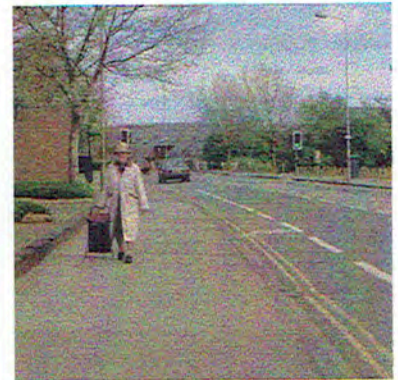




The Oxpens Quarter Initiative

The public's vision for the future



Acknowledgements

Oxford City Centre Management and Roger Evans Associates would like to thank the following people:

John Biggs (Urban Design Group); Geoffrey Randall (Built Resources, Oxford Brookes University); Ben Burrows (Holywell Press); Paul Mason (CIN La Salle); Sally Harrison and Moyra Haynes (Oxford Preservation Trust); Peter Hill (University of Oxford); Kavanagh Development; Keith Moffatt (Go-Ahead Group); Osbourne Development Group; Steve Pharoah (Urban Design Group); Jonathan Radley (Oxford Bus Company); SENDRA; Chris Smith (Oxford City Council); Graham Smith (JCUD, Oxford Brookes University); Andrew Snowdon (Oxford College of Further Education); Cathy Tranmer (RUDI, Oxford Brookes University); Nick Waites (UDGPPP); Chris Whitehouse (Morrells Brewery); Stuart Yeatman (Urban Design Group); and also all the members of the public who took part and whose enthusiasm helped to make the Oxpens Quarter Initiative a success.

Sponsors

The following organisations helped to make the Oxpens Quarter Initiative possible through sponsorship:

- Oxford Bus Company
- Oxford City Council
- Oxford College of Further Education
- Oxford Preservation Trust
- Oxford University
- Roger Evans Associates
- Holywell Press

The project team

Roger Evans Associates:

Kathryn Anderson, Sarah Bascombe, Eileen Carr, Jo Cave, Steve Conner, Roger Evans, Christina Evans, Chris Odgers, Rob West, and Julie Witham.

City Centre Management:

Marcus Laphorn

Dedicated to the late Steph Spencer, Chair of the Planning Committee from May 1996 to June 1997, without whose commitment the Initiative would not have gone ahead.

c o n t e n t s



introduction

Pages 4-6 background

historic

present day



Pages 7-11 public involvement

leaflet

treasure hunt



awareness raising day

public workshop

the internet

Pages 12-25 the debate...

Pages 26-27 key themes

Pages 28-30 action

where do we go from here?

Appendix A

List of participants

Appendix B

Extracts from letters

introduction

The Oxpens Quarter Initiative was undertaken to enable people concerned about the long term future of the Oxpens Quarter of Oxford City Centre to come together to discuss its future.

This part of Oxford has recently been publicised due to reference made to it in Bill Bryson's best seller, "Notes from a Small Island":

Let's pass back down Cornmarket, through the horrible, low-ceilinged, ill-lit drabness of the Clarendon Shopping Centre, out onto Queen Street, past the equally unadorable Westgate Shopping Centre and central library with its heartless, staring windows and come to rest at the outsized pustule that is the head office of Oxfordshire County Council. We could go on through St Ebbes, past the brutalist compound of the magistrates' courts, along the bleak sweep of Oxpens Road, with its tyre and exhaust centres and pathetically under-landscaped ice-rink and car parks, and out onto the busy squalor of Park End Street, but I think we can safely stop here at the County council, and save our weary legs....

... And you tell me that it is one of the most beautiful, well-preserved cities in the world? I'm afraid not. It is a beautiful city that has been treated with gross indifference and lamentable incompetence for far too long, and every living person in Oxford should feel a little bit ashamed.

Bryson, B., (1996) *Notes from a Small Island*, London: Blackswan, p.155

This could be a wonderful new city quarter for the next millennium
Local resident

The initiative began in the summer of 1995 when Oxford based urban design company, Roger Evans Associates, together with Marcus Laphom, City Centre Management responded to an open invitation from the DoE to compete for funding to produce an urban design framework as part of the Government's 'Quality in Town and Country Campaign'. This particular bid was unsuccessful, but such was the enthusiasm demonstrated for 'seeing something done' with this part of the City, that supporters of the bid were encouraged to seek other ways of taking the Initiative forward.

By March 1997 commitment (including funding) had been secured from a variety of key organisations and thus the Oxpens Quarter Initiative was formerly launched with the following objectives:

- **To provide a brief which could eventually inform the production of an urban design framework for the Oxpens area**
- **To promote the idea of public workshops as a useful tool in the planning process**
- **To involve a wide cross section of the public in city planning and design**



This report is in five sections:

Section One provides a background to the area, both past and present. It traces the area's history from when it was a residential community (St. Ebbes and St. Thomas), through redevelopment in the 1960s to present day development pressures.

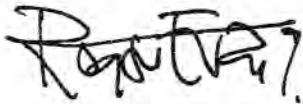
Section Two describes how the public have been encouraged to become actively involved with the future of the Oxpens area.

Section Three summarises the concerns that the public have expressed about the area and their ideas and aspirations for the future.

Section Four sets out those key themes or ideas behind which a consensus has seemingly emerged - the values which should inform future planning.

Section Five provides some suggestions as to 'where we go now' - the action which needs to be taken.

The Initiative has demonstrated a clear desire for action to be taken to secure long term improvements to the Oxpens Quarter. There seems to have been a resigned acceptance to development in this area over the years in contrast to the 'real Oxford' which millions of people visit each year. Views expressed through the Initiative have refuted this attitude; people **do** care about the quality of the built and natural environment in this area. What is more, visitors to Oxford **do** experience this Quarter and for many it forms their first impression of Oxford.



Roger Evans
Principal of Roger Evans Associates
Chairman of the Urban Design Group



Marcus Laphorn
City Centre Manager
Oxford City Council

The Initiative has been conceived in four stages:



Stage 1: To discuss **issues** of concern



Stage 2: To generate **ideas** in response to these concerns



Stage 3: To make **choices** between these ideas or options



Stage 4: To take **action**

For example...

All groups (without exception) stated that traffic domination in Oxpens Road was a real **issue**. This in turn created a number of additional inter-related issues including concerns about accessibility, poor environmental quality and pedestrian safety.

Most people had **ideas** as to how problems of traffic domination could be resolved. These ranged from removing cars from Oxpens Road altogether by re-routing traffic or placing cars in a tunnel, removing pedestrians from the street via pedestrian footbridges or re-designing the existing street so that both vehicles and pedestrians continue to use the street but pedestrians have greater consideration than they do at present.

Most groups at the workshop then began to make difficult **choices** between these ideas or options. The discussion often focused on peoples' experiences of streets and places elsewhere. We have tried to emphasise the majority view when one existed. In the case of Oxpens Road, many people expressed a view that it should be more like Oxford's St. Giles, as they felt this was a good example of how vehicles and pedestrians could continue to use the same street, but in an attractive way where traffic was not allowed to dominate to the same extent.

Ways of putting ideas into **action** are included at the end of this report. In the case of Oxpens Road, the recommendation is that an urban design framework be produced in order that proposals to traffic-calm the street through tree planting, new street alignments and new development can be tested in three dimensional form. The action plan will need to be further developed to cover issues such as funding and phasing, roles and responsibilities.



