

Oxford

Central West



Summary of workshop findings on development around Oxford Station

Saïd Business School and Nuffield College,
March 16th 2016

This report of a workshop held at the Said Business School and Nuffield College on March 16th sets out the main conclusions and proposals, along with supporting information, to include some cases. The event was organised by Oxford Civic Society (OCS) and the Academy of Urbanism (AoU) and brought together local stakeholders with outside experts, over fifty in all (*see list of participants*).

The report will be sent to participants for their responses to the event, and followed up by further discussions. We encourage you to comment on the [Commonplace Oxford Central web site](#). The workshop, which all found positive and enjoyable, addressed five key issues for the future of the area known provisionally as Oxford Central West:

1. Why is a fresh vision needed for the area, and is the time ripe for major change?
2. What characterises a successful transport hub?
3. How could the wider area be developed?
4. How can transport in Oxford be transformed?
5. Who will pay and how can the vision be delivered?



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Drawings from Vicky Payne and Lucy Sykes.

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1. Setting the scene

While most people agree on how bad Oxford Station and surrounding areas are, and some can see the wasted opportunities, few know how to get somewhere better from where we are now! At a workshop in March organised jointly by Oxford Civic Society (OCS) and the Academy of Urbanism (AoU) a wide range of stakeholders showed an enthusiasm to work together and to think differently, which included drawing inspiration from other comparable places on the Continent as well as in the UK. There has been no shortage of studies in the past, including different proposals for what a new station might look like, but until now no-one has been able to look at the wider area because ownership was so fragmented and there was little collaboration.

Previous events organised by OCS under the banner of Oxford Futures have set out an ambition for how Oxford might grow sustainably in ways which could address some of its problems, like a chronic shortage of affordable housing and the worst traffic congestion in the South East. The first report ([Oxford Futures: Achieving Smarter Growth in Central Oxfordshire; 2014](#)) was inspired by the examples of similar cities such as Cambridge and Freiburg, and by visits to new Dutch settlements. That report set the context for a new spatial growth plan and for engaging the public. It made suggestions for training and for evaluating options for development and transport in terms of their social, environmental and economic impacts.

A follow-up symposium at Wolfson College in June 2015 jointly organised by OCS with the Oxford Strategic Partnership and the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership emphasised the need for Central Oxfordshire to ‘get its act together’ or miss out on investment and lose its position as a world-leading university city. Much work has been done since then in negotiating a City Deal with the government and on resolving land ownership issues, so that a new vision is both needed and has become possible. Speculative work has also been done on addressing the regional and local transport problems, including the idea of trams for Oxford.

The timely ‘Vision for Oxford Central-West’ event on March 16th 2016 showed that the old Parish of St Thomas offers space to enlarge the city centre to service a greater Oxford. If it is developed imaginatively it can help provide affordable housing, generate better jobs, solve transport problems, help reduce pollution and improve the quality of life for all. This will not be achieved without many years of effort.

The redevelopment of the 200 acres (80 hectares) around Oxford Station could therefore be the catalyst for a new phase of planned growth similar to the extensions to North Oxford when dons were allowed to marry in the 19th century. It could be a crucial part of resolving the city’s traffic problems. It seems to the organisers that a Scenario for ‘smarter growth’ could involve the following stages.



1. Shaping the vision

The report of the March workshop must be shared and the ideas in it debated to establish what level of support exists, where there is common ground, and where further work is needed. The aim should be to produce a list of early actions or pilot projects. For example the idea was floated of a space in the city – perhaps a shop or a café - where plans could be displayed. It will be important to engage the public: those who use the station, those who live and work locally, those who have businesses that might be affected. The [Commonplace web site](#) could be used to get reactions to different options.

2. Resolving the strategic issues

Many tricky issues need to be faced and options assessed before conclusions are reached. The current lack of an agreed plan for the wide area is also an opportunity as few cities have such a chance. Great skill will be needed in promoting imaginative solutions and avoiding getting blocked by bureaucratic inertia and fear of the unknown. These issues include:

- a. The transport strategy for the western entry into Oxford's city centre, including possible new modes (a Metro?), and improved accessibility for the whole study area;
- b. The location of the new Oxford Central station, and how it should be linked to buses, taxis and bikes;
- c. The amount of space needed now and in the future, including the possibility of relocating the ice-rink;
- d. The planning briefs which are needed, e.g. the kinds of homes needed and where a start could be made; spaces to promote innovation and support new enterprise; spaces for leisure.

