

AGM 2010 – Chairman’s Report

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I hope you consider that in 2009 we celebrated the Society’s fortieth anniversary in fitting style. We were blessed with fine weather for our summer party in the Botanic Garden followed by a delightful talk on its history from the *Hortus Praefectus*, Timothy Walker. Then in September our President Mark Barrington-Ward gave us his memorable lecture: *40 Years of Oxford Planning. What has it achieved and what next?*, which now takes its place as the latest in our succession of occasional publications. Our day conference *Oxford Architecture: The Last 40 Years* followed in the entirely appropriate setting of St John’s College Garden Auditorium. For me, perhaps the most impressive memory of a fascinating day was listening to Sir Richard MacCormac’s reflections on architectural design in the very place which he had created for just such an occasion.

These special events were supplemented as usual by a full programme of other talks, visits and walks, organised now by Alastair Lack with his team of assistants, to whom we are most grateful. The continuing rise in our membership owes much to the quality and variety of our programme.

Under Pauline Martin’s dynamic leadership as Editor, we have also marked this anniversary by extending and improving the Newsletter and the other ways in which we communicate with members, now increasingly electronically where convenient.

You will see from the Planning Sub-Committee’s report that this has been another typically busy year on the planning front, with some very major proposals to examine, and a busy sequence of pre-application discussions also. Oxford University has continued to develop its plans for the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter, and make rapid progress in the construction of the Bodleian Library’s new depository at Swindon. This should permit the redevelopment of the New Bodleian, and let us hope a reconsideration of the environment in Broad Street, which has been in abeyance for too long. The Colleges too have been active in advancing improvement plans. Oxford Brookes has twice revised its proposals for its Gypsy Lane campus, following much criticism of the earlier plans. At the time of writing, the future of its third design remains to be determined. On the Churchill Hospital site, the major development of the Cancer Centre has been completed, adding to the complexities of the traffic congestion in the area.

Consideration of the city’s Draft Core Strategy continued throughout the year, from the Inspector’s initial hearings which required revised proposals, through the detailed consideration of the many lengthy submissions, to further postponed hearings, and the legal challenge to the South East Plan. At present, the outcome remains uncertain.

The Oxford City Canal Partnership was formed early in the year, with the Society as one of the inaugural members. The Partnership seeks to promote a vision for the canal as an environmental resource, a focus for the community and a contributor to economic life in the city. Its strategic plans should include ideas for the future of the Jericho Boatyard and the former Canal Basin.

We are one of the larger Civic Societies in the country, and an active member of the Association of North Thames Amenity Societies, a constituent grouping within the now defunct Civic Trust, to which we were formerly affiliated. During the year, articles in the Newsletter have kept members informed of the debate around a possible successor organisation to the Trust. The Executive Committee have carefully considered this, and the Hon Secretary has represented our views in the national discussions, out of which the new Civic Voice is gradually emerging.

One of the most worthwhile of the organisations which we support is the Oxfordshire Blue Plaques Board. With Eda Forbes as its tireless secretary, the Board has had another full year, unveiling eight further plaques, four within the city boundary, and four in the wider county.

Through the unremitting efforts of the OxClean Group, the March Spring Clean weekends, and all the other initiatives to reduce litter and increase awareness of the littering problem go from strength to strength, with more clean-up groups participating each year. These activities are now embedded in the City Council's programme, and the Group continues to expand their contacts to ensure increasing success in the battle to achieve a cleaner, greener city.

At the City Council's request, we have also taken on responsibility for the coordination of the Streets for People campaign. Our efforts this year assisted thirteen groups to arrange street events, and plans are well under way to increase this number significantly in 2010, and extend the scope and purpose of this initiative which stems originally from European Mobility Week.

The Travel Behaviour Group has had an increasingly busy year. From the early consultations with the County on the Transform Oxford proposals, through discussions on various detailed road schemes, we have moved to all the preparative work on the Local Transport Plan 3, and the implementation of Access to Oxford, of which improvements to Oxford Station are an important component.

Early in 2009, the future of the Museum of Oxford was threatened when the City Council halved the Museum budget for 2009-10 and proposed closure from April 2010. We are most grateful to all those members who rallied round to support our campaign for the retention of this vital part of the presentation of the City's cultural heritage, particularly those who have volunteered to assist the reduced staff. Without them the Museum could not remain open. We still need more help if the rota is to be fully supported, and I appeal to anyone who can offer some occasional time for this interesting and rewarding work to put their name forward. A steering group has now been set up to explore a more stable and sustainable future. So far, a continuing budget for 2010-11 has been proposed, and we are involved in the work which is proceeding on the longer term prospects. We expect this to be a continuing commitment for the Society.

I think it must be clear that all the Society's activities could not take place without the great deal of time and expertise given to them by a group of remarkably dedicated and gifted members. I should like particularly on your behalf to welcome those who have joined the Executive Committee or one of its sub-groups this year, and also all those who assist at meetings and in support in a multitude of ways.

Finally, I draw your attention to the Treasurer's Report, which shows that our finances continue in a healthy state. Your Committee remains alert to the demands which our current and future activities place on our funds.