The Roger Evans Associates team

Historical Background

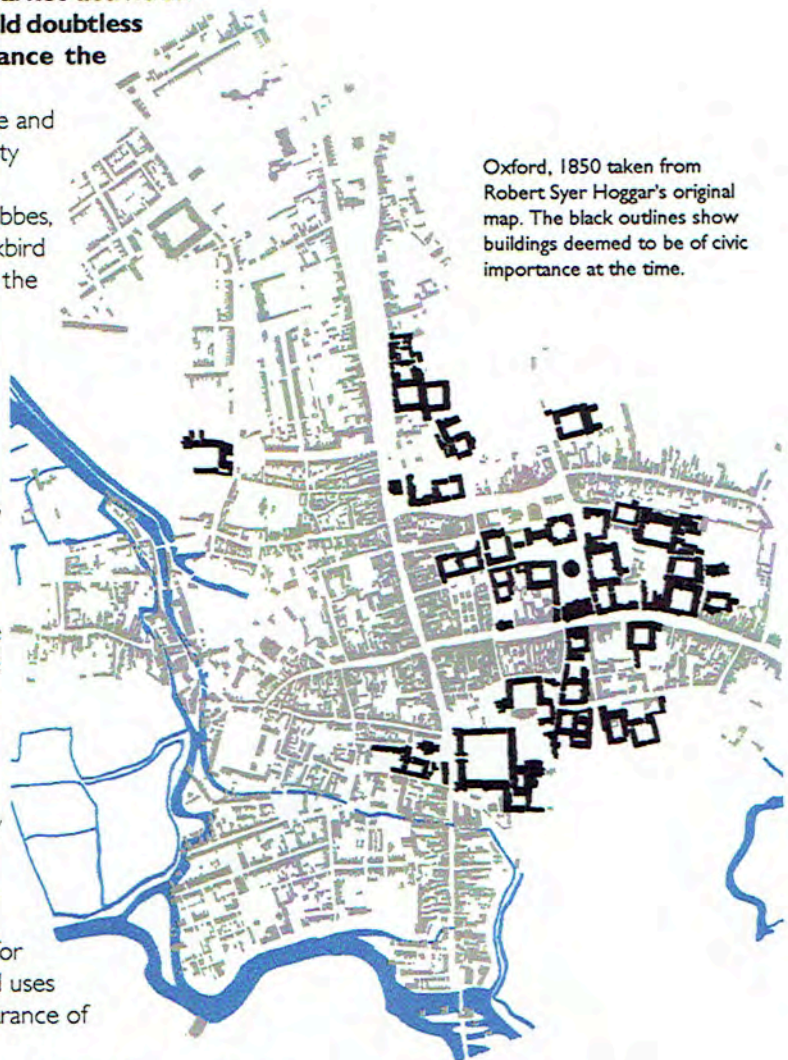
St Ebbes grew as a largely residential area around a traditional grid street pattern in the first half of the 19th century. Parts closest to the city centre accommodated a market and mixed uses such as small shops, many related to market activities.

Had it survived, current policies would doubtless have sought to conserve and enhance the area.

Three factors led to wholesale clearance and redevelopment. As early as 1943 the City Engineer's plan for Oxford included proposals for the redevelopment of St Ebbes, which was seen as a slum. In 1953 Blackbird Leys was planned on 753 acres outside the city limits. Although the County only agreed to a scheme one third the size, it enabled the proposed redevelopment of St Ebbes and also St Thomas' to be identified for commercial use rather than residential as had been previously proposed. Finally, the razing of St Ebbes offered the prospect of a fast road link between St Aldates and Park End Street (Oxpens Road) which it was thought would ease long standing traffic problems. The three main reasons for clearance - demolition rather than improvement, relocation of housing out of the City Centre to make way for commercial uses, and the creation of an environment primarily to serve free-flow car movement - would be unlikely to be accepted today. However, the comprehensive development of St Ebbes to make way for an inner relief road and commercial land uses was confirmed by the City in 1964. Clearance of St Ebbes was completed in 1971.

New building began in 1968, with Castle Street being re-aligned to make way for the Westgate Shopping Centre and multi-storey car park which were completed by 1972. Much of the remainder is still used for car parking. The street pattern and comparative richness of urban form which has been lost is shown in the diagram which overlays the shopping centre and multi-storey car park on the earlier street map (right).

Oxford, 1850 taken from Robert Syer Hoggar's original map. The black outlines show buildings deemed to be of civic importance at the time.

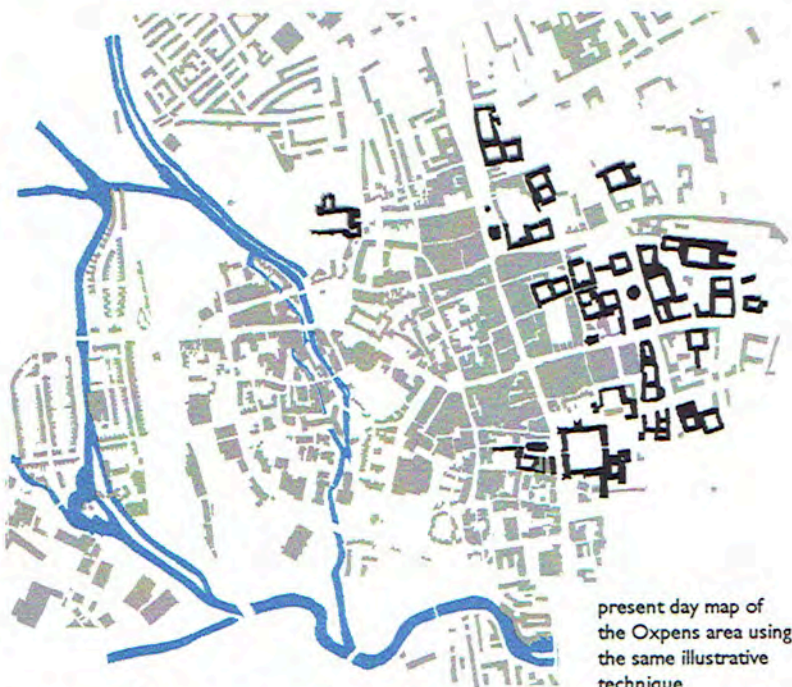


Westgate Centre overlaid on original street pattern



Present day

Oxpens today is dominated by a number of large land uses. These include the **Westgate Shopping Centre** and car park, the **Railway Station**, **Oxford College of Further Education**, **Oxford Prison** and



the **Royal Mail Sorting Office**. Although much of the original housing was removed, there is still a sizeable local population.

1960s planning ideology, with its emphasis on good accessibility for the private vehicle, is still the prevailing determinant of city form in this Quarter. Most of the city centre's surface car parks are found here. The Oxpens Road continues to provide an inner relief road to the City Centre.

In the last decade there has been a policy shift towards the use of public transport over private vehicular transport. This raises a number of questions for the future design of Oxpens. The provision of free flow traffic systems and large City Centre car parks seem to be at odds with current transport thinking and policies within the Oxford Transport Strategy (OTS).

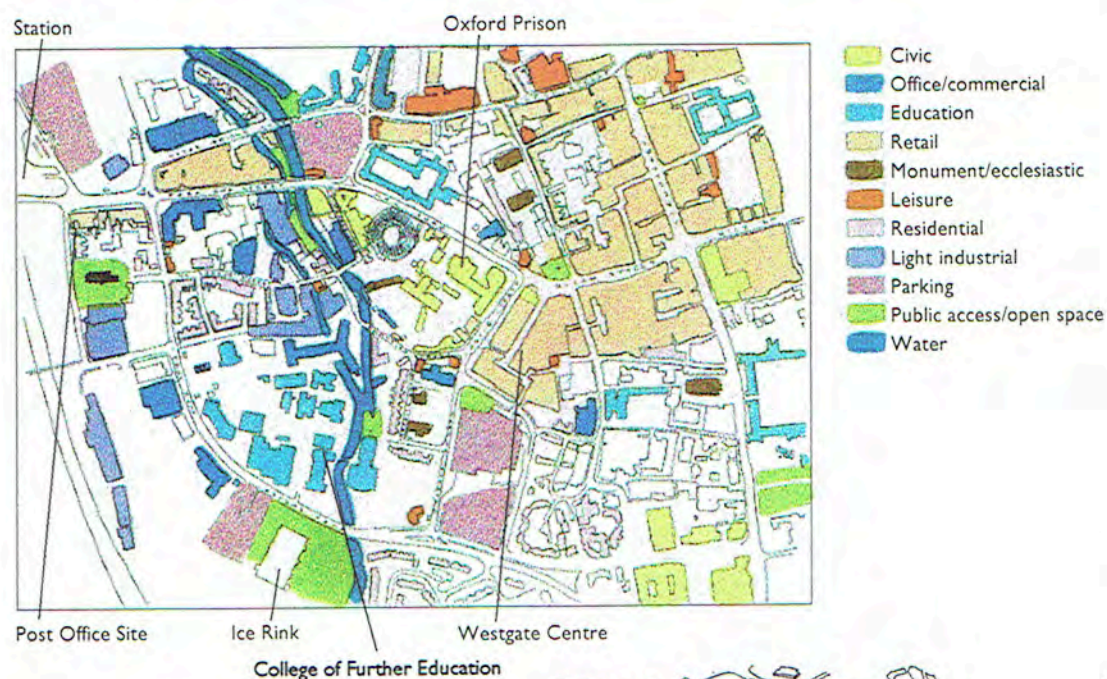
The **Oxford Transport Strategy** has considerable implications for the Oxpens Quarter. It proposes that Cornmarket Street (and potentially Queen Street) should be pedestrianised. A new bus priority route has been planned in its place, taking a detour around Oxford City Centre and through the Oxpens Quarter. This will take in part of the High Street and St. Aldates, Speedwell Street, Old Grey Friars Street, Castle Street, New Road, part of Park End Street, Worcester Street and George Street. At present there are no fixed proposals for where bus stops should be placed along this route (although a number of options exist). Under OTS, Hythe Bridge Street becomes a two-way street.