3. Creating the delivery mechanisms

Huge sums of money and considerable risks are involved. In the current investment climate it will be vital to create as much certainty as possible. Issues include:

- a. How can the landowners (and their advisors) best work together?
- b. How should the different communities be engaged?
- c. Can ‘master developers’ be found for major sites, and is some other form of public/private partnership (perhaps similar to a New Town Development Corporation) needed to attract public investment?
- d. How can a process of long-term urban change be managed and who should take the lead?

4. Tapping the resources

As well as land, major commitments of capital and people will be needed over the next twenty or more years before the area has found a stable new role.

Issues include:

- a. How much are the different elements going to cost and how much cross-subsidy is going to be viable?
- b. Where will the pump-priming funding come from for studies, relocation, ground works, etc?
- c. What level of capital could be raised through some form of bond alongside potential grants?
- d. How might the stages of development be phased to produce a positive cash flow and minimise disruption? The public sector will need to take a leading role in creating the framework, as there are few developers who can tackle a project of this scale.
- e. What form of public/private partnership will be appropriate and how can the main elements in the new transport hub best be procured?

5. Celebrating success

Changing the area’s image and maintaining support over the period of four or five governments will depend not just on luck but also on promoting a positive image. This means creating opportunities for people to enjoy themselves. Issues include:

- a. What temporary or pop-up uses are feasible and desirable?
- b. Can empty spaces be used creatively e.g. for festivals, or allotments?
- c. How can ‘big ideas’ be trialled and tested e.g. dedicated transit routes, or water buses.
- d. What kinds of outcomes are possible and likely, and what timescale will this cover?

The next steps are to discuss the workshop’s conclusions with the stakeholders and then with a wider set of communities so that Oxford moves forward together and the current momentum is not lost.

Henk Bouwman, Nicholas Falk and Peter Thompson

2. A shared vision

2a. Sir Hugo Brunner: OXFORD CIVIC SOCIETY PRESIDENT

A fresh start - In opening, Sir Hugo Brunner, OCS President, pointed out that the Parish of St Thomas was once characterised by 'cheerful violence', but now faced a very different future thanks to the recent changes in ownership which put the City Council, Nuffield College, and the University in the driving seat. OCS was therefore keen to see the different landowners collaborating in an effort to connect the large area to the west of the main railway line with the historic city centre.

The different action areas
near Oxford Central Station



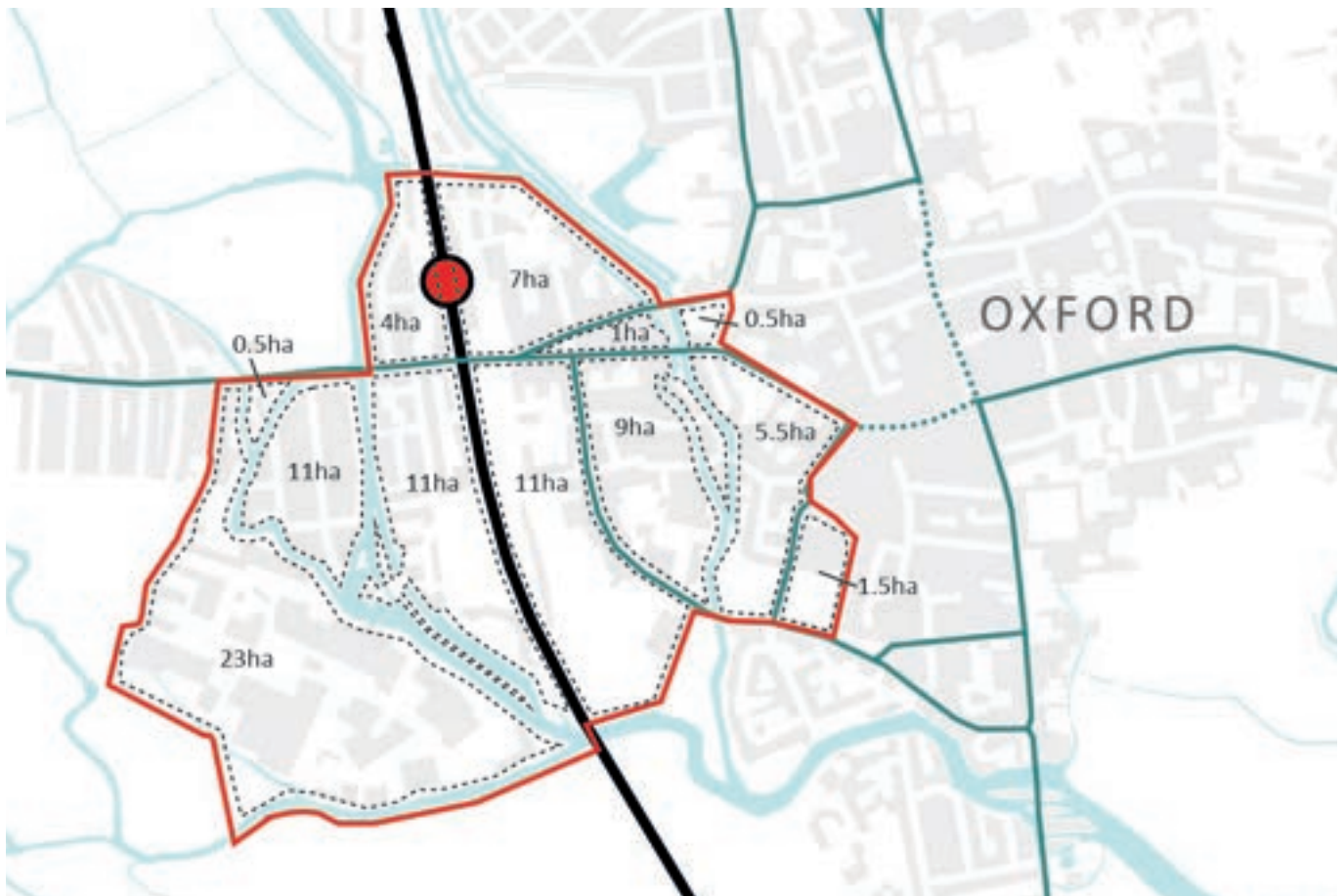
2b. Peter Thompson: OXFORD CIVIC SOCIETY CHAIRMAN

