

A constant and steady presence

Annual Review 2024



OXFORD
CIVIC SOCIETY
AN INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR OXFORD
SINCE 1969

Our aims

Aim 1: Influence policy makers on the development of Oxford as a city region where people enjoy living, working and visiting.

Aim 2: Engage members and others about the Oxford city region... with constructive... proposals for its further improvement.

Aim 3: Co-operate with the region's residents' associations and civic societies nationally... to campaign for community-led solutions to shared problems, including engaging with our diverse communities.

Aim 4: Learn from other cities, both in the UK and abroad, where creative strategies might be helpful to the Oxford city region.



Blue plaques

We continued to support the Oxfordshire Blue Plaques Board which placed six new plaques in 2024. Read more in the March 2025 issue of Visions.

An influential voice for Oxford

Our Chairman, Ian Green, sums up the year

2024 was a year of new national, local and organisational challenges but we maintained a clear focus on our aims, our actions and responses demonstrating both versatility and vigour at all levels.

The Society continued to influence policy makers and key stakeholders to ensure that development respects the city's past, benefits the city's present and contributes to a vision of the city's future. Our technical working groups – Planning, Transport, Community Impact and Oxfordshire Futures – worked hard on this as the following pages show.

We continued to engage our members and others in discussion about the city and the wider city region, helping us to develop our proposals for further improvement. A new sub-group, City Visions, was set up and is contributing to our evaluation of the pros and cons of current local government reorganisation and devolution options for the city region.

As ever, the Programme Group organised many very popular visits, talks and discussions on a variety of topics, as set out later in this review.

OxClean is by far our most rewarding contact with local communities and hundreds of people came together in March for the annual Spring Clean. Each year the amount of rubbish collected on these litter-picks reduces. Behind the scenes we continued to campaign for more bins and more responsible attitudes to litter.

The Communications team continued to engage with members and reached out to the community via our websites and shop window on Broad Street.

We continued to strengthen our cooperation with the Oxford city region's residents' associations and with civic societies in other parts of the country. The

creative strategies of other cities, both in the UK and abroad, are often helpful here and we continued to learn from them.

National challenges included the introduction of changes to planning policy and we responded vigorously to national consultations on this.

At the end of the year, we also responded to the Government's White Paper on local government reform and devolution, which could have significant impact on the governance of the city and city region. We are concerned about the lack of public engagement in these issues and are seeking ways to establish a constructive dialogue between the governors and the governed. Major decisions need to be made in 2025.

We took a particular interest in the overall investment in infrastructure strategy and will continue to keep a close eye on this critical issue.

Locally, the way in which transport policies have been developed and implemented (or prepared for implementation) has proved unnecessarily divisive. We tried to influence this, encouraging collaboration with communities. For example, we continue to try to ensure that monitoring and evaluation of the planned traffic filters is as sensitive and perceptive as it needs to be.

Organisationally, we made major changes to how we operate and these will be formally announced at our AGM. You can read a brief summary on the back page. This more effective governance arrangement was much needed and is possible because we are privileged to have very capable trustees, supported by equally capable active members.

We cannot thank our trustees and other active volunteers enough but everyone's support matters – individuals, families, local associations and corporate members. Thank you all.

Ian Green, Chairman

All change

A new national government was elected in July 2024, bringing a raft of new measures relating to planning, local government reform and devolution. The Society has seen much change over the last 55 years but continues to be a constant and steady presence with a long-term view.



The old part of County Hall, symbolic of the County's power. Might the County shortly swallow up all the other local councils?

Our volunteers

We have over 100 volunteers involved in our various working groups and no paid staff. We have room for more! Do join one of our groups – or even start a new one.



Planning in numbers

Planning applications decreased slightly to 1,109 in 2024 of which 85% were approved. We scrutinised over a third of the total (c.370) and submitted comments on 137 (compared with 90 in 2023).

There was little movement across the categories of applications, with the exception of those for listed buildings consent where applications in 2024 increased by 18% – 111 compared with 94 in 2023.



The proposed new Warneford Hospital (above) and the Oxford North development (below) where much of the ground was laid this year. We argued for more housing on this site.



Going for growth

Gillian Coates sums up the Planning Group's work

Throughout the year we engaged with representatives from the Council and the University to stress the importance of well-sited new homes. We believe that if the city is to function effectively then people should live in or close to it and not need to commute from the far reaches of the county.