With pressures for Oxford to expand, land within the Oxpens Quarter provides the main opportunity to accommodate development. A number of planning applications are currently at a critical stage, including the Pentith leisure development and the PFI initiative for the prison site.

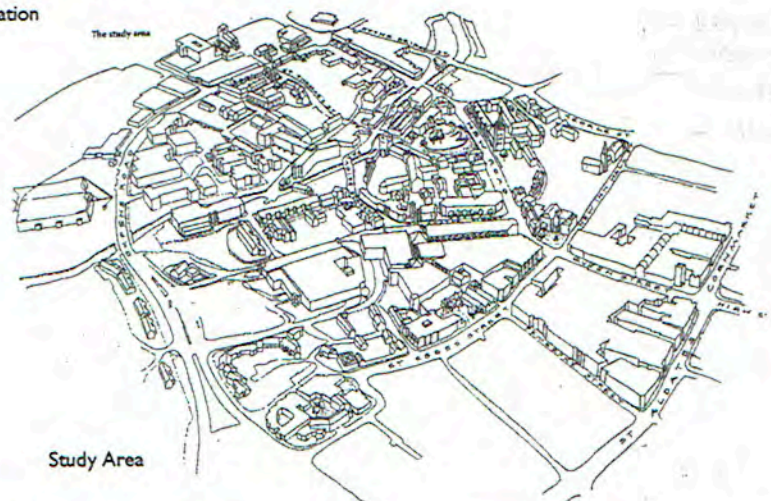
The **leisure village** is perhaps the most contentious scheme in the Quarter. It is proposed to build the scheme on land adjacent to the Oxford Ice Rink. Advocates feel that the development provides Oxford with much needed entertainment facilities in an accessible location and thus strengthens Oxford's overall appeal. Opponents of the scheme, however, are concerned about the siting of the scheme (on an area of green open space), traffic generation and the appropriateness of the design (essentially shed buildings) in a sensitive city centre location.

A Private Funding Initiative (PFI) to redevelop the **prison site** involves demolishing County Hall and re-aligning Castle Street (once again). The scheme involves new development and the retention of a number of listed buildings. A variety of uses are proposed including a hotel, museum, cafes and restaurants. The re-alignment of Castle Street provides an opportunity to create some new frontage development along the blank edge of the Westgate Centre.

Other development opportunities exist on the old gas works site, on land adjacent to the railway station and on land soon to be vacated by the Royal Mail. Other sites may become available as policies aimed at reducing car usage take effect or by the rationalisation of existing roads.



Current land uses in the Oxpens Quarter



The Oxpens Quarter Initiative was conceived to give the public a real opportunity to become involved in the planning and design of their city.

In recent years planning issues in the Oxpens Quarter have become very confrontational with a variety of individuals and groups steadfastly fighting their particular corner. In such a political climate the result is frequently one of frustration and unnecessary expense. Short term issues in the long run can lead to further fragmentation and impoverishment of the public realm.

This is an opportunity for diverse interests to look through 'fresh eyes' at this area and identify areas of common ground upon which everyone can agree, and hopefully act. By looking at the area as a whole rather than as independent issues, it should be possible to create a city quarter which benefits all of its users, not just investors. By users we not only mean the Oxpens residents, but also the wider Oxford community and Oxford's high number of visitors. For many, the Oxpens Quarter provides their first impression of Oxford when arriving by train, bus, car or foot. Investors too will be able to benefit in terms of the long term land values generated.

At an early stage it was decided that the best way to involve the public was to provide a variety of ways in which people could participate.

This included:

- awareness raising event in the Westgate Centre (7th June)
- a treasure hunt through the study area
- internet discussion page
- a telephone hotline
- and a public workshop and exhibition at the Oxford College of Further Education (21st June).

Five thousand friendly, eye-catching **leaflets** were distributed to provide information on how people could become involved in the Oxpens Quarter Initiative. They were displayed in public buildings, libraries, shopping centres and all Cityline buses. The leaflet contained an enrolment form to the public workshop and a **treasure hunt** designed to encourage people to explore the study area. The incentive to become involved was increased by the offer of a prize of unlimited free travel on Cityline buses for the correct answers to the treasure hunt together with an additional prize for the best comments on the area. Oxygen FM, a local radio station, seized the challenge, sending out hunters to track down clues live on air! Returned treasure hunt forms suggest that to the wider Oxford community, the Oxpens Quarter is still relatively unknown territory.



The Oxpens Initiative leaflets

At the **awareness raising event** staff from Roger Evans Associates and the host, City Centre Manager Marcus Lapthorn, were kept busy all day providing information on the initiative and listening to the views of the public. The event was held on Saturday 7th of June in the Westgate Centre, one of Oxford's busy shopping areas on the edge of the study area. This provided an opportunity to encourage those members of the public who do not normally express their views on planning and design matters to 'get involved' and sign up to come to the public workshops. An impressive model of the city attracted a considerable crowd who were then curious to know the reason for the display. After studying the model for a few minutes, a perceptive youngster enquired,

Why is the city squashed up over there? "

- obviously making the distinction between the high density historic core of Oxford and the fragmented and sprawling nature of the Oxpens Quarter!

The amount of public interest proved just how much the people of Oxford care about their environment. People recognised the current problems of the south west quarter of the city and expressed the fears they had for the way in which the area might be developed.

"The walk was safe, surprisingly quiet once off the main road, and extremely enjoyable. I had no idea there was so much variety and peace in such a small area. Thank you for opening my eyes to a part of Oxford I was unaware of "

Kidlington resident and treasure hunter



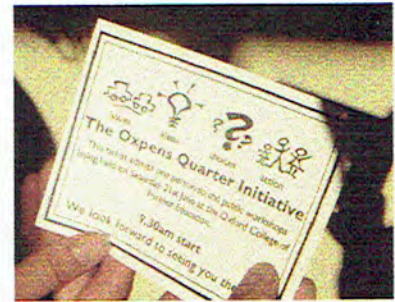
The **Public workshop** was organised to enable people of all ages and backgrounds to get together and talk about their concerns and ideas. The venue (the main hall of the Oxford College of Further Education) was perfectly situated in the centre of the study area.

The workshops were well attended with over 100 people staying for the whole day and a number of others dropping by from time to time to pass a curious eye over the proceedings. Participants came from a cross section of backgrounds including:

- representatives of the public sector including local City and County Councillors and nominated representatives of a City Council committees (10%),
- the private sector, including the manager and property owners of the Westgate Centre and representatives of Cityline buses and Post Office (10%),
- the voluntary sector, including representatives of the Civic Society, Oxford Preservation Trust, green groups and local churches (10%),
- local resident groups, including members of Saint Ebbes New Development Residents Association - SENDRA (20%),
- educational institutes (5%),
- students and school pupils, including a number of urban designers from Oxford Brookes University (10%)
- developers, including the two consortium bidding to redevelop the Oxford Prison site (10%)
- and the general public from across Oxford (25)%.

