 obstacles on the east pavement between Summertown and Keble Road due to various companies digging up pavements. No alternative route was provided, and pedestrians were left to make their way around holes and debris as best they could. On Walton St. workers have left piles of traffic cones etc. behind, and where are they permanently piled? You've guessed it – on the pavement! And nearly every time a hole is dug in the pavement it is patched messily and lumpily, and often breaks up again quite quickly. **It is important to note in the light of all this that the Mori poll conducted recently by the County Council found that pavement maintenance is one of people's major concerns in Oxfordshire.** But Councillors and Officers need reminding all the time that this is a concern – they keep saying road maintenance is the problem. **So do bombard your County Councillor with letters and telephone calls reminding them of those of us who walk and use pavements regularly, because they still forget we exist.**

- 1) **Patrick, our Technical Advisor, gave a presentation and talk on Local Transport Plans to our April meeting.** In terms of strategies to promote walking Oxford, along with Devon and Hampshire, came second best of Counties, but that is not saying much, as all three fail to meet even half the criteria applied by the study. York is far and away the best place to live if one is a walker, both in terms of conditions on the ground and future strategies. Everywhere else that formed part of the study came out abysmally in terms of strategies to promote walking; one would almost think walking was something dangerous to be curbed when assessing most LTPs.
- 2) **The long-awaited Government Walking Strategy has been published, and has been hailed as a breakthrough document, if a little low-key. For free copies please ring the DETR on 0870 1226 236.**
- 3) **It looks as though we may be getting an Abingdon branch of the Pedestrians Association.** On March 18th there was a stall at the Guildhall in Abingdon, to which many interested people came. This is being followed by a meeting of interested walkers. Remember how OxPA started, over five years ago, with a similar small group? Jenny and Philippa heard a story at the Pedestrians' Association Abingdon stall which is worth including here: **'In Denmark, when they build a new development, they surround it with grass and wait until they see where the grass is worn down by pedestrian desire lines, then they build the footpath there.'** Breathtaking in its common sense simplicity. What happens here is that we are given a right-angle to walk round, and the diagonal path that is created by people going where they want to go is rather crossly fenced off or planted with prickly bushes!
- 4) **Some glass doors are hard to see.** One of our members walked into one of the doors of the Clarendon Centre, injuring her mouth. A subsequent complaint from her ensured the painting of stripes onto the glass. This represents a success, but it is a pity a pedestrian had to be injured before basic safety precautions were taken.
- 5) **Yet more new developments in Oxford, this time in North Oxford, mean that more pavements are ceasing to be walkways and are instead driveway extensions, sloping across their whole width towards the road.** This is so cars can be driven across the pavements easily into the new driveways. No matter that thousands of pedestrians walk along the pavements with their dependants, pushchairs, wheelchairs and walking sticks. The comfort of a few car drivers is more important. We have a new hung administration on the City Council since the election (21 Labour, 21 Lib Dem, 8 Green, and 1 Conservative) so please contact them via the Town Hall if you find accessibility on foot a problem.



- 6) **Oxfordshire County Council's Local Transport Plan Working Group agreed to include pavement extensions in their strategy.** This means developer funding will go into creating continuous footways along main routes into the city centre. Mr Eddie Luck, Chief Transport Planner, suggested Banbury Road as a first trial area, so that the whole route will eventually be done, rather than the piecemeal approach we have seen to date. Some junctions are easy to walk across due to pavement extensions, and others are either bumpy kerbs or steep crossfalls leading into deep gutters, often with huge puddles. Craig Rossington, our excellent County Walking Strategy officer, confirmed that pedestrians, because they are moving along the main highway, take precedence over vehicles turning out of or into side streets. It was generally accepted that drivers need to be re-educated into observing this simple rule from the Highway Code, and that pavement extensions will help with this.
- 7) **Oxford Civic Society held a conference on the future of transport in Oxford.** Roger Williams, former Chief Transport Planner said that traffic growth in the city centre has been static for 20 years prior to OTS, and has dropped by 20-30% since OTS. Public transport use is expected to go on rising. Pedestrians and cyclists have increased in numbers on the radial routes into the city centre. Short-term objectives are; improvements to the Station Site (I'm sure we should all think so too, they are desperately needed), cycle improvements, the repaving of Magdalen St west and Broad St., more pedestrian crossings (hooray!) and bus shelters. In the medium term Mr Williams believes the Park and Ride should keep expanding, Cornmarket should be repaved, buses should be removed from Cornmarket, and designated tourist coach parking should be provided (more about this issue in the next item). Professor Phil Goodwin said when an area is pedestrianised usually trade dips and then revives again. ROX (retailers of Oxford) said their trade is down by 17%, and they want traffic back in Broad St and reduced parking charges for drivers. The afternoon working groups came up with various recommendations. These included the need to keep pedestrians, cyclists and car drivers apart, that there should be a 20mph speed limit for drivers in the city, that disabled parking spaces should be wide enough to accommodate wheelchair users, and that there should be a pedestrian officer.
- 8) **There are plans afoot to take twelve car parking spaces out of St Giles and put room for a few tourist coaches there instead.** This has led to many criticisms of the idea. But at present coaches set people down on Magdalen Street East, making the air unbearably poisonous and the street a pollution tunnel for walkers accessing Broad St from St Giles. It will be a relief to see them moved. But what of the choice of St Giles for coaches? St Giles is a very wide street, wider than many motorways, and the whole width of it apart from a relatively narrow pavement on either side, is roads and car parks. It is a nightmare to cross, even if you are able-bodied and fit. With a little imagination something splendid could be done there. Imagine traffic narrowed to two or at most four lanes, and the rest of the road turned over to public space. We could have a market, benches and trees, cafes, a new square.... And as for the coaches? Better have them on St Giles than on a narrower street, but even better to have built a coach park by the rail station for example.

Our next two meetings are on Monday May 15th and Monday June 19th, at 7pm in Oxford Town Hall. Please come, and bring a friend, relative, neighbour, or anyone you meet in the street. Everybody is welcome!

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