Opportunities - Peter Thompson said that the redevelopment of the station could be the catalyst in transforming an exceptionally large area. With some 200 acres (80 hectares), Oxford Central West is as large as the city centre. Indeed it could form 'a new heart, and not just an ugly backside!' Development provides opportunities to:

- ☐ Deal with traffic, and help bring in a transport revolution
- ☐ Appreciate the city's heritage by developing in an area that would not spoil valued views
- ☐ Boost the status of Oxford's academic institutions with a 'world class new quarter'
- ☐ And learn from elsewhere.

This will require mutual understanding to generate a vision that could be widely shared and enable the city to move forward, as comparable Continental cities and rivals like Cambridge have done.

The size of
different plots



2c. Tony Turton: OXFORD CIVIC SOCIETY COMMUNICATION GROUP

Attitudes - Tony Turton reported on the initial views of local residents, based on an analysis of comments on the Commonplace web site. The general response so far, largely from older people, was that the area is run-down and low quality. The priorities were to improve pedestrian paths, build affordable homes, and transform the station as a transport hub. The new aerial photographs reveal how poorly the spaces are used at present, despite being only ten minutes walk from the centre.



Aerial photos Copyright D Collins and Jolt Media.
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Enquiries dave@jolt-media.co.uk

These conclusions were reinforced by participants who took part in the three morning guided walks through the area, with comments such as:

'Huge contrast between the historic centre, and the area West of the railway line, a product of 20th century planning'

'Great potential for better communication routes, despite the car traffic'

'We scrutinise planning applications endlessly but fail to join things up'

'Oxford is still quite a small town'

'But the working population now extends beyond the County boundaries, and 46,000 people come to work every day'

'There are layers of history waiting to be uncovered, and some important blocks to be conserved'