In the morning the participants were greeted with croissants and orange juice and split into their allocated **topic-based workshop** groups. Participants were allocated to a group according to the concerns they had expressed on the enrolment form. Topics included:

- rivers and parks (two groups),
- street pattern and movement (three groups);
- conservation (one group);
- character of streets and spaces (two groups);
- character of new development (one group).



public involvement

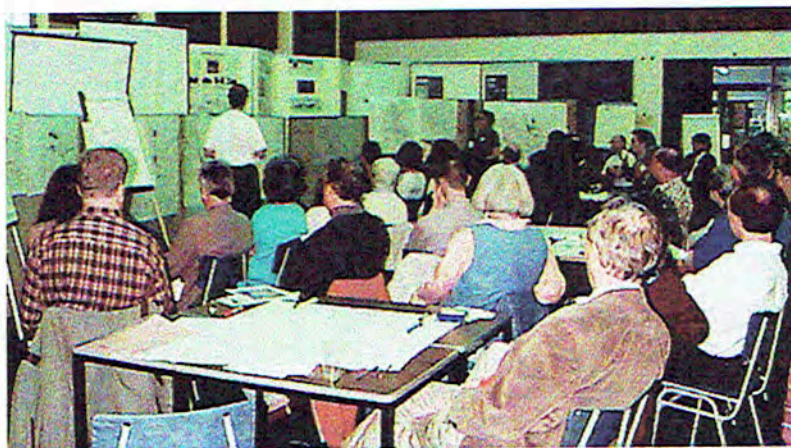
Groups had been pre-arranged to ensure a balance of views (i.e. there was at least one representative of each of the groups outlined above per workshop group). The groups were then given the opportunity to express their views while facilitators were available to jot down ideas using words rather than drawings. Various approaches were utilised including: identifying strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and the production of '**10 commandments**' to guide its future development. Although groups were encouraged to keep to their particular topic, discussion touched on a wide range of issues demonstrating how issues are connected.

At the end of the morning workshops, participants re-assembled to hear presentations from all the groups. There was clearly a great deal of consensus emerging through the nine separate presentations. It has been suggested that this may have been due to the under-representation of the car lobby. To counter this we have included a letter representing this view in its entirety in the appendix. There was almost unanimous condemnation of the legacy of 1960s and 1970s planning in the area. Roger Evans asked the participants if anyone present had been involved in planning during this period and could provide an insight into the ideology of the time. The discussion that ensued suggested that people's ideas in that period were very similar to those now being expressed at the public workshops. This served as a note of caution for the afternoon design workshops, suggesting that it is how people's aspirations are realised in design terms, rather than the aspirations themselves which is the real issue.

People enthusiastically continued discussions over the lunch hour. This was also an opportunity to browse the **exhibition** material produced by stakeholders in the area. The Osbourne and Kvaerner Groups exhibited their proposals for the PFI initiative to redevelop the prison site. The realignment of Castle Street promoted a considerable amount of discussion. Student work from Oxford Brookes University demonstrated proposals for the same site. Local children living in the St. Ebbes area had produced exhibition material which demonstrated a child's experience of the area. It highlighted the inadequacies of current provision and identified opportunities for future provision. CIN La Salle, property managers for the Westgate Centre exhibited proposals to improve the Westgate Car Park. The Oxford College of Further Education took the opportunity to exhibit the design of a new art studio on their Oxpens campus. Oxford Bus Company demonstrated a number of different options for bus provision in light of proposals within the Oxford Transport Strategy to pedestrianise Commarket Street and create a bus priority route which will take passengers through the Oxpens Quarter. For many people this was the first opportunity to 'surf the net'. Oxford Brookes University demonstrated how the 'Oxpens Quarter Initiative' had been placed on their 'RUDI' (Resource for Urban Design Information) site.

"How many people have to want something doing before something is actually done?"

Deborah Glass, local resident



Roger Evans Associates September 1997

Participants remained in the same groups for the afternoon **design workshops**, as it was felt useful to build on the team spirit that had the aspirations expressed in the morning workshop into concrete design ideas. The participants were assisted by an urban designer and armed with several maps of the site together with large felt tip pens. The designer was there purely as a guide and people were encouraged to begin to represent the ideas raised in the morning on the maps. Once people overcame their fears of putting pen to paper they became overwhelmingly enthusiastic about inputting into the design of the area. Whereas in the morning sessions there had been broad agreement about concerns and aspirations, the afternoon session highlighted that Whereas in the morning sessions there had been broad agreement about goals, the afternoon highlighted that there were different approaches to achieve this common vision. For example, although everyone agreed that the pedestrian environment should be improved along the Oxpens corridor, a variety of methods were put forward to achieve this including traffic calming and toucan crossings, realigning Oxpens Road, changing the character of the street to something closer to St. Giles, sinking the road into a tunnel or creating pedestrian footbridges. Within this report we have tried to highlight the shades of views whilst pin-pointing where we felt the majority view lay.

A new representative of the group pinned up drawings for all to see and presented ideas generated. Each presentation was enthusiastically applauded, something which was perhaps a novelty to those participants who regularly attend planning committee meetings!

In conclusion the day was a chance for people to design their ideal Oxpens Quarter. Participants were reminded of the need to dream and sometimes take radical action. None the less, many of the ideas are truly achievable. Remember, hard nosed commercial developers contributed towards these design ideas!

It was particularly striking that despite the attendance of such a vast range of interest groups, there was a real consensus reached on issues and areas of concern. In fact the level of disagreement appeared to be minimal.

After the event participants were provided with beer by Morrells Brewery and people stayed to continue discussions with designers. Many people expressed how thankful they were for such an opportunity to express their opinions and present ideas.

It was a highly successful day and was not only a chance for all to consider the major issues surrounding the future of Oxpens quarter of the city but also a day for having fun.

The opportunity to continue to express opinions continues through the setting up of a web site where people can list any further comments.

The chance to generate a vision for the Oxpens quarter of the city is not therefore over but has only just begun.



“Congratulations on the success of Saturday. Many people have said they got more out of it than they expected to. Let’s hope the councillors picked up on the messages”

Moyra Haynes, Oxford Preservation Trust

Strengths

The Oxpens Quarter is seen by local people as having a number of hidden strengths:

- a strong local community;
- closeness to the city centre, the railway and bus stations and the river;
- some local employment provision;
- important historic buildings, including the prison and castle.

A number of 'good' places within the area were also identified. Middle Fisher Row is thought to be pleasant to walk with its attractive river gardens and also safe, being well lit. Lower Fisher Row and St. Thomas' Street are appreciated for their historic character while St. Thomas' Church is enjoyed for its tranquillity. The river edge is popular because it brings the countryside into the city and Turn Again Lane is liked for its lack of traffic.

A number of opportunities were recognised:

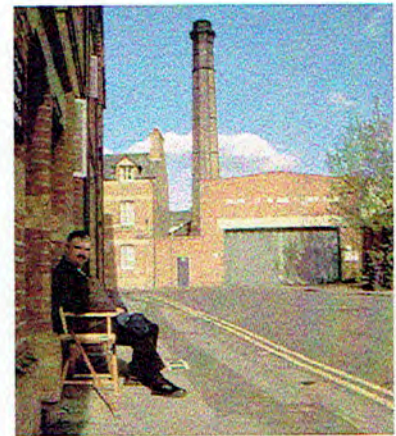
- space for new development (much in single ownership making re-development easier),
- possibilities to provide facilities for the whole city with the river and Castle Mill Stream identified for recreation and nature conservation.

Weaknesses

The Oxpens Quarter was thought to have many weaknesses. Oxpens Road is seen to divide the area and with poor quality buildings, unrelated to the road, it is thought to be just a traffic route rather than a 'real street'. The Westgate underpass is considered to be unsafe and unpleasant for pedestrians. Thames Street is disliked because the houses back onto the street and it is difficult to cross the road.

The traffic lights at Park End Street are unpopular because they are weighted in favour of vehicles instead of pedestrians.

Generally, it was felt that the Oxpens Quarter lacked a cohesive identity, was not pedestrian friendly and its existing main role within the city was just to provide an inner ring road.



"I love the old area around St. Thomas Street...some of the local residents hold a wealth of information about bygone days"

treasure hunter

 **"You always get the idea the area is empty. It needs livening up."**
Oxford resident.

"It's an area you just pass through. There's no reason to stop there."
Oxford resident.

