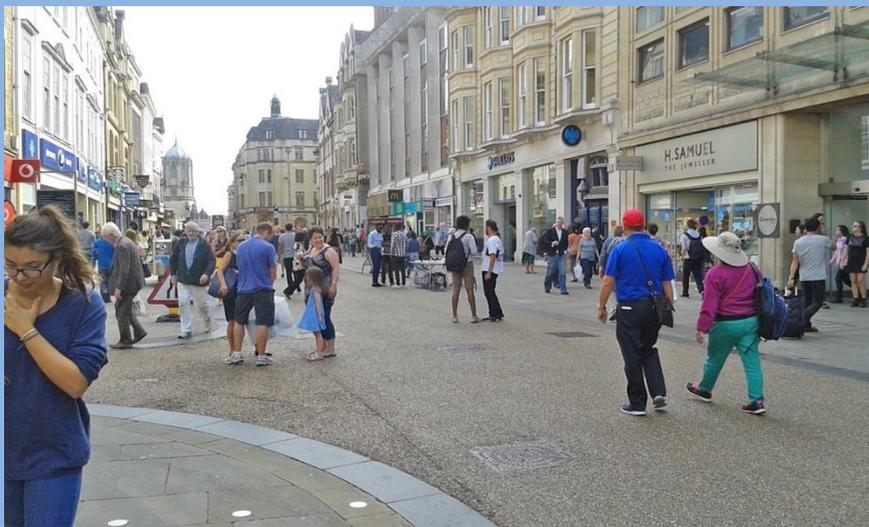


# A More Walkable Oxford

What the Local Authorities can do



**Oxford Pedestrians Association (OxPA)**

**2017**

## **Acknowledgements**

This publication is dedicated to the memory of Paul Cullen (1943-2011), Chair of OxPA from 2005 to 2010, who produced the original ***A More Walkable Oxford*** in 2008. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of Sushila Dhall, Keith Frayn, Corinne and John Grimley Evans, Mary Dortch, and copy editor Dr Jenny Collins.

# A More Walkable Oxford



*If only we could put the pedestrian at the centre of the design process and not the car, then we might create more liveable, walkable communities . . .*

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HRH The Prince of Wales in an interview with the National Trust

**Oxford Pedestrians Association  
2017**

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## **1 In Oxford on foot**

Oxford is a magnificent city, where being outdoors should be a delight. Beautiful buildings and streets surround us.

Oxford's outdoor environment is not only the city's face to the world; it is where we live our daily lives. It can help or hinder people, and we all depend upon it. The suburbs are as important as the city centre, for it is in the suburbs that the lives and attitudes of many of Oxford's children are formed. And it is often in the suburbs that many elderly people and families with children make their way regularly, on foot, to local shops and bus stops.

Being out of doors on foot is good for individuals and communities. It improves our health and enhances our sense of well-being and creates a stronger sense of community. But in many places the experience is spoiled by shortcomings that could be remedied, if only they were addressed.

The people of Oxford and the city's visitors deserve a better street environment. The current, mostly unpleasant, experience of being on foot (or wheelchair) in Oxford, reflects a lack of focus on the part of both the City and County Councils, which leads to well-intentioned policies remaining unfulfilled.

This report by OxPA looks at the Oxford outdoor experience in the streets and urban spaces of the city. It does not address the quality of the city's parks and other recreational open spaces. These are also important, but the issues discussed here are those which fall largely within the remit of the County Council as Highway Authority, and the City Council as Planning Authority and as manager of the city's environment.

In this report OxPA looks at where and how things can be remedied. We hope that the Councils will adopt ongoing processes to effectively improve conditions for people walking in Oxford.

## 2 Policy needs turning into action

Both the City and the County Councils recognise the personal and social benefits of walking and physical activity. Both Councils have policies of support for walking and outdoor activity, but these have not been fully implemented. The County Council now has a budget for Public Health initiatives, transferred from the NHS funds, some of which could be used to promote walking.

Climate change, sustainability, and health concerns, including mental health, have all confirmed the contribution that walking can make. It is claimed to be a great cure-all, mentally and physically. It is carbon-free, consumes no fossil fuel, and creates no noise or air pollution. It is one of the healthiest forms of exercise, accessible to nearly everyone. Part of central government's response to the challenges of living more sustainably and adapting to climate change includes changing our travel habits so that we all walk, cycle, and use public transport more. There is a walk at one or both ends of most vehicle trips, whether by bike, car, or motor bike. That's equally true for public transport—walking to and from the bus, and waiting for it, are part of the journey.