Economic growth was the byword and the sheer number of research institutions, innovation centres and laboratories that came before the planners was eye-watering. Sadly, we lost the battle for the Odeon site (destined to be an aparthotel) and the Debenhams/Oxenford building (destined to become lab space and student accommodation).

A measure of our success is the regular involvement with developers at the pre-application stage and we were delighted to be consulted on the exciting proposals for the Warneford site and the redevelopment of the Waynefflete building. We continued to engage with Nuffield College on their plans for the island site, the central gateway to the city.

Keeping in touch, making news

Thelma Martin on the Communications Team

Using all the means available to us, we regularly updated members on our work and kept the Society's aims, initiatives and events in the public eye.

Our four websites and X (formerly Twitter) are tools we have used for some time, as is print media. We achieved front page and editorial coverage from the *Oxford Times* for our views on the Schwarzman Centre. We resolved to make better use of social media to engage additional audiences and recently set up a new Instagram account. Our shop window display on Broad Street continued to attract attention from the thousands of passers-by.

Travel and transport matters

Andrew Pritchard reports on the Transport Group

Throughout the year we worked to reduce the impact of tourists on travel in Oxford, in particular of their coaches in the city centre. We were pleased to talk with Mosaic, an independent consultancy advising the City Council on tourism, who also considered the coach problem important. They aim to set up a commercial group to finance a five-year business plan for tourism, concentrating on place management.

We supported the introduction of a Rapid Transit system in the county's LTP4 report, so we set up a meeting with Coventry City's director about their novel proposals for a Very Light Rail system, which promises cheaper and faster introduction of trams. We looked at how such a system might be introduced in Oxford.

Along with everyone else, we have found the delays to the Botley Road railway bridge and station works incredible. The road closure is now predicted by some to last until August 2026. We are promoting a review to identify lessons learned and the scope for compensation of the many who have been affected.

We have consistently urged that East West Rail is electrified from the start and has full provision for freight services. The Government now appears to agree, though partial electrification has been suggested, using battery power along some stretches, discouraging the use of electric traction for freight.

Through our membership of Oxfordshire for Buses, we urged that up-to-the-minute information about bus departures be available at Oxford station, as at the Seacourt Park & Ride, and understand that this is likely to be installed in 2025.



What Coventry's light rail vehicle might look like. The service is due to start in 2025.



Botley Road bridge works

Slowly does it!

One of our most successful campaigns was to persuade the County Council to introduce 20 mph speed limits on suburban roads. Oxford thus became the second UK city to do so, in 2009. Other authorities were clearly taking note as more and more places have adopted the policy.

What we had not foreseen was that car insurance premiums would go down as a result of the reduction in claims for collision damage! We continue to campaign for better traffic management.

Parent Power

As members of the OIEP Educational Attainment working group, we're supporting Parent Power, a project in Blackbird Leys. This aims to improve parent wellbeing and support networks, so that parents and their children can thrive together.



"Very many thanks for organising another brilliant visit. I learned a lot!" A comment from a member taking part in a guided tour of new buildings at Oxford Brookes.



Tackling inequality

Gillian Coates on the Community Impact Group

We continued our work with the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership with members of the Society serving on the Steering Group and the subject working groups. The aims of the Partnership are both wide and ambitious, addressing the knotty issues that impact on inclusivity – educational attainment, inclusive employment, social value and procurement, and place-shaping.

Much work has been undertaken, primarily focusing on engaging organisations across Oxfordshire to sign up to a new Charter to make the county's economy fairer for everyone. We see this initiative as an opportunity for the Society to engage with residents' associations and community groups, reaching those parts of the city where we have no representation and few members. See www.oiep.org.uk

Talks for all and members' tours

Ian Salusbury reports on the Programme Group

This year our programme of events included nine talks on a wide range of subjects which attracted over 470 attendees. These are free of charge and open to the public. We hosted a talk at Florence Park Community Centre for the first time to broaden our audience reach. The most popular talks were by Simon Bradley on the *Pevsner Guide to Oxford* and Simon Wenham on James Murray and the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

We also arranged nine visits and guided tours for members only. Several events, such as the tour of the Life and Mind Building, proved so popular that they were fully booked within an hour of being announced. We successfully set up a second visit to Rhodes House to meet the demand for places. In total, 193 members attended our events in 2024.

In context – the city region

Ian Green on the Oxfordshire Futures Group

Our underlying commitment has been to encourage an Oxfordshire-wide consensus on the distribution of employment and housing growth along with associated transport and other infrastructure provision. We still lament the cancellation of the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan but are encouraged by the new national Government's re-introduction of mandatory strategic planning and the beginning of a new stage of the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy. Early in 2025 progress with strategic spatial planning should be possible.

