



# Walk Talk

Newsletter of Oxford Pedestrians Association  
Feb 2025

## Welcome to Newsletter 151

Take the ads off The Plain



The Plain roundabout is a notorious barrier to getting across Oxford safely and easily. For pedestrians, it is difficult to get from one side to the other: the informal crossings are risky and require multiple stages, while the formal pedestrian crossings are set back some distance from the roundabout. For cyclists, it is dangerous to mix with traffic: three years ago, medical researcher Dr Ling Felce was killed by a drug driver. A 'ghost bike', painted completely white and adorned with flowers, stands on the roundabout in her memory. Many people simply try to avoid crossing The Plain at all.

Next to the ghost bike, on the grassed island in the centre of the roundabout, there are five advertising boards for taxi firms and estate agents. I spotted last year that their planning permission was due to expire in October, so I emailed planning enforcement to have them removed. To my surprise and dismay, this seems to have had the opposite effect. This February, the City Council applied - to itself! - for both retrospective permission and advertising consent for a further five years.

I would like to ask OxPA members and supporters formally to object to this application. The Plain needs a thorough redesign to make it safe for everyone. Retaining the advertising boards is a step in entirely the wrong direction. Literally the sole purpose of adverts is to distract attention, and everyone navigating The Plain needs their full attention on the road.

There are additional reasons to object to the adverts on aesthetic grounds. The Plain enjoys a handsome setting at the approach to Magdalen Bridge with imposing trees on the central island, which is diminished by the ad hoc placement of adverts. But my principal concern is road safety. The City Council's internal procedures seem to have been careless in disregarding the needs of pedestrians.

Please submit a brief objection by Friday 7 March. I've put together a simple website at <https://PlainView.carrd.co/> (it doesn't need .uk at the end!) with a link where you can submit comments, or you can go directly to <https://www.oxford.gov.uk/planning> and look for reference 24/03019/CT3.



### Iffley Lock - shared or not?

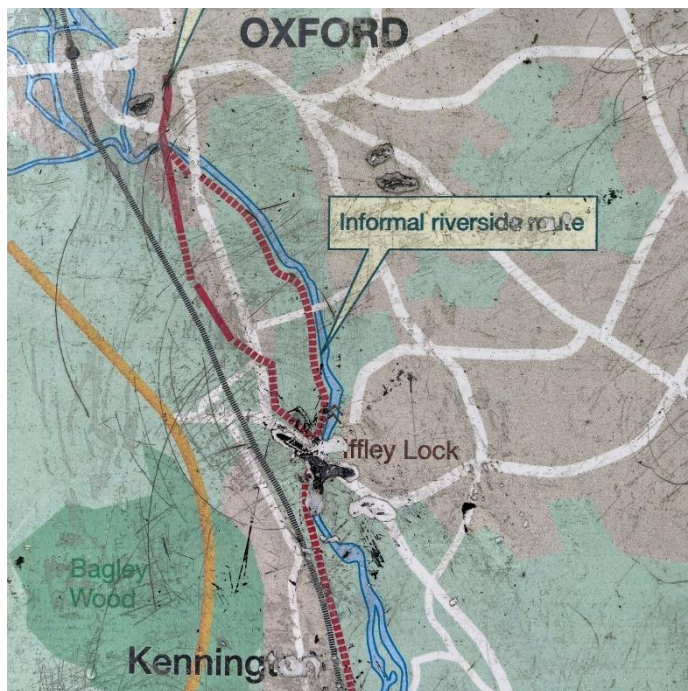
I appreciate both walking and cycling along the Thames towpath, especially around Iffley Lock. The main roads, especially Abingdon Road, are dominated by cars, so it is good to have a quiet alternative.

But after Polly Friedhoff's tragic death, it became apparent that the status of the river towpath as a shared path is unclear. One of OxPA's recommendations for improving safety on the path is that 'Signs which are visible and large enough be placed at regular intervals along these paths saying Pedestrian Priority.'

At the end of last year, I audited the existing signage. Unfortunately, rather than designing out conflict between pedestrians and cyclists, the signs seem to design it in.



[Photo 2: No cycling, looking north]



[Photo 1: Sustrans map]

Descending from Isis Bridge on the southern bypass, this map shows the Hanson Way, a traffic-free route between Oxford and Abingdon. The route was developed by Sustrans as a Millennium project so this map is showing its age! An accompanying milepost points to the 'Riverside' but the map makes it clear that the Thames Path is an 'informal riverside route', not National Cycle Network route 5, which continues along the ring road instead.

Land ownership along the river is complicated, but this stretch on the approach to Iffley Lock belongs to the Environment Agency. Their sign is 100% clear: 'No swimming / No cycling / Keep dogs on leads'. I'm told there used to be a kissing gate here as an encouragement to dismount (but remember that dismounting is not always easy for people who use bicycles as mobility aids).



[Photo 3: Share Respect Enjoy sign]

Yet literally a few seconds further north, at the Mathematical Bridge, is this green 'Share Respect Enjoy' sign from Sustrans. It shows people walking, cycling, and using a mobility scooter, with the strong implication that this is a shared path for cycling.





[Photo 4: No cycling, looking south]

A little further on again and there's a sign at the rollers for people heading south from the Isis Farmhouse. This one says 'No cycling' but also 'Welcome to the lock', and it's positioned to make it ambiguous whether it applies only when you turn off through the lock, or the Thames Path as well. And between the two 'No cycling' signs is another reminder to 'Share Respect Enjoy'.

Finally, and unsurprisingly, there is no sign at either end to say 'Thank you for visiting the lock, please resume cycling safely from here'!