Typically, the walking experience of Oxford confronts people with obstacles.

### 3 What's wrong with Oxford's streets and public spaces?

A variety of problems affect the experience of being outdoors in Oxford. In essence, they boil down to one of neglect of the street as a public place. Some obstacles to walking are to do with day-to-day management of the city's street environment; others are to do with design of streets and facilities, while yet others are to do with poor installation or maintenance of facilities. And of course, to be able to make most use of Oxford on foot, the city needs to be navigable. In this section we highlight factors which contribute to the degrading of the outdoor experience of Oxford on foot.



#### 3.1 Management of parking abuses

Management of parking is very poor in many places, whether illegal pavement parking or the obstruction of pavements by vehicles protruding from front gardens. Illegal pavement parking is an offence that needs to be tackled. Unfortunately pavement parking has been regularised in some parts of Oxford as a 'solution' to neighbourhood car parking pressures. This has had the effect of encouraging illegal parking on pavements throughout the city. No compensatory measures have been provided for those who use the streets on foot. OxPA argues for an end to this practice, and its replacement by street design which reflects a holistic view of the street and its uses, making street space properly available to all users, especially including the most vulnerable.

### 3.2 Unmanaged cycle parking

Insufficient provision and poor management of cycle parking causes many problems. Racks are often blocked by abandoned cycles, and pavements become obstructed by bicycles unable to find a legitimate parking place.



### 3.3 Cycling on pavements

The design of some streets reflects a concern with helping people cycle safely by facilitating **cycling on pavements**, rather than creating a condition where it is safe to cycle in the road. The County continues to extend such provision, ignoring the transfer of risk from the cyclist to the pedestrian. Furthermore, **poor maintenance of white lines** and other markings and **a lack of design consistency** means that many people are unclear as to where cycling is and is not permitted. This leads to more widespread cycling on pavements with all the attendant risks to people on foot, especially the very young or old, and those with disability.



### **3.4 Narrow and crowded footways**

Footways are far too narrow on many of the busy walking routes into the city centre, and on the very crowded routes to and from the rail station. Rail station usage continues to grow, and with the exception of the newly remodelled Frideswide Square, the pavements along the crowded routes to the city centre continue to become increasingly difficult to negotiate.



### **3.5 Junctions**

Junction 'improvements' such as the lights at the east end of George Street, and the remodelled junction of George Street with Hythe Bridge Street, do not seem to have been designed with pedestrians in mind. Queues of people wait to cross and become an obstruction to passers-by. Monitoring and adjustment is required to ensure pedestrians can cross easily and safely. Crossings need to be direct and on desire lines.

### **3.6 Benches**

The number of benches has increased but there could still be more in the city centre. 'Perches' such as those on Cornmarket are uncomfortable and need replacing with proper benches.

### 3.7 Signage and navigation systems

There needs to be a full audit of street nameplates to bring all street junctions up to a standard of fully nameplated street corners. Improvements are needed at many T-junctions, and signs should be placed at both ends of all streets. We welcome the Waymarking scheme in City Centre, introduced by the City Council under the Oxfordexplore brand, but more signs for pedestrians routes are needed, for example, at Carfax.

### 3.8 Highway and drainage facilities

Poor installation and maintenance of highway and drainage facilities mean that ponding occurs after rainfall exactly where it is least wanted - often at formal crossing points where tactile paving leads the pedestrian straight into a very large puddle. There are also many instances of broken paving slabs and kerbstones caused by heavy vehicles, which pose hazards to pedestrians. This kind of poor workmanship and maintenance can mean the difference between a person being able to get to the shops or bus safely or having to stay at home.



### **3.9 Public conveniences**

The city's public conveniences are not well enough advertised and there are not enough of them for the volume of visitors to the City; existing facilities are on Market Street, Magdalen Street East, Speedwell Street, Gloucester Green, and in the Town Hall. Eight shops (including Marks and Spencer) are part of the Community Toilet Scheme, offering their conveniences during normal shopping hours. More shops should be encouraged to join this scheme.

### **3.10 Bus services**

Getting to and from buses can be difficult. There is a need for better coordination of bus stops and street crossings. Every out-and-back bus trip means a street crossing has to be made. Many city centre bus stops lack a shelter and digital indicator. There is a serious gap in bus services in the city centre, forcing many people to change buses or reach their destination by walking the length of Cornmarket or further - an uncomfortable and difficult experience at times and beyond the capabilities of many mobility-impaired passengers.

