

Oxford Pedestrians Association

OXFORD PEDESTRIANS' ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER NO. 70
JULY/AUGUST 2006

Welcome to Issue number 70 of OxPA's Newsletter! A heat-wave is upon us, and the streets seem another country from usual; pedestrians brown and lightly dressed, and our streets thronged with tourists. This is the time of year when it is clear how unsuited most of Oxford has been made to cope with large numbers of people on foot. The public space is there, but it is mostly given over to traffic. So local walkers and visitors push buttons and wait at light after light to cross, stepping into the road around one another as they meet on pavements, breathing air pollution, and glaring at one another as those who are standing still block the way of those walking on. Thanks be for the back streets, the lanes and alleys, and the parks and tow paths of Oxford, without which the local walker's summer would be something one would not return to Oxford for.

1) **The Westgate planning application (Ref: 06/01211/FUL) has been submitted. It will be the topic of our next (July) meeting.** The official consultation period ends on July 14th, however Planning Officers have said they will accept submissions for inclusion into the written report going to Planning (nowadays called Strategic Development and Control Committee; SPDC) until the middle of August. SPDC will decide on the application in September, but as it is such a huge application the Secretary of State for Planning, David Milliband, will have the final say. The language used in the application can be frightening in its understatement. The controversial proposed demolition of Abbey Place housing (necessitating the eviction of highly disabled residents) is referred to throughout as the 'redevelopment of Abbey Place'. Increased traffic along Botley Road, Abingdon Road and Thames Street is referred to as increased air pollution merely 'outside Tennyson Court'; which is a block of flats in St Thomas'. As anticipated in the last OxPA Newsletter, the proposal allows no land to enable the much-needed pedestrianisation of Queen Street. The Westgate proposal can be viewed at Ramsey House, St Ebbes during office hours. Although the whole proposal runs to around 6,000 pages it is worth having a look at the Executive Summaries and the Environmental Impact Assessment.

Write your comments to: Mr Michael Crofton Briggs, Director of Planning, Ramsey House, St Ebbes, Oxford. Lobby City Councillors on SPDC, and your local Councillors, if you want them to represent your views on this development, which if it goes through, will change Oxford City forever.

If you think the application should be called in and interested parties have their say at a Public Inquiry, write to: Mark Newman, Thames Valley Planning Team, Government Office for the South East, 1 Walnut Tree Close, Guildford, Surrey GU1 4GA and ask that the current Westgate planning application be called in.

2) **A major proposal to close city centre Health Centres and relocate them in a partly privatised form on the site of the old Radcliffe Infirmary was recently turned down by the City Council on grounds of traffic generation and congestion along Walton Street. The issue of local accessibility was raised, and it was agreed that Health Centres need to remain within and accessible to local communities.**

3) **OxPA's Footway Obstructions Survey** Do you know of streets where footways are made impassable, or nearly so, by parked vehicles or clutter? Tell us about them. Enclosed with this newsletter is a survey form. Do please complete it and send it back. If we don't know about such streets, we can't speak for them.

- 4) **'Life Begins At 20' is our campaign for a twenty mile an hour speed limit across the city.** It was successfully launched at the Beech Croft Road street party on 18th July by none other than our Lord Mayor. **There is an increasing body of evidence that 20mph returns streets to citizens; it reduces deaths and injuries to people on foot, especially children; it civilises the street; it saves money not only in health bills but in reducing the clutter that the County has to provide to manage 30mph environments.** 'Life Begins At 20' has been set up by OxPA and by Cyclox, Oxford's cycling lobby group. Watch out for more as the campaign unfolds. If you'd like to tame your street and your city, contact our secretary or chairman.
- 5) **Our June meeting attracted a good attendance to hear Martin Kraftl, one of the County's Transport Planners, tell us about the background to the Local Transport Plan, how it is largely shaped by Government requirements (since Government provides most of the money), and what that means for expenditure on walking. Government set four objectives to be addressed - traffic congestion, safer roads, accessibility, air quality - and a fifth, improving the street environment, was set by the County.** All these objectives clearly influence the environment we all experience when on foot. Most of the major improvement the County will invest in, are improvements to public transport. Because the walk journey and the wait at the bus stop are part of that, Martin was pressed on how such matters would be improved. Many questions were asked. It seems that in the City there has been a poor history of investment by the private company involved in bus shelters. We hope that following our meeting, the County might give more attention to some of the matters we raised.
- 6) **OxPA is objecting to the proposal to close the bridleway which crosses the BMW plant.** The technicalities of replacing the bridlepath with one that passes outside the BMW plant are somewhat complicated, but OxPA felt that with an increase in journey distance of some 34%, and the poor and unsafe environment alongside the very busy ring road (along which the replacement is proposed) were real reasons to oppose the replacement of one bridleway by another.
- 7) **Walkers along Oxford's canal towpath will be saddened to see British Waterway's contribution to our summer walks; an 11ft fence, topped with rolls of lethal razor wire, stands where for 150 years a working boatyard operated. Local tour guides are boycotting the Jericho walk this summer as it is so ugly. British Waterways are applying for permission to have this fence up for three years. Please send objections as soon as possible to: Michael Crofton Briggs, Director of Planning, Ramsey House, St Ebbes.**

Our next meeting is on Tuesday July 25th. Its topic will be how OxPA responds to the Westgate application. Please come, find out more and have your say.

On Sunday 27th August OxPA is having a quiet lunch together in the peaceful gardens of Christ Church Meadow. Meet at the St Aldate's Gate at midday. Bring some lunch and friends. Everybody is welcome!

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