Where the path narrows as it passes the lock, one option would be to direct cyclists to the (overgrown) parallel path through the trees. Could it be configured similarly to the divided path which runs along the south side of the University Parks?

I am under no illusion that signs have a significant effect on safety. But until the towpath can be widened and Abingdon Road made safe, which may take years, the minimum we can expect is that the signs should be correct and unambiguous.

### Recommendations for the Thames Path

OxPA members attended the inquest into the tragic death of Miss Polly Friedhoff and a working group put together a statement from OxPA, recognising that the Thames Path is treated as shared use without being wide enough - and that the collision took place at the very narrowest part of the Thames Path, with the following recommendations which we have sent to the County Council:

OxPA recommends that:

1. The Thames Path is affirmed as a footpath, with priority to pedestrians and wheelchair users.

2. E-bikes and e-scooters be not permitted to exceed speeds of 3mph along the footways alongside canals and rivers.

3. Signs which are visible and large enough be placed at regular intervals along these paths saying 'Pedestrian Priority'.

4. In the same way as cycle signs have been placed on roads where there is motorist and cycle sharing to indicated cycle priority, signs indicating a walking and a wheelchair using person are placed along the Thames Path and the canal towpaths

5. Plans be made to widen the Thames Path and canal towpaths wherever this can be carried out, so that shared use is possible without risk to pedestrians

### OxPA and CycloX

Ian Loader, the new Chair of CycloX, and OxPA Chair met to talk about where we can work together. We agreed that we can make a joint statement saying that we would like to be able to welcome (legal) e bikes and e scooters as solutions to Oxford's transport crisis, but that their use and parking, the same as we say about cycle parking, needs to be in the road, never on pavements. With this new class of vehicle popular and accessible, the roads need to be safe and spacious enough for their use, leaving pavements and footways clear for pedestrians.

### Benches

After chasing and looking at sites and liaising with local people we have finally agreed the contract for the benches. There will be 13, not 14, as the over the 5 years it took the City Council to get through their legal processes the prices rose, and then at the last minute VAT was added, which was another £5,000.

Thanks to local people whom we appealed to, the benches on Botley Road, Headington, and in front of the Blavatnik School of Government have been retained.

The two we have lost along the way are the one on Giles Road in Littlemore, and the one on Donnington Thames Path – we hope to be able to put those ones in at some point, but meanwhile owe grateful thanks to Friends of Quarry, and to Councillors Susanna Pressel, James Fry and Louise Upton for accessing funds from their Council budgets to support us.

Big thanks are also due to members of OxPA who have donated to help pay the VAT. These benches, as well as being a legacy from our late member

Keith Holly, are a tribute to many people working together to achieve something positive for Oxford.

### **There's an app for it...**

A new smartphone app is available that allows you to share your walking experiences and take an active role in improving walkability in your area. By using the Walkability app and sharing your walking experiences you can help communities and local authorities to identify areas that need further improvement to make walking better for everyone.

The Walkability app allows you to add photos related to your experience, collect data, edit and update observations with latest information. The app also includes some gamification, communication, and social features to build walking communities and encourage participation.

The app is available in the Apple and Google stores. It has been developed by Walk21 Foundation, a UK-based charity that works around the world supporting everyone's right to walk. Find them at <https://walk21.com/>.

Are you using the app? Let us know your experiences.

### **Working group for A More Walkable Oxford**

OxPA needs to build on our policy booklet 'A More Walkable Oxford' (AMWO) and would like to create a working group to create a draft for members to comment on. If you would like to be part of this group please contact [oxford.pedestrians.association@gmail.com](mailto:oxford.pedestrians.association@gmail.com) and we will arrange a first meeting as soon as we can. All members of the group will be given a copy of AMWO to start off with. Much of what is in the booklet still stands, but we need to update and add to it.

### **AGM 2024 Summary**

OxPA is pleased to report that our well-attended AGM re-elected our Chair (Sushila Dhall), Treasurer and Membership Secretary (Don O'Neal) and Social Media Officer (Owen McKnight) for the year 2025-26. We look forward to the year as a strong small committee representing a strong small campaigning group with a big impact.

We give thanks to Ted Maxwell of Oxford City Council, our AGM speaker, who gave a clear presentation of work to support place-making in Oxford, and to support future initiatives such as rail links to the east of the city. His presentation can be found [here](#).

### **Volunteer vacancy: Newsletter Editor**

OxPA is seeking a Newsletter Editor for our quarterly newsletter. The work is not too onerous as we have a template - we need someone to collect input from members and put the newsletter together, working

with the support of OxPA committee, to create a document to be sent to members electronically by our secretary. The Newsletter Editor would be a member of OxPA committee, a small but hard-working group.

### **Volunteer vacancy: Stalls Officer**

OxPA needs a Stalls Officer to store four small boxes of OxPA stall stuff and to bring these, or make them available for easy collection up to 4 times per year. In addition, the Stalls Officer would provide a list of what we have to the Treasurer annually for the Treasurer's report.

Please contact us at [oxford.pedestrians.association@gmail.com](mailto:oxford.pedestrians.association@gmail.com) if you are interested or would like to ask any questions about this role.

### **Contacts**

Sushila Dhall: Chair  
Don O'Neal: Treasurer and Membership  
Stalls: Vacant, volunteer needed  
Owen McKnight: Social Media Co-ordinator  
Jamie Blomfield: Secretary

### **Enquiries**

Thanks to everyone who has been in touch about issues in their areas. Where we think we can help, we are following up on these. As a small organisation we are very reliant on our membership to highlight issues of concern, so please keep your emails coming, to:  
[oxford.pedestrians.association@gmail.com](mailto:oxford.pedestrians.association@gmail.com)