### **3.11 Air quality is poor in Oxford**

Air pollution is an issue for the whole of Oxford, with 'safe' levels of various traffic exhaust pollutants regularly breached, especially in the city centre, local shopping areas, and around the ring road. This has health implications for walkers, and also for residents of these areas. The City and County Councils have focussed on buses as a source of pollutants, and as a result buses have become much cleaner over recent years but because of the huge number even 'clean' buses make a significant contribution to pollutants in the city centre. The situation is not helped by the fact that all long-distance coaches traverse the city centre. However, cars and vans are the main source of air pollution on streets such as Hythe Bridge Street, Longwall Street, St Giles, Beaumont Street, and residential roads such as Botley and Abingdon Roads.

OxPA would like to see more streets closed to through private traffic (see 6.1) with the exception of cars of disabled drivers and essential delivery vehicles. This would free up the routes for public transport (including taxis), cycles, and pedestrians, and reduce air pollution for walkers and cyclists, whose experience at present on these routes is grim.

### 3.12 Traffic volume is too high

In spite of the aims of recent Transport Strategies, the volume of traffic in the city is still unacceptably high. Private vehicles continue to breach the bus gated areas and delivery vehicles through the streets at all hours regardless of agreed delivery times. The number of buses and coaches, and their ever-increasing size, make the High Street and St Aldates dangerous and unpleasant for pedestrians and cyclists. Residential 'arterial' routes, such as Botley Road and Abingdon Road, are highly congested with traffic at peak times.



City centre, Carfax

## 4 How to make streets into places for all to use and enjoy

A change in focus is needed to transform our streets into public places, not merely thoroughfares.

### 4.1 Create clarity about who does what

The City Council as Planning Authority and Public Realm manager, and the County as Highway Authority, have a shared duty to make city streets and other parts of the public realm friendlier, safer, easier to use and to negotiate. The division of responsibilities between the two Councils is often confusing.

- a) **OxPA recommends that both Local Authorities should agree and publish a statement about which does what with regard to the city's streets and public spaces.** This would not only help citizens and visitors, it should also help the two authorities become more proactive in dealing with concerns as they emerge.
- b) **OxPA recommends that the two Councils publicise their *Highways Enquiries* and set up an email address to manage all enquiries.**

### 4.2 Reduce vehicle dominance

- a) **Rationalise and redesign parking in residential streets** to reduce the nuisance and visual impact, free up pavement/public space.
- b) **Reduce the numbers of vehicles entering the city centre** by introducing a workplace parking levy and/or a congestion charge, as proposed in the current Oxford Transport Strategy.
- c) **Encourage the establishment of more car clubs** to reduce private car ownership.
- d) **Implement more street closures** like St Giles Fair, Cowley Road Carnival, etc. (see section 5.8).
- e) **Apply a 20 mph limit throughout the city**, including arterial routes.
- f) **Rationalise bus traffic** to reduce the numbers in the High Street and St Aldates and restrict the size of coaches and buses to what is appropriate in Oxford's narrow, medieval streets.
- g) **Enforce restrictions** on timing of commercial deliveries.
- h) **Manage commercial litter collection timings better** so Oxford's streets are not disfigured by bags of litter or large vehicles at busy times of day.

### 4.3 Put policy into practice

There are examples of good practice in Oxford city centre which demonstrate that when transport policy is properly implemented, the result is a public space where walkers, cyclists, and other road users all benefit. Frideswide Square and the Plain are two areas where pavements have been widened and raised crossings built on desire lines. Both places are safer, easier to navigate on foot, and more attractive as a result, while motorised traffic flow has not been compromised.



New Inn Hall Street is a good example of shared space, where walkers, cyclists, and delivery vehicles coexist without conflict. OxPA would like to see similar principles applied in other city centre streets. The Worcester Street/George Street/Hythe Bridge Street junction on the other hand is an example of an unsuccessful road layout. Over-prioritising of motorised traffic flow over cycle and pedestrian traffic has resulted in pedestrian crowding on the street corners, blocking pavements and slowing journeys on foot. Cyclists wait precariously in the middle of the road for significant periods while motorised traffic flows dangerously close to them in both directions. This junction needs to be remodelled, which will cost time and money, when a better design would have been obtained if vulnerable road users had been properly considered to start with.

