



Walk Talk

Newsletter of Oxford Pedestrians Association

April 2017

Welcome to Newsletter 121



This mandala, created by Public Health Doctor Lucy Saunders, should be framed on the desk of every local politician and planning officer. It is also an excellent aide-memoire for activists in the Oxford and other Pedestrians Associations. It summarizes the "Healthy Street" approach to urban design and regeneration embraced by Transport for London and featured in an excellent commentary by the Royal Colleges of Physicians and of Paediatricians and the Faculty of Public Health*. The Royal Colleges paper is a critique of the Department of Transport's Cycling and Walking investment strategy noting that the Department is planning to spend £300 million over the 5-year course of the present parliament on encouraging walking and cycling compared with £14 billion set aside for upgrading motorways and trunk roads. The Royal Colleges suggest a minimum investment of £10 per person per year (around 8 times as much) on cycling and walking schemes is needed to provide cost-effective improvements in the health of the public. It is depressing that in dealing with government the only argument thought worthwhile to advance is the money that might be saved by improving the health of potential NHS clients. What about our quality of life? Is that worth nothing to our political masters (and mistress)? Dr Saunders' mandala is a reminder that people will walk and cycle healthily - and happily - if streets are safe and pleasant places to walk and cycle in.

*Royal College of Physicians 2016. DfT walking and cycling strategy <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/file/4243/download?token=xa3riDrg>

Oxford's Air Quality

Our guest speaker at the March meeting was Mai Jarvis, City Environmental Team Leader, who gave an informative presentation on the history of Oxford's attempts to reduce pollution from emissions and current plans to meet EU standards: these include increasing cycling, improving infrastructure for charging electric cars and incentives to purchase them, car clubs, grants to taxi fleets to convert to electric, city exclusion zones for all but electric/H2 vehicles. Oxford is required to monitor air quality and report to Government both monthly and annually. More than 40,000 early deaths in UK are attributed to air pollution, and 5.6% of Oxfordshire's mortality.

ClientEarth has challenged the UK government in court over its failure to reach EU standards and the government has now to draw up new plans. However, Defra believes Oxford will meet required standard by 2020. Air pollutants include NOX, ozone, CO2, SO2, PMs from engines, rubber and metal, either generated by vehicles within the City or blown in from further away. Air quality is constantly monitored in the High, St Ebbes and St Aldates. Current readings can be accessed by visiting <https://oxfordshire.air-quality.info/location/oxford-st-ebbes/period/day/>.

Oxford Path Wardens

Members may not realise how important footpaths are to pedestrians, even in the City centre. Several well-used routes in the City centre are Public Rights of Way, including Bulwarks Lane, Friars Entry, the passageway that links New College Lane to Holywell Street via The Turf and Bath Place, Lamb and Flag passage, and the path beside St Giles' Church linking Woodstock and Banbury Roads. In wider Oxford there are many footpaths used by pedestrians including the river and canal towpaths, paths beside the Cherwell, and Cuckoo Lane linking Headington to the City centre.

There are 182 individual Public Rights of Way in Oxford (mainly footpaths). Over the last few years, Oxfordshire Ramblers have created a group of Path Wardens who monitor the state of Public Rights of Way (footpaths and bridleways, and some Byways open to all traffic – BOATS). Outside Oxford these volunteers are known as Parish Path Wardens. Within Oxford City, seven Path Wardens cover different segments of the City. We each try to walk all the paths in our area at least once a year, and twice a year we are sent reports from the County Council Countryside Access Team of 'issues' on their database, which we inspect and report on. The Path Wardens also do simple maintenance – mainly cutting back overgrowing vegetation, and reporting more serious issues to the Countryside Access Team.

Often there is too much work for one Path Warden to do alone, so we are always grateful for offers of additional help. If you are interested please get in touch (keithfrayn@gmail.com)!



Overgrown footpath in Headington Quarry' (footpath 152)

Walking in New Mexico

Visiting the desert of New Mexico puts walking in Oxford into a new perspective. Even in a backwater like Las Cruces, a small town close to Mexico's border, walking is something people do to keep fit early in the morning and late at night when the fierce daytime sun is not out. Once they have had their walk they then drive to work. The roads reflect this priority, with 6 lanes at a minimum and 50mph the slowest traffic speed. On foot it is impossible to navigate as there are no pavements and no crossings until you get into residential areas. Everything is very spread out as there is the space to build and it is assumed everyone drives. However, across the actual desert are tracks, some leading to and from Mexico which are used daily by migrant workers, on whom the economy of border towns depend, and who work for cash in dollars to support families in Mexico. Some tracks lead to shops and markets, so for the intrepid visitor it is possible to get about on foot, just not on roads! Nevertheless the air is clear and fresh, and the views magnificent, of distant horizons and mountains which give this very large desert area contour and shape.

Active Travel Commuting and Health

A recently published study in the British Medical Journal (BMJ 2017;357:j1456) has shown that cycling or walking to work is associated with major health benefits. The authors conclude that measures to encourage and support active commuting could reduce risk of death and the burden of important chronic conditions. See the abstract at:
<http://www.oxpa.org.uk/BMJcommuting.html>

Local Elections May 4th

Make sure transport is on the agenda!

Ask your candidate:

- how will you improve facilities for walking and cycling?
- will you use the new powers from the Bus Services Bill to defend and improve local bus?
- will you support measures to reduce danger and damage of HGVs?
- what action will you take to reduce traffic and clean our air and work towards a low carbon future?

Meetings:

Tuesday April 25th **Riversidewalk**, meet Town Hall 7pm. **Phone Sushila/Corinne if weather is doubtful**

Tuesday May 23rd: Impact of opening the Westgate Centre on Traffic in Oxford.

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