

Oxford Pedestrians Association

OXFORD PEDESTRIANS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER NO 54

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Welcome to Issue number 54 of OxPA's Newsletter! Your Newsletter Editor spent the month of September in the tiny kingdom of Bhutan (between Nepal and Tibet) with Patrick, OxPA's Technical Advisor, who was asked to help with traffic issues in the capital city of Thimpu. Bhutan is very much a walking country. Tiny children, as young as three and four, walk for miles without adults, and everybody is very fit. As yet there are few private vehicles, but it is interesting to note that those there are automatically seize precedence over the huge number of walkers. Most roads, being narrow walking routes, have no pavements, so as cars zoom aggressively by people leap to the side of the road and wait. Where there are pavements, eg. on the main shopping street of Thimpu, they have been constructed with the able-bodied in mind, consisting of wide paved areas joined together by flights of steps. Like here there are holes in the pavements and little or no help crossing side streets. Unlike here, however, the streets are truly living places with people of all ages sitting relaxing, chewing betel nuts (there is no chewing gum and little tobacco), playing football, selling vegetables, drying chillies, pounding laundry or dough, or just sitting out in the sun. Every school has speed humps outside it! Several people in the Bhutanese government are concerned at the anarchic way traffic is growing and taking priority. Wisely, they wish to avoid the mistakes we have made here, which is why Patrick is preparing a study of ways forward before it is too late.

OxPA is grateful to Mr Peter Mann, Acting Chief Transport Planner on Oxfordshire County Council, for attending our October meeting to bring us up to date on Oxford Transport Strategy and where it is now going. This Newsletter is a mostly a summary of the information he gave us.

1) The County now operates under three headings: Education and Cultural Services; Social Services and Welfare; and Environment and the Economy. Pedestrians come under the latter, as part of Transport. There is currently no Head of Transport, but Mr David MacKibbin will be coming from Hampshire to start in January.

At the time the central Oxford Transport Strategy (OTS) changes were brought in, the media though this was OTS in its entirety. However, although the changes were a 'landmark' of OTS, there is still a large programme of 'continuous improvements' to be made. Of 78 pieces of work to be done, 37 are pedestrian and cycle related. Pedestrian and cycle schemes tend to be developer funded, ie. dependent on other construction projects, like housing developments, for funding. The County still puts pedestrians and cyclists together despite awareness of tensions between the two groups.

2) Good news for pedestrians is that various pedestrian crossings are going to be installed in the city! One is planned for across the middle of Beaumont Street, a heavily used pedestrian route which is currently highly dangerous to walkers, consisting only of an off-route pedestrian island, on which it is easy to get stuck with traffic pouring past in both directions. Instead of a light-controlled crossing, OxPA suggested a zebra crossing at this point, which would work well because zebra crossings give pedestrians priority when they need it, and give walkers the time they need to cross. In addition zebra crossings tend to slow rather than stop traffic at what could be a terribly congested point between two other light-controlled crossings at either end of Beaumont Street. A zebra crossing would also be the cheapest and easiest type of crossing to install. The only thing going against the installation of a zebra crossing here is that the County has a history of not installing them, especially on radial routes and the inner ring route, out of a sense that they are not 'controlling' enough.



Other pedestrian crossings are planned, some for next year and some the year after, but a list has not been received in time for this Newsletter, so will appear in the New Year's one.

3) The core pedestrian network will begin with a pilot scheme on Botley Road. At the moment this has been held up by cycling representatives' objections to the plan for the cycle lane remaining on the pavement, bringing them into conflict with pedestrians. Also there are apparently 'land acquisition issues.' **A Jericho scheme is planned to start in 2004/5.** When OxPA members went on the Botley Road and Jericho-to-city-centre walks with County officers, we showed them dozens of improvements that could be made. Out of these officers will decide on priorities. **OxPA has been told that we've been 'very helpful' and that our work will be used as a basis for what eventually goes in on the ground.**

4) When OTS was put in, members will recall the next plan was to pedestrianise Queen Street, creating a small pedestrianised shopping centre for Oxford. **Sadly the County have now cancelled this plan.** They say Queen Street is 'inextricably linked to the (proposed) Westgate development as a good stopping place for buses.'

5) The County Council is committed to the GTE (guided bus system), which would be like a very wide road for buses only running across the city meadows. They have re-submitted their proposal for it to the Government.

6) Residents' Parking will be put in Summertown, north of Summertown, and North Oxford between Walton Manor and Summertown, later in this financial year. At present Summertown is overrun with cars parked on pavements and traffic islands, making it a no-go area for residents, cyclists and pedestrians. Stopping the 'free car park' element of Summertown should result in more use of the Park and Ride and fewer people driving into the city. **Perhaps we will even eventually get a pedestrian crossing where it is needed across the road in the middle of the shopping centre!**

7) According to County statistics there was a 28% increase in people walking into Oxford city centre over the bridges between 1999 and 2002. Certainly there appear to be more people crossing Magdalen and Folly Bridges on foot than in vehicles at any one time. **The experience for pedestrians of crossing any of the bridges into the centre is one of noise, pollution, and extreme narrowness.** Hopefully the above figures will encourage the County to go for pavement-widening schemes on the routes in the centre.

8) On December 13th OxPA has a stall in the Town Hall at the Winter Green Fair. Please volunteer to do a shift on our stall, a fun and interesting way to spend time and meet people. Alternatively, please make cakes, fudge, or candles for us to sell on the stall. All help is appreciated, and goes towards our vital cause! Contact Michaela (details at end of Newsletter).

Our next two meetings are on Mondays November 17th, and December 15th, at 7pm, in St Aldates Centre on Pembroke Street (which is across the road from the Town Hall). Please come, and bring a friend. Everybody is welcome!

Seasons greetings to all our members, and a very Happy New Year to all of you!

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