Car park next to the Central Station



River Thames enbankments



Oxford old power station



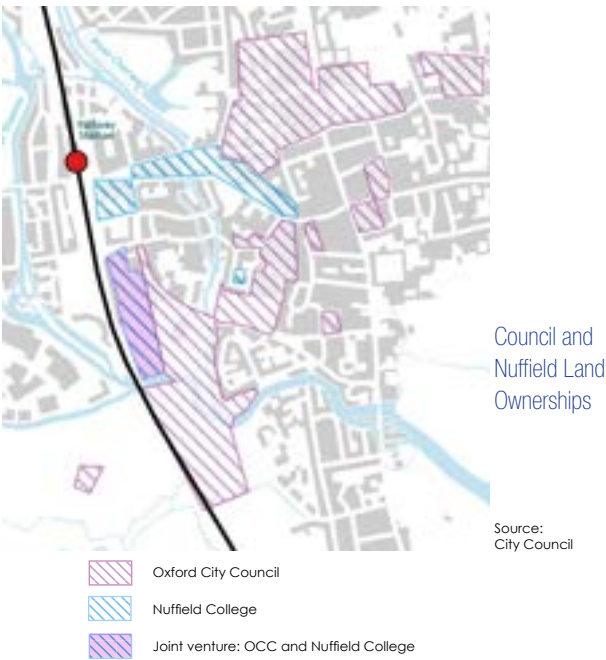
Walks in the Oxford Central West area

2d. David Edwards: DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT AT OXFORD CITY COUNCIL

Context - David Edwards who has negotiated the agreement on Oxpens, set out the context for a new vision to bring together the different parts of a fragmented but central area. One of his plans shows how the City now controls a large part (along with Nuffield College). Other points include:

- The County Council has invested in the new Frideswide Square, which has greatly improved first impressions coming into the City from the Station;
- The Station has been the subject of an architectural concept competition, and the City is bidding to get the Department for Transport to fund the replacement for Botley Road Bridge;
- The Westgate extension, which involves an investment of £480 million and 3.400 jobs, will be complemented by Land Securities taking over the Castle Quarter to reinvigorate it;
- The City Council has acquired a significant part of the Oxpens site (the old railway land) from London and Continental in a joint venture with Nuffield College, and the initial planning work should be seen simply as a ‘baseline’. Nothing is fixed other than the desire to make it exemplary;
- Nuffield College has also acquired the land that runs from the College to the Station, which they would like to develop as a ‘Social Science Quarter’;
- Oxford University, which owns around 50% of Osney Mead, is developing a masterplan for the industrial estate;

The City Council recognises the need to encourage others to take the lead, but also for it to produce a plan, or series of linked plans, for the different neighbourhoods to ensure they are linked up and to make the most of the opportunities. The development framework will need to include a mix of uses to appeal to the market as well as to longer-term considerations. Key is going to be sorting out the transport links.



Oxford SPD :
Indicative Land Use

	SPD Floorspace (m2)
Flats	15,700 (125)
Houses	25,600 (172)
A1-A5 Uses	1,500
B1 Offices	8,100
B1 R+D	4,300
Hotel	7,400
Student Housing	10,600
Total	73,200



Pedestrian path over Botley Road



Osney Bridge



River Thames wharf



Osney Mead Industrial Estate



Frideswide Square before 2015



Gas works Bridge



Frideswide Square in 2016



Osney Mill Marina



Henk Bouwman from the
Academy of Urbanism

2e. Henk Bouwman: DIRECTOR OF THE ACADEMY OF URBANISM

Henk Bouwman is a director of the Academy of Urbanism and director of UiP urban producers in London specialising in integrating transport hubs in urban developments. He presented some basic principles for creating added value in developing a station. His illustrations were drawn from European cities, where cars have often become much less dominant.

2.1 A station as a place

A railway station serves a number of basic functions, for example as a place for departure and arrival. Integrating the station in its surrounding urban structure (buildings and the spaces between them), while adding extra functions to the station building can create a station as a destination in its own right. Developing a first-class transport interchange as a place adds value to the area as a whole. E.g. Rotterdam's new station serves not only as a transport hub, but as a concert hall, a 'city lounge' and a workplace.

2.2 Recognising the assets

Oxford Central West has great potential, not just because of its direct rail link to London, but also because it has such a large area for development so close to the city centre and station. The colleges, pockets of existing living areas and the many waterways in the study area should be seen as key assets for which a redeveloped station can act as a catalyst in enlarging the city centre to service a greater Oxford.

2.3 Collaboration

Is key to making the sum greater than the parts. This requires a platform to collaborate and to allow owners to express their different objectives and find common ground for a long-term vision. This vision should include shared values, principles and directions for a successful development and should offer a frame for a process of continuous change, as there are so many 'unknowns' in planning for 20 or 30 years ahead.

2.4 Stimulating investment

Work will initially be required to reorganise traffic and clear bottlenecks. The development sites must then be seen in both short and longer terms, along with environmental assets such as waterways, green spaces and landmarks that create a distinct identity. Exemplary European schemes such as Amersfoort Station (which a group from Oxford visited in 2012), Bordeaux, or HafenCity in Hamburg, show what is possible.