"It's a bit of a mess at the moment"
treasure hunter

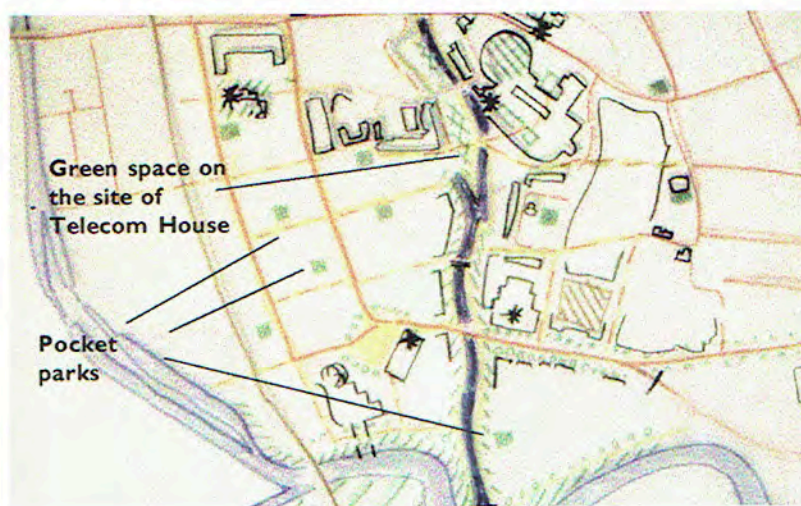
It was recognised that for the Quarter to begin to address these problems, and to begin to balance local needs with city needs, a number of issues would have to be addressed. What follows is a summary of all the issues that were raised during the day and ideas about how these issues might begin to be resolved.

Topic: Parks and public spaces

Pleasant public places within Oxpens are generally in short supply and difficult to access. The River Thames to the south and the Castle Mill Stream are the two major assets.

Issue: 'green spaces' are not exploited

- Extend the countryside into the city - Grandpont meadow could be brought into the city along the Castle Mill Stream
- Create a network of tree-lined streets and paths
- Create a major new park at the centre of this network of green paths (Telecom House being a frequently sited location for the park)
- Create a series of smaller parks and spaces the size of Bonn Square



Issue: There are too many 'dead' and wasted spaces in the Oxpens Quarter, including the area around the ice rink and the railway station.

- Develop suitable sites for uses such as housing and recreation
- Reduce the amount of land used for car parking. A new use should be found for the Abbey Place car park
- New buildings should be close to the street to avoid the feeling of dead space
- Enhance the amenity value of the Oxpens recreational ground through landscaping and new frontage development
- Create a more active programme of events for the Oxpens recreation ground



"Paradise Street...should be a peaceful interesting little corner"

S. Gerhardt

"Where at the moment can you sit out and eat your lunch in Oxford City Centre?"

local resident



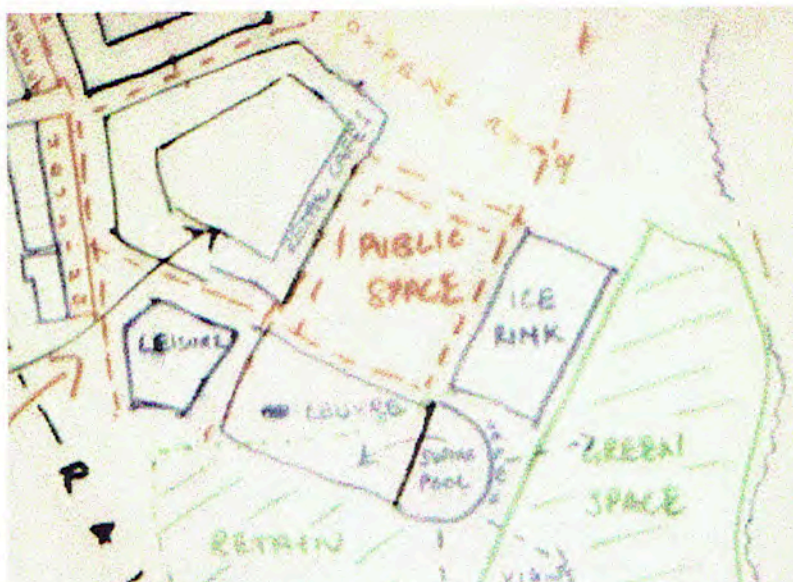
An existing pocket park hidden behind the Westgate car park



"On a sunny afternoon in the summer there are at most ten people and a dog in the field next to the ice rink - very few people use it"

Andrew Baker, St. Ebbes resident

Topic: Parks and public spaces



More could be made of the area around the ice rink without destroying the pleasant open spaces

Issue: The waterways are isolated and under-utilised

- Re-establish canal basin on Worcester Street car park and provide residential moorings
- Provide continuous riverside paths along both sides of the river to encourage access and usage
- Provide pedestrian crossing points where watercourses meet roads e.g. Oxpens Road and Park End Street
- Improve pedestrian and cyclist access to riverside pathways
- Provide a new footbridge over the river at Osney Lock and the Paradise Street area
- Maintain the existing rural character of the riverside
- Existing good quality green spaces alongside Mill Stream should be retained and extended

Issue: Wildlife considerations

- Enhance the riverside as a wildlife and ecological corridor by additional landscaping and planting
- Provide some protected wildlife 'refuges'

"The green lung next to the ice rink is important...Need to get development around it and then the green space will fall into place naturally"

Simon Hosking, *The Publican*,
The Wharf House

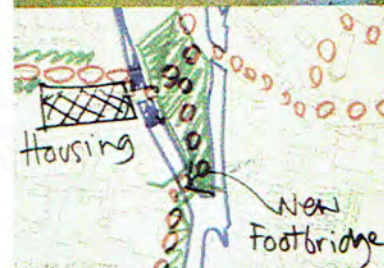
"The river should be a wildlife oasis. I saw an otter the other day, just off Mill Street."

Local Resident

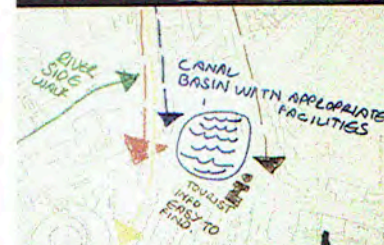
the debate

"One thing we've all agreed is that more should be made of Castle Mill Stream"

workshop participant



Castle Mill Stream now, (top) and ideas for improving accessibility (below)



Worcester Street car park as it is now (top) many have suggested it could ultimately become a canal basin with moorings (below)

Topic: Street Pattern and Movement

Major roads and large buildings introduced in the 60s and 70s have created an environment which is unpleasant and difficult for pedestrians to move through and confusing to motorists. The changes to the historic street pattern have created barriers between Oxpens, its surrounding communities and the city centre.

Issue: Pedestrian and cycle links to surrounding areas (including Jericho, Osney and Carfax) are poor

- Create an extensive on-and-off roads pedestrian and cycleway network
- Create a major new North/South route alongside the river connecting Jericho to Grandpont
- Create a major East/West route from Osney Island to the Westgate Centre, cutting through the Telecom site and the prison site
- Enhance the existing main East/West route from the station to Carfax by making it a pedestrian priority route (i.e. Park End Street and New Road)

Issue: Pedestrian and cyclist access within Oxpens is poor for both residents and tourists

- The prison site and Castle Mill Stream provide major opportunities for new pedestrian links
- New linkages should also be created through existing large sites such as College of Further Education, large car parks, and Telecom House
- Provide increased pedestrian access through the Westgate Centre (in the short term this could mean access at night, in the long term this could mean redevelopment as a series of smaller blocks)

Issue: Oxford City Centre streets are too congested

- Pedestrianise key city centre streets (Commarket Street and Queen Street)
- Remove buses from Commarket Street and Queen Street

Issue: Integration of different modes of transport is poor

- Move the coach park closer to the rail station (the area to the west of Beckett Street has been suggested)

"If you could work out a way of completely pedestrianising Queen Street - even if only during the day - and using Castle Street and New Road instead for the buses I would welcome it....This would only work if the whole of the side and back of the Westgate centre were made much nicer places to be....If the old prison site is to become an arts centre (or similar) there would be a synergy"

Chris Lewis, Oxford Resident

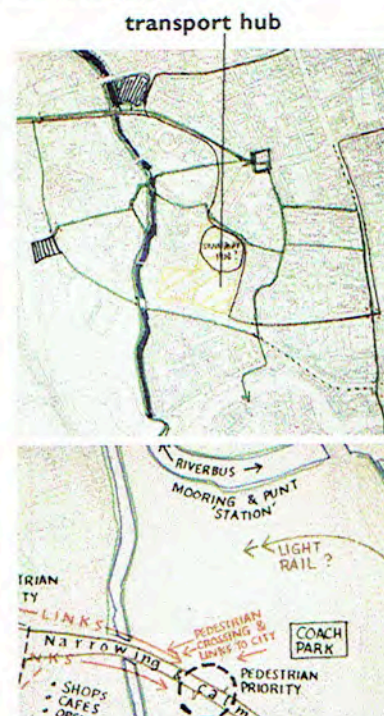
"The more we create a maze where we can't turn left or right and create collars where traffic must go, congestion just gets worse."