We also investigated options for local government reorganisation and devolution, pending national initiatives in 2025. The main aim here needs to be high-quality growth that is inclusive, responsive to climate change and with optimal economic benefits.

The group will be drawing together a report on how smart growth and development can help tackle the obstacles we face and meet national targets.

Engaging the community

Rosanne Bostock sums up for OxClean

In partnership with Oxford Direct Services we organised our 17th OxClean Spring Clean in March, when about 60 groups collected over five tons of litter and recyclables. We hope the new website we developed will encourage people to undertake any-time litter picks, for which we can supply equipment.

We supported the clean-up of St Mary Magdalen graveyard in the centre of Oxford which had become very overgrown and a magnet for litter.

OxClean acts as assessor for the Duke of Edinburgh Award volunteering section. We supported around a dozen pupils clearing litter from car parks in the John Radcliffe, Nuffield and Churchill Hospitals.



OXFORD CIVIC SOCIETY
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SINCE 1982

VISIONS

November 2024
Number 159

Getting the foundations right

For attention to build on the progress made in the last year, the Oxfordshire Futures Group has set out its vision for the future of the city region. The group's vision is to create a sustainable, inclusive, and resilient city region that can meet the challenges of the future. The vision is based on the following principles: **1. A sustainable city region** that can meet the challenges of the future. **2. An inclusive city region** that can meet the needs of all its residents. **3. A resilient city region** that can withstand the challenges of the future. The vision is based on the following principles: **1. A sustainable city region** that can meet the challenges of the future. **2. An inclusive city region** that can meet the needs of all its residents. **3. A resilient city region** that can withstand the challenges of the future.

In a special themed issue of our newsletter, Visions, we focused on several aspects of strategic infrastructure planning. In our view, the whole city region needs to work jointly to overcome some serious challenges, from a shortage of water to climate-proofing new and existing buildings.



Litter picking brings the community together as here, on Horspath Road.

With thanks to our members and others for the use of their photos: Beautiful Barton, Clive Booth, Coventry Telegraph, Roger Grosvenor, Stephanie Jenkins, Oliver Sandall, Oxford Centre for Oneness, OIEP, Ian Salusbury

Figures at a glance

Income - £26,082

(£16,797 in 2023)

- Subscriptions/donations £11,120
- Visits/guided tours £1,449
- Gift Aid £1,552
- Legacy £8,941
- Investment income £3,020

Expenditure - £13,699

(£11,542 in 2023)

- Newsletter £3,628
- Visits/tours £953
- Talks £2,783
- Room hire £1,264
- IT/website £1,993
- OxClean £812
- Blue Plaques £516
- Donations and subscriptions £530
- Computer purchase £620
- Other £600

Surplus £12,383

(£4,097 in 2023)

General Fund Assets

£59,915

(£47,532 in 2023)

Restricted Fund Assets

£17,500

(£17,500 in 2023)

Reserves policy

We hold sufficient to cover our liabilities and to enable us to take professional advice as needs arise.

Registered charity no. 1116739

Money matters in 2024

Richard Dodd, Hon Treasurer, summarises our finances

Income from membership subscriptions was similar to 2023, while interest on reserves held in our CCLA account was significantly higher. Gift Aid brought in over £1,500.

We received a legacy of just under £9,000 during 2024. Planned expenditure of the remaining £17,500 of the legacy received in 2020, earmarked for provision of benches, is now imminent. The funds are considered to be restricted.

An extensive programme of visits and talks ran throughout 2024. Expenditure on the free-of-charge talks was similar to 2023, resulting in a net cost of £2,287. Other items of expenditure, including our support for Blue Plaques, OxClean and our administrative costs, were broadly in line with 2023, resulting in a year end surplus of £12,383.

The full accounts are available on the website, or on request from treasurer@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

Streamlining our governance

Ian Green, Chair, explains recent changes

An analysis of what we do and how has led us to group the Society into three main sectors: Operations, Engagement and Communications, and Technical Working Groups. Each group now has a trustee to coordinate activities within and between the groups. The Executive Committee will meet less frequently with more decision-making delegated to the sectors and individual groups. We hope this will spread the work more equitably and improve our effectiveness.

**OCS is a society for people who care about Oxford,
want to enjoy it more fully and help shape its future.**

New members are always welcome.