#### 4.4 Make it easier to get about on foot

- a) **Plan and fund an Oxford walking network**, identifying different classes of walking route and gaps in the walking network; commit to eliminating those gaps. Produce and distribute a map of walking routes.
- b) **Review formal street crossings** to make it easier to cross roads on desire lines without undue waiting. Diversions down side roads to light-controlled crossings create hurdles to direct journeys on foot. For some people an extra 80 yards going, and then coming back, can make the difference between going out and staying at home.
- c) **Review timing of pedestrian crossing lights** – in some places pedestrians may wait up to almost 2 minutes for a green light to cross the road. Light timings are often based on the premise that vehicular flow is more important than pedestrian traffic. A review is needed throughout the city, bearing in mind that people need to be persuaded that they really are being encouraged to walk rather than drive.
- d) **Provide more, and more comfortable, rest places** – sitting is part of the outdoor experience - whether to rest, to muse, or to chat - and a more walkable city also needs more rest places. When giving walking higher priority, rest places of a good standard, including some that are covered, are an essential requirement.
- e) **Increase pavement extensions (raised crossings) on side roads** to make crossing the street physically easier and to give people on foot priority. This needs to go alongside a campaign to raise awareness amongst drivers.
- f) **Remedy broken paving slabs**, potholes, and damaged kerbs to reduce trip and stumbling hazards.
- g) **Replace light-controlled crossings** with zebra crossings where possible, encouraging co-operation between drivers and pedestrians, and reducing waiting times for both.

## 4.5 Day-to-day management and maintenance of the street environment

### a) Manage cycle parking continuously

Provide more on-street secure cycle parking in carriageways to eliminate obstruction of the pavements. Carriageway cycle parking confirms the rightness of the carriageway as cycling space. Work with the University to enable students and visitors to park their cycles off-street on College property and not on the pavement outside colleges.



### b) Remedy ponding at dropped kerbs and elsewhere

Many dropped kerbs have been badly installed and become barriers to getting about on foot during and after rain. This creates inconvenience and risk for able-footed people, but for more vulnerable people it means barriers to even the most local journeys. A full review of dropped kerbs is needed, with replacement by pavement extensions and raised crossings, to ensure that ponding after rain is eliminated and to make crossing roads easier. Road works need to be finished with proper drainage in place to ensure ponding does not occur at the side of the road, exposing pedestrians to soaking as buses and other vehicles pass by.



## **5 OxPA's recommendations to Local Authorities**

### **5.1 Create budgets specifically to improve walking conditions and the experience of being out of doors**

There is no shortage of policy support for walking and independent travel. Specific funding should be allocated to develop the one way of getting about that is used by everybody. Issues like shared use of space by pedestrians and cyclists should be properly addressed and satisfactory designs produced to improve people's environment when walking or cycling.

### **5.2 Carry out a full audit of street infrastructure used by people on foot**

The County should undertake a full audit, in line with an approved process, to identify shortcomings in people's walking experience. This should include the width of footways, condition of kerbs, crossings, rest places, toilets, and connections with buses and trains. This audit should ideally be a continuous process, and it should share the results with the City. Both will then be able to work out and prioritise remedial measures, and plan ahead to improve the outdoor experience, rather than remaining reactive to only some matters as they are reported.

### **5.3 A Walking Officer and a Cycling Officer**

Walking and cycling officers should be appointed to ensure the specific needs of walkers and cyclists are considered at every level.

### **5.4 Adopt and implement the recommendations of the government's *Manual for Streets***

The Councils should adopt a shared view and policies which reflect and reinforce the role of the streets as places for people. Both Highway and Planning Authorities have responsibility for the care and development of the outdoor spaces we use. These documents underscore the need for Highway and Planning Authorities to agree on a more enlightened and person-centred view of streets and their uses as primarily public space.

## 5.5 Reduce traffic speeds throughout city and residential areas

OxPA would like to see a city-wide 20 mph speed limit to include all roads throughout the City, including ‘arterial’ routes that are also residential streets. This would simplify street signage and reduce the clutter caused by multiple speed limit signs. In the short term, 20 mph signs, as on St Giles, need to be prominent enough to be unmissable by drivers.