Amersfoort Station



Utrecht Central Station



Rotterdam Central Station



Concert at the Rotterdam Central Station



HafenCity public space in Hamburg



3. Workshop discussions

3a. Creating a new Heart for the City – Facilitator Biljana Savic: ACADEMY OF URBANISM

Biljana Savic, an independent urban designer formerly with CUBE and the Prince's Regeneration Trust, facilitated the workshop on 'what kind of area can it become?' In the feedback session she stressed three conclusions:



Biljana Savic from the Academy of Urbanism

Strengths	Weaknesses
Gateway	Underwhelming
Strategic position	Too many cars
Heritage	Undefined
Hope	Confusion
Potential	Run-down
Connections	Isolated
Largest development site	Anonymous
Concerned ownership	<i>'People expect something else from Oxford'</i>
	<i>'There used to be three breweries, all gone'</i>
	Night/day differences <i>'cowboytown'</i>

- ☐ The area needs to be densified, once the cars are removed, with a mix of uses in distinctive neighbourhoods;
- ☐ Housing is a priority, with higher densities than have been considered so far;
- ☐ The station quarter and streets into the centre should be a hub for learning and innovation.

Grenoble Station is the prime location for main engineering companies



Distinctive identity

The overwhelming problem at present is that the area is dominated by cars with too many car parks close to the city centre. There is more than one neighbourhood, so it is important to develop different kinds of places, all distinct and different from the rest of Oxford, and reflect the past but not to try to replicate it.



Mixed uses in HafenCity, Hamburg, work amazingly well



Kings Cross is a perfect example of mixing old and new, and the human scale is kept

Kings Cross area



Kings Cross area



Mixed use developments on Kings Cross railway land



Evolving functions

A masterplan should help the area to evolve, plot by plot, develop by developer. It should include temporary uses. If people like what is done then it will be easier to attract funds, and if it is affordable, it will help create a community. The population should be quadrupled (there are currently 3-4,000 residents, 40% of whom are transient).



Kings Centre in Osney Mead

Design excellence

We need a collective spatial vision, perhaps through collaborative design workshops, to ensure the development is integrated and easy to understand. The area has to be dense, but also intimate and vibrant. But infrastructure has to come first, and the cash flow problem resolved. Hence the railways must be involved.

Osney Mead industrial complex



Kings Cross station entrance



Philip Harcourt during the workshop

3b. Workshop 2: An integrated transport system – Facilitated by Philip Harcourt: Academy of Urbanism

Philip Harcourt (AoU) is a developer and development consultant specialising in mixed use developments with particular experience of waterfront development and projects around transport hubs. He facilitated the transport workshop, and stressed in the feedback session that the problems of traffic and congestion need to be tackled at source:

- ☐ Redeveloping and intensifying Osney Mead with a mix of uses can reduce the need to travel from outside all the way into the historic centre;
- ☐ Developments around the station should be complemented by commercial developments at the Park and Ride sites;
- ☐ New routes are needed into the centre, with some form of rapid transit.

Freiburg's railway station adjoins stops for trams, a major cycle park, and a bus station



Functions

The current station is inadequate and needs to be expanded to at least four platforms. It offers no sense of arrival; just a sense of departure. It fails to be a true destination.

- A. A proper transport interchange should cater for train, local bus, cycle, taxi and pedestrian (but not long distance coaches as there is no synergy).
- B. The six designs show what the station might look like but without much consideration of its functions (a brief seems to be absent).



AHR's proposal for Oxford Central Station

4.2. Connecting up

New developments on top of the current situation make a new link to the city centre necessary.

- A. It should incorporate new cycle routes away from cars.
- B. But there was no agreement on the mode (car / tram / rapid rail / dedicated bus route).
- C. Employment at Park & Ride sites would generate better use of P&R buses with counter cyclical bus utilisation (i.e. back loading passengers).
- D. There is no shortage of potential demand for space from employers.



Allies and Morrison's proposal for Oxford Central Station surroundings development

City centre living

Developments at Osney Mead should help reduce congestion.

- A. The traffic is largely the result of the separation of living areas from workplaces, where adequate housing in this area could meet the employment needs of businesses in the centre.
- B. Current occupiers on Osney Mead would, in the main, be happier located on the ring road. This would reduce HGV movements into the area.
- C. Another bridge across the river is needed.
- D. Water transport should also be explored.



