



# Walk Talk

Newsletter of Oxford Pedestrians Association

March 2012

## Welcome to Newsletter 102

**A city centre for pedestrians!** This was the inspiring title for our meeting in February. Our Guest Speaker was Gordon Reid, Oxford City Centre Manager, who presented his vision for making the experience of people on foot in Oxford worthy of our world-famous city. Gordon came to Oxford two years ago after working in Edinburgh, Perth and Dundee, and now he is applying his energy and experience to making Oxford more pedestrian-friendly. He believes that the city centre should be designed not to facilitate passage of through traffic but for people on foot, regardless of how they arrive in the city. His radical vision for improving Oxford includes pedestrianising much more of Broad Street, possibly moving the bike stands to the north side and having more tables and chairs on the south side. He would also like to remove traffic from half of St Giles, which functions for most of its length as two lanes of traffic although it has 6 lanes of road space. He envisages a "world market" in this space, and indeed there would be room for a market, art installations, a fountain and more. Gordon told us that of the 16 'historic' towns in England, Oxford has the highest footfall with 700,000 total movements per week past the three measuring points in Oxford (above M&S on Queen St, at STA travel on George Street, and at the Clarendon Centre on Cornmarket). Nine million visitors come to Oxford each year but not enough is done to encourage them to stay and spend money here. Questions raised by members at the meeting included the difficulty of crossing at Carfax, and George Street traffic lights not working for walkers. There is also the serious problem of the "Cornmarket Gap" in bus services, which presents huge difficulties for people travelling by bus between East and North Oxford. Also discussed were the high volume of traffic moving through Frideswide Square, pavement clutter, the new Wayfinding notice boards, and how to educate University Freshers about bicycle etiquette when they come to Oxford.

### Frideswide Square proposals

The County Council is consulting on two proposals for Frideswide Square, at present an unworkable, polluted, traffic-congested junction by the railway station. Both proposals drastically narrow the road space to one lane each way (there are currently three lanes each way) with the addition of bus-stopping bays. Both proposals take out all the traffic lights, and put in pavement extensions and level crossings with traffic islands on desire lines, and two mini-roundabouts (one lane width), one outside the station and one in front of the Royal Oxford Hotel. One design proposes a 'boulevard' with very wide pavements on both sides of two lanes of traffic down the middle, and plenty of opportunity to walk at a distance from the traffic. The other design proposes an 'oval' with the two single-lane roads crescenting in opposite directions around a big traffic island, which looks

attractive from above but may be a bit like The Plain on the ground, an inhospitable space surrounded by lines of motorised traffic. OxPA warmly welcomes the desire line places to cross, and the vastly increased space for walkers. More cautiously we like the principle, which is that given less space and no traffic lights drivers should go slowly and interact with walkers and cyclists as they do in shared space schemes in Europe. However, OxPA has also expressed reservations about aspects of the scheme; what will happen at night or when there isn't enough traffic to calm itself by congestion, where will cyclists go, and what if drivers don't interact with walkers and cyclists but just plough on regardlessly going as fast as they can? Talks on the proposals continue; OxPA values being able to voice our welcome for improvements while expressing our concerns about aspects that may not work. But we are convinced that radical

change is needed at what is currently one of Oxford's biggest and most unfriendly junctions.

### **Westgate update**

The City Council cabinet has again given its support to the scheme to vastly expand the Westgate Shopping Centre all the way down to Oxpens Road, with a new 1,337 multi-storey car park (partly underground) next to it. Now however the scheme is run by Crown Estates, who took over this piece of public land when Capital Shopping went into receivership two years ago. The scheme relies for economic success on filling the new car park from 8am to 6pm with shoppers staying an average of 40 minutes each.

### **April meeting**

Spring is here! For our April monthly meeting we will mark the lighter evenings and milder weather by going for a walk.

### **Pavement Cycling**

At a packed meeting in Headington residents met with local Councillors, a representative from CycloX, and a representative from OxPA to talk about problems with cycle lanes on pavements, around bus shelters, and junctions where cyclists and pedestrians were clashing. It was good to hear local views as there was not the aggression between different road users that has become so depressingly common in Oxford. The audience listened sympathetically to the concerns of cyclists who are being pushed off roads by fast traffic, and pedestrians, who cannot always hear or move out of the way (and perhaps should not have to!) if a cyclist comes up behind them on the pavement. And people on foot might have impaired hearing and or vision. The main thing everyone agreed on was that the 20mph speed limit needs to be enforced; with lower car speeds both cyclists and walkers are at far less risk, and cyclists can keep to their rightful place on the carriageway. The police said they could not enforce the 20mph limit because it was not a law passed nationally, but the feeling of the Councillors was that they could find a way to encourage the police to enforce the limit.

### **Frideswide traffic**

A five minute survey of both lanes of Botley Road from on top of Botley Road bridge at 4.30pm on Tuesday Feb 28th showed that 1 motorbike passed, 2 taxis, 3 buses, 11 vans and lorries, 17 bicycles, and a whopping 81 private cars.

### **Puddles**

When it is raining hard there are several junctions where water pools deeply. This means two things happen: people can't cross where it should be safe to do so, and passing vehicles send up sheets of water drenching walkers and cyclists. If you notice an example of this defect, you can report it to the County Highways Authority:

*highwaysenquiries@oxfordshire.gov.uk*  
or phone 0845 3101111.

### **Action on blocked pavements**

To get action on pavements blocked by A-boards and other clutter outside shops, phone the Council on 249811.

### **Government guidance on shared space.**

Having received research reports on the practicalities of shared space in urban design the government has issued design guidance to local authorities:

*http://www.dft.gov.uk/publications/ltn-01-11*

### **Help us de-clutter the city centre**

We have an opportunity to work in partnership with the City Council and the Oxford Civic Society to reduce pavement and signage clutter when the city's new Wayfinding signs are installed in the spring. Would you be interested in joining a small group to look at the city centre and put together a list of suggestions? This would probably mean an afternoon walking round the centre as a group, to compile and agree a list. If you'd like to help, please contact Ros Weatherall as soon as possible: 8 Richmond Road, Jericho, OX1 2JJ, *ros.weatherall@gmail.com* or phone 01865 426805 (home) or 07786 06 16 06 (mobile)

### **Next meetings**

**March 27th:** 7pm at the Town Hall: "Public rights of way in Oxford city" Guest speaker Anthony Dale, Footpath Secretary of the Oxford City Ramblers.

**April 24th:** A Spring evening walk - details to follow.

### **Contacts**

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