## 5.6 Tackle parking abuses

Street parking is a major factor in degrading street environments. Several key actions are needed. There needs to be firm action against illegal **footway parking** and streets should be engineered as **shared space** where people on foot have equality with vehicles. Parking must be managed without appropriating footways as parking spaces. In many streets, marked-out parking spaces on pavements do not leave adequate space for people on foot, and drivers do not always park within the white lines. In streets where pavement parking is considered unavoidable there needs to be a review of the minimum width needed for pedestrians, parents with prams or pushchairs, wheelchair users, and people who need to walk side by side. Frequent monitoring should be maintained to ensure that parking is within the prescribed lines.



## 5.7 Car ownership

- a) **Work towards sustainable levels of car ownership** within the city, recognising that there is not space for everybody to have a car and park it in the street.
- b) **Encourage and facilitate Car Sharing Clubs** which give more people occasional access to cars without having to own one, thus reducing the need for on-street parking.

## 5.8 Street closure

Implement demonstration street closures which allow people to experience the delights of a car-free environment. Support and expand numbers of big street events such as 'In Town Without my Car', St Giles Fair, Cowley Road Carnival, Broad Street markets, and neighbourhood street parties throughout the city. Allow streets like Little Clarendon Street to be closed to motorised vehicles at weekends.



May morning 2016 in The High, "one of Europe's most beautiful streets"

## 6 Specific proposals for the city centre

Oxford's city centre is a unique environment which merits specific treatment to make being outdoors a pleasure for its many residents, students and visitors – to make it an experience that people will want to return to, not one to which the reaction can be 'never again'.

### 6.1 Create a Pedestrian Priority Zone for the city centre



Create a Pedestrian Priority Zone (PPZ) in the area extending from Little Clarendon Street and Keble Road in the north to Folly Bridge in the south, and from Frideswide Square and the rail station in the west to Magdalen Bridge in the east. Declare an ongoing strategy for this area, to establish walking as the predominant mode of transport, to design streets and spaces which confirm that. A PPZ would not prevent people entering the area by bike or by motor vehicle, e.g., electric shuttle or tram; it would, however, establish a priority of people on foot over other street users.

OxPA strongly supports the County's proposal to close Hythe Bridge Street to through private motorised traffic.

## **6.2 Bus services across the city centre need to be reconfigured until a definitive tram or electric shuttle solution can be implemented**

The walk through Cornmarket is a considerable disincentive to use of bus services. Re-linking of bus services is needed, to enable cross-city journeys to be made more easily. Magdalen Street East has been appropriated by the bus companies as a bus station, to the disadvantage of cyclists and pedestrians. Bus routings need definition and enforcement, to enable streets like this to become spaces for people once more. OxPA believes that in the longer term buses in Oxford City Centre need to be replaced by a more efficient and less polluting system of mass transit.

## **6.3 Introduce more shared surfaces where pedestrians have priority**

Providing one surface for everybody in narrow streets like Turl Street, Pembroke Street, New Inn Hall, and Market Street makes the best use of limited space and solves the problem of pavements becoming no-go areas for pedestrians and wheelchair-users because they are obstructed by parked bikes. OxPA would welcome extending level surface treatment to other suitable city streets, such as George Street. The aim should be to enable the city centre to be crossed on foot without conflict with motor vehicles.

## **6.4 Remove unnecessary traffic signals such as those at the Broad Street/George Street junction**

Many junction signals (e.g. those at the George St/Broad St junction) do not work well for pedestrians, who have to wait so long on the overcrowded narrow pavements; many flood across on their desire lines rather than wait for the safety of the 'green man'. OxPA believes that junctions would work better if de-signalisation were carried out, as was recently implemented at the eastern end of Broad Street. Instead, traffic calming in the form of raised crossings or junction tables should be installed.

## 6.5 Widen narrow and crowded footways in roads with heavy traffic flow

This would mean people can walk companionably (not in single file) and at a distance from noisy and polluting vehicles.

There are places in the city where overcrowding has created danger for people on foot, and where arguably the duties imposed by the Highways Act are not being fulfilled. Such conditions should be eliminated by pavement widening and moving parking spaces to other locations. Candidates for widening include:

- Hythe Bridge Street (possibly Oxford's most unpleasant, heavily used walking route)
- Sections of High Street
- Folly Bridge and its approaches
- Worcester Street, in particular between Beaumont Street and the entrance to the coach station
- St Aldates
- Magdalen Street East and West

Streets in other parts of the city should also be audited for adequate pedestrian space.