President: Sir Tim Stevenson

Chairman: Ian Green Vice Chair: Gillian Coates

Hon Secretary: Vernon Porter Hon Treasurer: Richard Dodd

Oxford Civic Society, 67 Cunliffe Close, Oxford OX2 7BJ

info@oxcivicsoc.org.uk

oxcivicsoc.org.uk | oxclean.org.uk

oxfordfutures.org.uk | oxfordwalks.org.uk

OXFORD CIVIC SOCIETY
ACCOUNTS FOR THE YEAR ENDED
31 DECEMBER 2024

These Accounts were approved by the Trustees on

9th January 2025

Chairman of Trustees

Lawless

Hon Treasurer

R.A. Dodd

THE TRUSTEES OF OXFORD CIVIC SOCIETY

INDEPENDENT EXAMINERS REPORT TO THE TRUSTEES

Report on the accounts of the trust for the year ended 31 December 2024 which are set out on the succeeding pages.

Respective responsibilities of the Trustees and examiner

As the trustees you are responsible for the preparation of the accounts; you consider that the audit requirement of section 144(2) of the Charities Act 2011 (the Act) does not apply. It is my responsibility to state, on the basis of procedures specified in the General Directions given by the Charity Commissioners under section 145(5)(b) of the Act, whether particular matters have come to my attention.

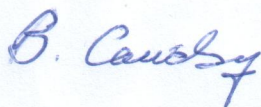
Basis of the independent examiners report

My examination was carried out in accordance with the General Directions given by the Charity Commission. The examination includes a review of the accounting records kept by the trustees and comparison of the Accounts with those records. It also includes consideration of any unusual items or disclosures in the accounts and seeking explanations from the Trustees concerning such matters. The procedures undertaken do not provide all the evidence which would be required in an audit and, consequently, I do not express an audit opinion on the accounts.

Independent examiners statement

In connection with my examination, no matter has come to my attention

- 1 which gives me reasonable cause to believe that in any material respect the requirements
 - to keep proper accounting records in accordance with section 130 of the Act; and
 - to prepare accounts which accord with the accounting records and to comply with the requirements of the Act have not been met; or
- 2 to which, in my opinion, attention should be drawn in order to enable a proper understanding of the accounts to be reached.



Brian Causby CPFA

6 January 2025

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT FOR YEAR ENDING 31 DECEMBER 2024

INCOME		2023	2024	2023	EXPENDITURE	2024
£9,273.62	Subscriptions/Donations	£9,119.82	£3,632.90		Newsletter	£3,627.74
£1,900.00	Corporate Subscriptions	£2,000.00	£728.24		Visits/walks	£952.83
£1,638.91	Gift Aid	£1,552.27	£3,015.00		Talks	£2,783.47
£2,030.93	Visits/walks	£1,449.36	£2,280.13		Website/IT	£1,992.97
£0.00	Talks	£0.00	£85.75		Stamps, telephone, stationery	£117.46
£0.00	Debates/webinars	£0.00	£25.00		Civic Voice/OCVA	£30.00
£1,953.67	CCLA interest	£3,019.80	£584.90		Blue Plaques	£516.10
	Legacy	£8,941.11	£157.00		Insurance	£157.00
	Projects		£225.00		AGM	£0.00
			£198.00		Room hire	£1,264.10
			£130.00		Independent Examiners fee	£130.00
			£704.36		OxClean	£812.02
			£792.94		Projects	£0.00
			£0.00		Donations	£500.00
			£0.00		Computer	£620.06
			£141.20		Miscellaneous expenditure	£195.35
			£0.00		Keith Holly legacy	£0.00
					Excess of Income over Expenditure	
					-General Fund	£12,383.26
					-Keith Holly Legacy	£0.00
£16,797.13	Total Income	£26,082.36	£16,797.13			£26,082.36

OXFORD CIVIC SOCIETY

BALANCE SHEET 31 December 2024

2024

ASSETS

£69,341.57
£8,073.18
£77,414.75

CCLA Fixed Interest Fund for Charities
Lloyds Current Account

2023

£58,321.77
£6,709.72
£65,031.49

Represented by:

General Fund

£47,531.49
£12,383.26

Balance 1st January
excess of income over expenditure in Year

£59,914.75

Keith Holly Legacy

£17,500.00
£0.00

Balance 1st January
Less expenditure in Year

£17,500.00

£17,500.00

£77,414.75

£65,031.49

- Notes
- 1) Of the £77,414.75 assets, £17,500 is to be spent for purposes agreed by the family of Keith Holly
 - 2) The computer purchased in 2024 is considered to have no residual value