Joe Hannigan, Oxford resident



"Feel physically sick walking through town - must get rid of the traffic!"

Michael McClenahan, visitor to the Westgate centre



Topic: Street Pattern and Movement

- Provide bus stops along the new bus loop which allow good, convenient pedestrian access back to the city centre (New Street, Castle Street and Old Grey Friars Street have all been suggested)
- Provide a tram service connecting Park and Ride sites on the ring road with the City Centre
- Enhance interchange facilities at the station, creating a new 'station square'

**"Have buses on the outside and
trams taking people in"**

Mrs. Elmev, shopper in the Westgate Centre

Issue: Confusing and tortuous vehicular movement

- Provide vehicular traffic with a variety of routes rather than concentrating them onto just the one route
- Improve access arrangements into the car park
- Seek to reduce tortuous one-way systems
- Improve access for local traffic, ensuring that there is adequate on-street parking for residents and specialist businesses who depend on passing trade

Issue: Poor orientation

- Use existing landmarks to orientate people through the area (Nuffield College Tower, Morrells Brewery Tower,)
- Use the natural features of the area to assist with orientation such as the river and the Castle mound
- Create landmarks at key junctions (Castle Street/New Road junction, Worcester Street/Park End Street junction, Thames Street/Speedwell Street junction)
- Place landmarks on key vistas to encourage people to move through the area e.g. the bottom end of St. Ebbes Street
- Create a 'gateway' route from the station to Carfax, with a series of landmarks and points of interest along the way (Park End Street, New Street, Queen Street)

**"There must be clearly
signed routes, well lit
and with adequate
pavements, not merely
inconvenient detours
round large buildings"**

*Kathleen Hall, Oxford Consumers
Group*

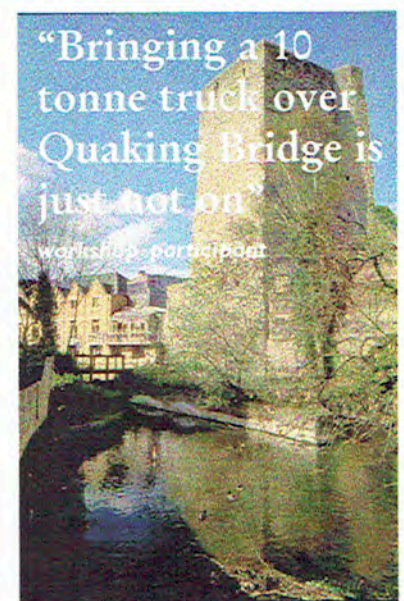
gateway route from
the station to Carfax



Coach station on the Post Office site?



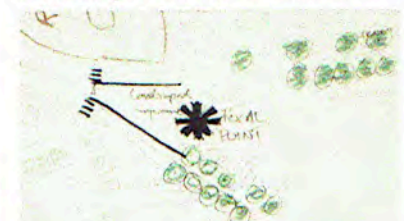
provision for a tram route through the
Oxpens Quarter



Quaking Bridge and St George's Tower



use existing landmarks for orientation



create new landmarks where they are
needed

Topic: Anchors to the Past

Despite radical clearance programmes in the late 1960s, fragments of the communities of St. Thomas and St. Ebbes have survived. Participants have been keen to support these communities as well as the area's built heritage.

A number of historic streets such as Turn Again Lane, Osney Lane, and St. Thomas Street remain. St. Thomas Church, Morells Brewery and the Castle mound provide key landmarks.

Issue: Many people have expressed a desire to see the communities of St. Thomas and St. Ebbes preserved, strengthened and expanded.

- Redevelop vacant sites for predominantly housing
- Provide a mix of complimentary small scale uses including workshops, corner shops and community facilities
- Provide a new youth centre in the Catacombs building
- Provide a new public square/focal point for the local community (Abbey Place car park has been suggested as a possible location as has re-instating the old Paradise Square)

Issue: The wider Oxford community is relatively unaware of the historic heritage that the area still possesses

- Re-open the Castle site, retaining as many of the existing uses as possible
- Promote the prison site, Castle mound and Morrells Brewery as tourist destinations

Issue: The traditional role of the area is increasingly under threat from commercial leisure development pressure and the move towards a 24 hour city

- Site new commercial development away from housing areas
- Reduce traffic generation created by this type of development through improvements to public transport in the area
- Ensure that new commercial development fulfils local needs (i.e. a carrot and stick approach is required) - local residents have expressed a desire for a swimming pool, basket balls and badminton courts and a community centre

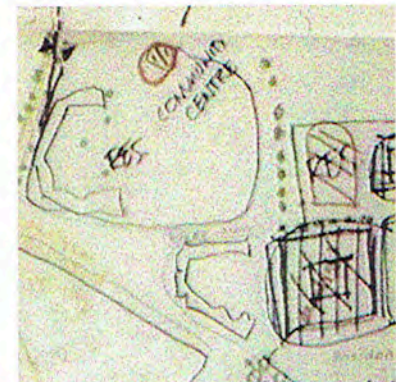
Issue: Too many old buildings and streets have been lost through insensitive redevelopment.

- Attempts should be made to restore the old street pattern for new housing schemes, and to give better connections to the city centre
- Sensitive and practical uses should be found for older buildings to keep them in use e.g. the LMS building could be used as a potential tram stop/transport interchange
- If older buildings cannot be re-employed, attempts should be made to retain their historic facades e.g. the Jam Factory could be refurbished as residential flats

"Need more housing - flats for working chaps like me!"
visitor to the Westgate Centre



Morrell's Brewery, part of the area's rich heritage



many workshop participants wanted more housing and a community focus - Abbey Place car park?



Topic: Anchors to the Past

“Whilst an admirer of good modern architecture, I think that ‘pastiche’ or reconstruction in authentic period style may have a place...for example, in a street where one or two houses in a series have been demolished in the past”

Alan Paul, workshop participant from London



Oxford's New Inn Hall Street

“A good example of how to regenerate Oxford is New Inn Hall Street...buildings have been renovated, new buildings compliment the old and thus the street is attractive as a whole”

Pat Moon, Oxford resident



The LMS building seen in the distance. A much loved landmark in need of saving

“LMS building could be used as a new tram station”

workshop participant

“Let's decide which landmarks we wish to conserve...”

workshop participants

“Extend conservation area status to include all of the area under discussion”

John Howson, Local Resident

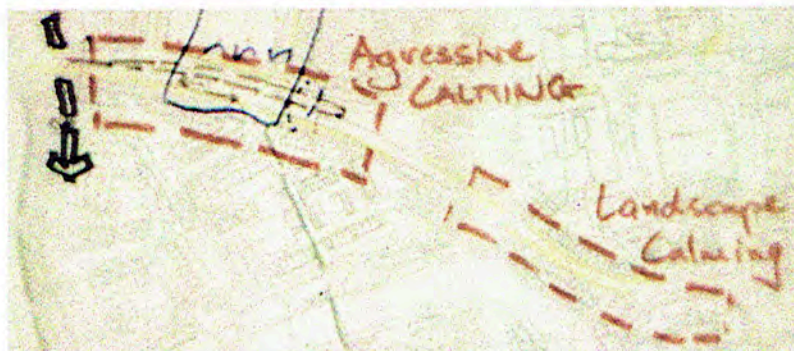
Topic: Street Design and Street Life

The area is significantly affected by heavy traffic and congestion. Oxpens Road creates particular difficulties for pedestrians and high levels of pollution and congestion. The ring road function of this road divides the area, affecting the local sense of community.

Participants felt that the area lacked activity, both on the street and in terms of facilities. As part of their vision for improving the area, they drew on examples of lively places in Oxford, such as Jericho and Gloucester Green. The issues listed below were felt to be at the centre of the problem.

