



AGM 2009 – Chairman's Report

Ladies and Gentlemen,

One of Oxford's greatest attractions is said to be that it is never dull. Certainly the past year has been anything but dull for the Society, and your hard-working Committee in particular. We have benefited greatly as our new committee structure and working methods have developed and born fruit. Perhaps the most notable result has been the success of the OxClean campaign. Last year at the AGM we were on the verge of the Spring Clean weekend. What an outstanding success that proved to be! The level of involvement was hugely impressive. Many open spaces and neglected corners were cleared of years of accumulated dumping and detritus; spotless streets gleamed with a new sense of pride and welcome. As I write this, we are approaching this year's Spring Clean, which I trust will be even more successful.

As their report and our Newsletters show, Spring Cleans are not the only projects of the very talented and energetic OxClean steering group. Their cooperation with City Works and the Oxford Times has been breaking new ground in local authority partnership working, a learning process for all involved. Liz Storrar has been at the heart of this activity, and after two very demanding years in the chair, she feels she must hand on her responsibilities to others. Our deepest thanks are due for all she has done to develop the OxClean project, and through this to enhance the profile of the Society so significantly.

Following the welcome given to their booklet *'The Bus Stops Here'*, the Travel Behaviour Group has now published their study of bus connectivity within the city. This is an important consideration in the assessment of the county council's proposals to *'Transform Oxford'*. Whilst welcoming the initiative to improve the environment in the city centre, the competing demands of better bus access and connectivity, the interests of pedestrians, cyclists, the disabled, the very young and the elderly pose huge problems over which we maintain a continuing dialogue with the county planners. A most welcome development here has been the close collaboration between city and county in the development of a street manual to guide street improvements as they are introduced.

In addition to the demanding scrutiny of the planning applications submitted within the city, there have been a number of major issues for the Planning Sub-Committee to consider this year. Whilst plans for the extensions to the Westgate centre are on hold, we have been consulted on a major development of shops, offices and student accommodation on St Aldates and Queen Street. Both universities have continued to develop their masterplans.

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At the Radcliffe Infirmary site, we are pleased to see that three of our main concerns – the retention of the Outpatients Building, pedestrian permeability between Walton Street and Woodstock Road, and the moving of vehicular access to the NE corner - have been met. Brookes has produced the next stage of designs for its redevelopment of the Gipsy Lane campus, and has obtained permission for a hall of residence on its Marston Road site to add to that at The Slade. The colleges have also been active, with major developments in various stages at St John's, Corpus Christi, St Antony's, Balliol, Keble and Pembroke. St Clare's too has been seeking to improve and rationalise its site on the Banbury Road. Members will hardly need reminding of the appeal over the Bodleian Library's proposal for the book depository on Osney Mead, or the inspector's decision. We wish the library speedy success in finding an alternative and more suitable site.

At the strategic level, we were pleased to see the Inspector's recommendation that the Warneford Fields should be registered as a Town Green. After much work on the proposed Core Strategy, the inspector appointed to examine its soundness has called for major revisions to improve its specific focus. It remains to be seen whether these will pass his scrutiny, or whether much more rewriting will be required. In the mean time, consultations are beginning on the Area Action Plan for the Northern Gateway to the city at the Peartree triangle. There is a welcome move too to establish a City Canal Partnership, to further the maintenance and use of the canal as a more significant contributor to the city's environment.

At the heart of many of our concerns lies the increasing financial pressure on the city council in providing the resources for the maintenance and development of the city in the way we should like to see. Leisure facilities are one example, and the future of Area Committees, though retaining their responsibility for the determination of planning applications, remains under scrutiny. The latest example has been the threat to the future of the City Museum, and I should like to thank all members for the various offers of support we have received in our campaign to retain this valuable asset.

This is our fortieth anniversary year, and I trust you will appreciate the rather special programme of events the Programme Group has been putting together. For many years, the quality and range of our events has been a major attraction of Society membership, and that has been largely in the hands of our superb convenor, Sheila Glazebrook. Sheila now feels the time has come to hand over this responsibility. I am sure all members will wish to thank her for all her efforts in providing so many enjoyable and rewarding hours for us all.

Alastair Lack will be taking over from her, and we wish him and the other hard-working members of the group every success in maintaining the standard of this important side of the Society's activities.

As the Treasurer's report shows, our expenditure has risen as our activities have expanded, and we have sought to improve our service to members. Nevertheless our finances remain in good shape.

Tony Joyce