## 6.6 Make 'heritage' surfaces walkable

The successful treatment of entries to side roads off High Street has shown how walking can be made easier and the street environment enhanced by careful use of materials in Oxford's beautiful 'heritage' areas.



## 6.7 Make Broad Street a beautiful public square

Take general parking out of Broad Street (leaving spaces for disabled drivers). OxPA carried out a survey of Broad Street drivers and pedestrians (see Appendix B). The results showed a large majority of drivers were not parking to shop at the Covered Market or Broad Street itself, the official justification for a parking rank.

In both Broad Street and St Giles, there could be benches, a fountain, and space for theatre, music, and sociable relaxation (if motorised traffic did not occupy the areas with the finest views).



Car Free Day, Broad Street, 2002



Everyday Broad Street, 2017

## **6.8 Coaches**

Provide coach parking outside the city centre and prohibit coaches from waiting in St Giles and other central places. Enforce the rule that vehicles should not stand with engines running.

## **6.9 Narrow the roadway on St Giles**

Narrow the roadway on St Giles (currently six lanes wide) to create a walking route between Martyrs' Memorial and St Giles Church, thus giving walkers the best view of this beautiful space. OxPA believes that without compromising traffic flow, this 'hidden jewel' could become one of the world's most beautiful squares (see Appendix B for survey).

# **7 Summary**

Oxford is a very fine city with a beautiful historic townscape. But the walking experience of Oxford is marred by narrow pavements, too much polluting traffic, and obstructions to getting around on foot. The health benefits of walking are widely known, and there have been policies to increase walking in Oxford for many decades. OxPA urges radical change in the way planners view and design our public spaces. Application of innovative solutions, ranging from simple to visionary, could transform the experience of walking in Oxford's streets. OxPA believes a "more walkable" Oxford will benefit the health and quality of life of residents, workers, students, visitors, tourists, and the local economy.



Celebrating a pedestrianised St Giles ('Victorian Fair' 2012)

## **Appendix A: Policies**

- 1 Manual for the Streets 2014  
[www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/341513/pdfmanforstreets.pdf](http://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/341513/pdfmanforstreets.pdf)
- 2 Connecting Oxfordshire: Local Transport Plan 2015–2031  
[www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/sites/default/files/folders/documents/road\\_sandtransport/transportpoliciesandplans/localtransportplan/ConnectingOxfordshireVol4CycleBusStrategies.pdf](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/sites/default/files/folders/documents/road_sandtransport/transportpoliciesandplans/localtransportplan/ConnectingOxfordshireVol4CycleBusStrategies.pdf)
- 3 Oxford Transport Strategy: Oxford City Council 2015  
[https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/download/557/oxford\\_transport\\_strategy](https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/download/557/oxford_transport_strategy)

## **Appendix B: Surveys**

The following surveys can be found at the OxPA website:

<http://www.oxpa.org.uk>

- 1 Parking in Broad Street
- 2 St Giles Survey
- 3 Junction of Hythe Bridge Street/Worcester Street/George Street
- 4 Frideswide Square
- 5 Cowley Road
- 6 Botley Road

## About Oxford Pedestrians Association

Oxford Pedestrians Association (OxPA) was formed in 1995 in response to concerns that despite policies to reduce traffic in the city, conditions for enjoying streets and outdoor spaces were deteriorating. Walking is healthy and has minimal environmental impact. More journeys can and should be made on foot. Moreover, everybody is a pedestrian for at least part of each journey. OxPA argues the case for better walking conditions in a number of ways:

- lobbying and working with the City and County Councils to improve our streets
- responding to consultations and proposals affecting the walking environment
- holding regular meetings, often with a specialist speaker and providing forums for people interested in walking as a form of transport
- producing a newsletter four times a year
- maintaining a website with links to local and national news and campaigns
- liaising and networking with other groups
- supporting local campaigns for better streets
- publishing our own book of Oxford walks, *'Oxford on Foot'*
- enjoying Oxford – with walks around the city and suburbs.

Members keep up-to-date with OxPA through our website and our newsletter where details of meetings and other announcements are made. Meetings take place on the fourth Tuesday of each month in the city centre, from 7–9 pm. Visitors are welcome.

**OxPA welcomes new members. The annual subscription is modest. To join please contact [oxford.pedestrians.association@gmail.com](mailto:oxford.pedestrians.association@gmail.com)**



[www.oxpa.org.uk](http://www.oxpa.org.uk)