Issue: The Oxpens corridor has a bleak pedestrian environment

- Redesign streets to control traffic and give pedestrians priority
- Reduce traffic speeds through road narrowing, toucan crossing points and new road alignments
- Provide avenue tree planting to reduce the scale of the street (St. Giles being identified as a good example)
- Provide pedestrian crossing points along pedestrian desire lines e.g.
 - at the Castle Mill Stream crossing
 - at the entrance to the FE College
 - at the Osney Lane junction
 - at the St. Aldates/Thames Street junction
 - at the St. Aldates/Speedwell Street junction
- Provide new frontage development on key development sites e.g. the gas depot, existing coach park and Post Office sites
- Improve the relationship between the FE College and the road, making the entrance more visible
- Provide continuous cycle paths in both directions along the Oxpens Road corridor
- Provide a new vehicular route closer to the railway line thus enabling Hollybush Road to revert back to a residential street
- Re-design Speedwell Street for two-way traffic, thus enabling Thames Street to revert back to a residential street
- Slow traffic to 20 miles per hour to make the streets safer for pedestrians



Oxpens Road/Thames Street

"In Holland if you're caught speeding they take away your car and sell it!"

workshop participant

the debate



The contrast between Oxpens Road and St Giles is marked. Both road carry similar amounts of traffic.

"Need general support for a 20mph speed limit throughout the City Centre i.e. a cultural change where everyone agrees - 'yes, we want to still use our cars but we want to enable pedestrians and cyclists to have a reasonably secure journey'"

workshop participant



The public called for more pedestrian friendly routes - particularly Oxpens Road

Topic: Street Design and Street Life

Issue: Many other streets in the Quarter are bleak and unfriendly, particularly Norfolk Street and around the Westgate underpass.

- Improve the look of these streets with more trees and street furniture, and possibly some small 'pocket' parks
- Give pedestrians priority for crossing roads. Don't send them down underpasses or over bridges
- Encourage development that will make the streets livelier and more welcoming
- New buildings should overlook the street to create a safer, more intimate environment
- The Westgate Centre should be "turned inside out" to remove blank walls
- Boulevard style streets should be encouraged
- Introduce a range of uses that will keep the area busy for most of the time to make it feel safer. Make sure noise is controlled though, for the sake of local residents

Issue: The life of Oxford City Centre is primarily concentrated on only a few city centre streets, is dominated by high street shops and tends to be restricted to business hours

- Extend the life of Oxford City Centre into adjacent city centre streets e.g. St. Ebbes Street, New Road, Castle Street and particularly towards the rail station
- Introduce a variety of activities to the area which complement the existing city centre uses such as a new concert hall, conference facilities and sports provision such as a swimming pool. These will be of city wide importance and will draw people and investment into the area
- Encourage a specialist shopping area to develop, with small and unique stores and cafes (potentially located around the Quaking Bridge area) and extending down St. Ebbes Street



Castle Street underpass



"Wouldn't like to visit the area at night...its quite inhibiting"

local employee

the debate

"The pavements in the area have been adapted for wheelchair access in piecemeal manner. Residents would be keen to see this rectified."

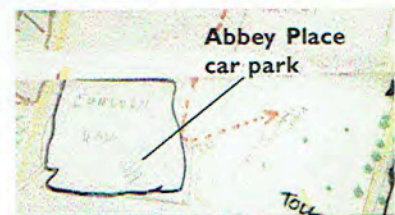
Colin Cooper, St. Thomas's Residents' Association



participants suggested tree planting could improve some of the uglier roads

"People don't walk down streets that don't look interesting...its got to be pretty"

Beatrice Purser, shopper in the Westgate Centre



one suggested site for a concert hall

"We need something to bring life into the area both in the day and out of business hours - the concert hall was a good idea"

Simon Hosking, Publican, The Wharf House

Topic: Street Design and Street Life

- Extend the life of Oxford City Centre into the evening, as is common in major European cities. Cafes, bars and clubs need not be opened close to residential areas but instead in streets currently dominated by high street stores and in the redeveloped prison site

(Many visitors to Oxford arrive at Oxpens and could be encouraged to spend time in the area if it had some of these facilities on offer)

- Extend the shopping core beyond Cornmarket and Queen Street, particularly towards the rail station

Issue: Car parking: a necessary evil?

Most (although not all) agreed that a long term goal would be to phase out car parking, many feeling that surface car parks such as the Abbey Place car park could be phased out in the relatively near future.

A minority view felt that radical action should be taken immediately and cars prevented from coming into the city centre.

Other people took the opposing view (particularly shoppers who spoke at the Westgate Centre day). They felt that car uses were already badly treated in Oxford and given any more restrictions and penalties they would simply choose to shop elsewhere

On balance, opinion suggests that city centre car parking should in future become unacceptable once good alternatives are put in place.

Issue: The pedestrian route from the station onto the city is poor

- Create a gateway route into town which is pedestrian friendly (Park End Street, New Road and Queen Street)
- Resolve dangerous crossing points, particularly at the Worcester Street junction and Holybush Road junction
- Make New Street a more lively place both in the day and at night. Do this by removing the blank walls (on both sides of the street) and encouraging bars, cafes and small shops to set up

“Opportunities to live where you work and not drive in from outside, clogging the roads”

S. Gerhardt



The open-air market at Gloucester Green

“Encourage small shops...not the bland large businesses...bring back the open air market!”

Mr. Jarvis, on a shopping trip from Abingdon



“Is there anyway we can upgrade Park End Street, thus raising rental values and making it more like Cornmarket Street - a great new corridor into the city?”

workshop participant



The Westgate car park was often targeted for redevelopment in the long term

“Knock down the car parks! Get the cars out and build there”

Zohra Fatima

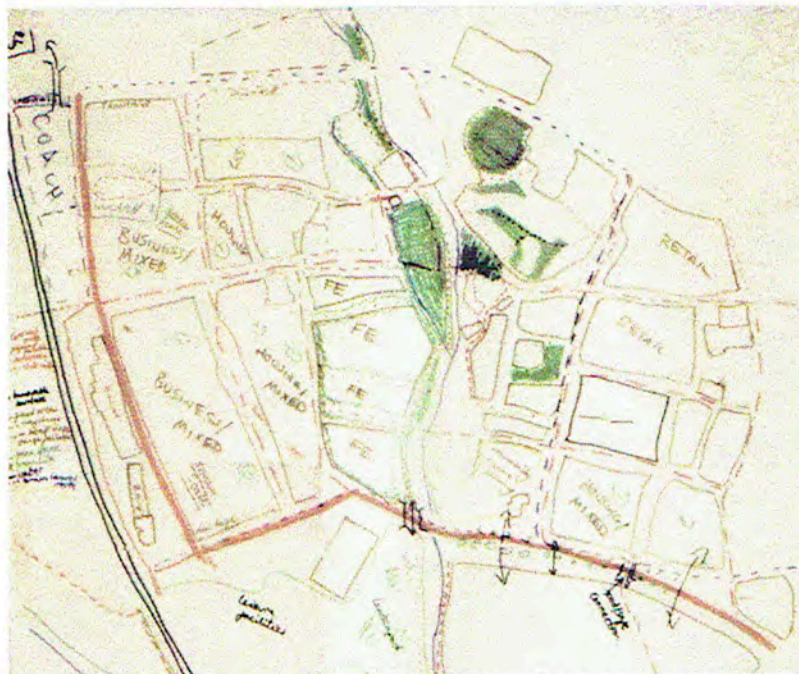


“Can you direct me to where the small specialist shops are...we’ve already got all these shops in Newcastle”

day-tripper lost in the Westgate Centre

(NB. team member found it difficult to make a suggestion)

Topic: Street Design and Street Life



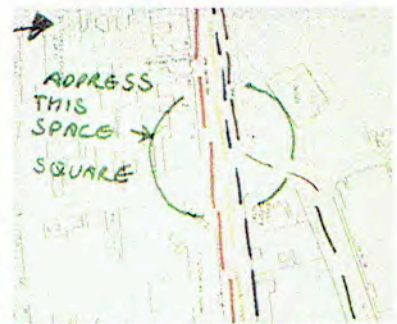
Some workshop groups felt that Oxpens Road was inappropriate as a residential street and decided it should be realigned closer to the railway line



New housing on Thames Street - are they fortresses or homes?

"Most of the area in question, being near homes, is unsuitable for development which would bring in late night traffic and the sort of social problems which would cause policing difficulties"

Geoffrey Lemmon, Wesley Memorial Church



The Castle Street underpass was felt to require a different solution

"New shops and boutiques needed...peoples, bars and hub-bub...more European"

local employee



The 'Tongue and Cheek' night club on Oxpens Road

"Residents concerned at the encroachment of new late night entertainment venues into an increasingly residential area"

residents' association

Topic: Building Design

Participants felt that overall the visual character of the Oxpens Quarter was very poor, because it had suffered from insensitive development over the last twenty years. It was felt, however, that there was much scope for improvement through some short term measures and a longer term vision for the design of new developments.

Issue: New development turns its back to the street e.g. the Westgate Centre

- In the short term provide new development along the blank walls to the Westgate Centre.
- In the long term re-develop the Westgate Centre as a series of smaller blocks

Issue: Motorists tend to race through the residential area along Thames Street simply because it does not look like a residential area

- See if there are changes which can be made to buildings along Thames Street to make them look more like houses and less like fortresses.

Issue: The ice rink is viewed as an isolated eyesore. Shed-like development is generally felt to be inappropriate.

- Integrate the ice rink within any new development proposals, ensuring that any new development fronts onto Oxpens Road.

Issue: A lot of the buildings in the Oxpens Quarter are ugly 'concrete boxes'. Some are too big and don't fit in with the older buildings. Telecom House, the multi-storey car park and the College of Further Education are very unpopular.

- New buildings should be sensitive to existing historic buildings. They should be typically 'Oxford' in scale, form and materials, but not pastiche
- New building footprints should be smaller to allow more access routes through the area
- The multi-storey car park, College of Further Education and Telecom House should eventually be demolished and replaced with more suitable developments



"We need more attractive entrance to the Westgate Centre from Castle Street - its a bit 'hole in the wall' at the moment"

*Andrew Woodgate/Philip Healy,
local residents*



The BT building

"The BT building needs doing up...its very grey...it would cheer the staff up!"

BT employee

"Don't want a leisure village by the ice rink - too Milton Keynes-like!"

young security guard at Westgate

Topic: Building Design

Issue: The College of Further Education comprises of a number of undistinguished buildings. The spaces around the college are not particularly attractive and are dominated by car parking

- In parallel with improvements to public transport, reduce car parking thus creating a landscaped 'campus'

Issue: Too much new development is 'short-term' and doesn't take the longer term needs of the community into account.

- New buildings should be flexible enough to allow a variety of uses over the long term, in order to avoid future demolition and redevelopment. This may prevent buildings standing empty, which does not benefit local people.



"My flat's been here for years...those new ones across the road don't last five minutes"

St. Thomas Street resident

General Discussion

“We’ve talked about the hardware issues rather than the software issues. General public feel that issues are decided before they even reach the planning committee by the estates committee”

workshop participant

“It has been a most enjoyable day, innovative and creative. Note we are going to take it seriously. We’ve had the leaders of all three parties here today and the vice chair of the planning committee. If you want things done you must lobby the county as well as the city council. I’m not going to commit myself to anything at all. The two things which have come out of today very clearly (is the need to do something about) Oxpens Road and Castle Mill Stream. What you do there is critical to the design and planning of the whole City.”

Cllr Stan Taylor



key themes

Themes

- 1 Green the Oxpens Quarter by creating a 'green heart' at its centre and connecting this by tree lined paths and cycleways to the City Centre, Jericho and Osney
(to be located in the Castle Mill Stream, Telecom House and Prison area)



- 2 Enhance Castle Mill Stream as a tranquil retreat from the bustle of Oxford City Centre, providing a focus for new life and activity around a new river basin
(Worcester Street Car Park potentially being converted to its former use)



- 3 Take a long term view on what the street structure should be in the area, thus ensuring that when certain buildings become obsolete, they can be replaced with buildings that respect a new, more accessible street structure
(Oxford College of Further Education, Westgate Centre, the Prison site and Magistrates' Court area being the areas identified for radical action)



- 4 Ensure that when buses are eventually removed from Cornmarket Street, a well considered alternative route is in place through the Oxpens Quarter with good pedestrian routes back to the City Centre and convenient interchange facilities
(New Street, the rear of the Westgate Centre and the Station are identified as integrated transport nodes)



- 5 Create a district centre for residents of St. Thomas and St. Ebbes which will serve to knit together severed and fragmented areas, provide a focus for community life and accommodate an expanded quarter population
(this could eventually be situated in the vicinity of Abbey Place car park once efforts at reducing car use - via the OTS - take effect)





key themes

- 6** Enhance the appeal of Oxford for citizens and visitors alike by providing complementary facilities currently missing from the City Centre and enlivening key areas within the quarter with cafes, specialist shops and entertainment
(new uses for existing buildings should be found along with the redevelopment of vacant or under-utilised sites)



- 7** Create a 'gateway route' between the station and city centre, designed primarily for pedestrians, cyclists and perhaps in the future trams

(Station - Park End Street - New Street - Queens Street - Carfax)



- 8** Re-design Oxpens Road as the 'new St. Giles' allowing vehicles and pedestrians to co-exist, but in a safe and pleasant environment

(traffic calming, new road alignments, street trees and new frontage development being important considerations)



- 9** Recognise that design of new buildings in the Oxpens Quarter should be of a quality already promoted in other City Centre quarters

(placing more emphasis on massing, scale and local distinctiveness)



Where do we go from here?

Policy Implications

The aspirations of the Initiative could be reflected within the following policy documents:

- Oxford Local Plan
- Oxford Transport Strategy
- Oxford City Centre Strategy

Recent revisions to Government Planning Policy Guidance PPG1 (General Policy and Principles) and PPG6 (Town Centre and Retail Developments) place greater emphasis on both design of the built environment and the importance of strengthening the vitality and viability of town centres. Consultation has clearly demonstrated that the people of Oxford share this aspiration. As such, their comments form a useful benchmark by which to assess changes made to policy at a local level.

Above all else an **urban design framework** plan is required which illustrates a **long term vision** for this city quarter in three dimensional form. The plan would indicate which elements were flexible and which were not, identify the agencies and players needed to realise the plan, and establish the plan's **viability**. The plan could relate to the local plan as **'supplementary planning guidance.'**

Within this framework plan a number of specific **topics, sites** and **areas** need to be examined as discrete projects. These studies should identify:

- project aims and objectives
- project details
 - detailed design brief
- implementation strategy
 - roles and responsibilities
 - funding sources
 - phasing
- appraisal
 - economic benefit
 - viability
 - users
 - traffic generation
 - planning and policy implications
 - land/property requirements
 - the need for further design guidance

Consultation has demonstrated a need for design guidance for a number of specific topics, for a number of individual sites and areas. Peoples ideas and aspirations now need testing and then translating into well considered and detailed design guidance.

Topic-based design policies

Design guides set out principles on which development control decisions are made and are not site specific. Consultation has demonstrated a need for Supplementary Planning Guidance on the following topic areas to guide development within the Oxpens Quarter where it does not already exist in sufficient detail.

- cycling
- roads and footpaths
- leisure buildings
- lighting
- parking
- play areas
- public art
- residential development
- retail development
- safety and security
- trees
- watersides

Site-based design policies

Design briefs set out how a particular site should be redeveloped. It should translate site specific guidance within the local plan into three dimensional envelope and massing models, **'designing the town without designing the buildings'**. Consultation has demonstrated a need for design briefs to be provided for the following sites:

- Post-office sorting depot
- Prison site
- Magistrates Court area
- Abbey Place and Westgate car park area
- College of Further Education campus
- Ice rink area
- Station area
- Gas depot site

Area-based design policies

Consultation has demonstrated a need to provide particular guidance within this framework on the following:

- The 'Gateway' route from the station to Carfax
- The Oxpens Road corridor
- The new bus priority route

Promoting ideas and aspirations expressed throughout The Oxpens Quarter Initiative

Results of this Initiative should be fed to the following groups:

- Oxford City Council
- Oxford County Council
- Workshop Participants
- Original invitee list including public, private and voluntary sector groups, educational establishments and residents associations
- Potential developers
- Government organisations such as English Partnerships

Copies of this report should be made available at libraries and council offices and the local press encouraged to publicise the emerging ideas. The Oxpens web site should be updated with the latest ideas as they emerge.

Future Consultation?

Future consultation could follow a similar format to the Oxpens Quarter Initiative event of open debate through workshops as opposed to the more traditional public meeting approach. The Initiative demonstrated that such an approach assists consensus building.

A last word

“And now I ask myself, what will come of the ideas generated on the day? The output of such a fruitful involvement really must not be allowed to end up in the filing basement. It really is vital that conclusions be taken up and looked at and put to good use”

Adrian Williams, letter to the Oxford Times

Roger Evans Associates

59-63 High Street

Kidlington

Oxford

OX5 2DN

TEL: 01865 377030

FAX: 01865 377050