Rick Mather Architects' proposal for Oxford Central Station

Locating the station

A priority for Oxford is to improve flows on the Botley Road and under the railway line, which means rethinking the linkages.

- A. The transport hub must be well-connected to the City centre (which for most people will mean the new Westgate shopping centre).
- B. A new station a few hundred yards South on Oxpens would be the best practical solution as it would allow the existing station to function in the interim without disruption, improve linkages with buses and taxis, and also help in connecting both sides of the railway line together.
- C. “Dreaming spires” would constrain but not prevent such a development.
- D. The ice rink can be redeveloped or relocated. The use can be incorporated in a new interchange with a mix of other uses (employment, retail, leisure and housing) to help fund the development.



Tight fit under Botley Road Bridge

3C. Workshop 3: Delivering (and paying for) the vision – Facilitated by Patrick Eve: AoU and Savills:

Patrick Eve (AoU) is a surveyor and partner in Savills' Oxford office. He facilitated the group on delivery, and brought out three conclusions.

- ☐ The area is too big and diverse for one developer, and we need to think fifty years ahead.
- ☐ So a loose group of major landowners should be formed to address the linkages, and help attract private investors.
- ☐ The key issue is to link Osney Mead with the city, and this required government support for a new bridge across the river.



Patrick Eve, Savills

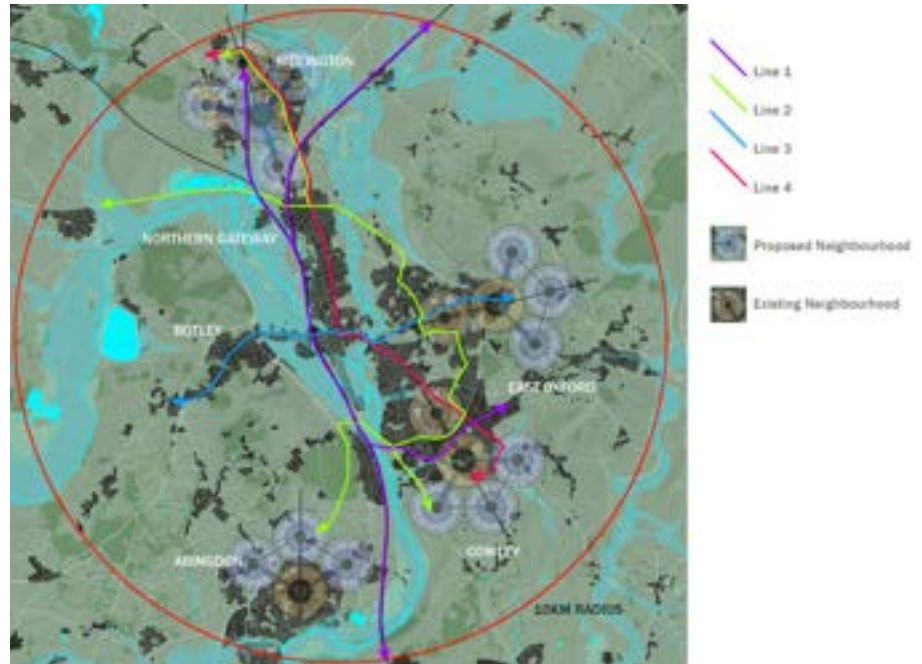
Osney Mead area



Long term vision

The group agreed on the need to create a new district with a series of linked quarters or neighbourhoods that would offer a fitting gateway to Oxford and complement, not compete with, the city centre.

- A. Cyclists and pedestrians should have priority.
- B. This probably requires some form of rapid transit.
- C. To achieve quality requires development that is relevant and adaptable over time.
- D. With a 'big idea' to hold it all together.



Urbed's proposal for the Oxford Metro
([Trams for Oxford Futures report](#))

Coordination

- A. No single landowner can drive the development forward.
- B. Hence a development framework is needed with clear objectives and aspirations, with a long-term view e.g. Kings Cross railway lands.
- C. Network Rail are quite limited as it builds to a price and there are competing priorities eg electrification and four tracking to Didcot.
- D. An Area Action Plan needs to be aligned with the 2018 Local Plan, for example to link up with other possible areas for major development.
- E. Immediate priorities will include the links between Oxpens, Oxford Castle and the new Westgate centre.
- F. The major landowners (the City, Network Rail and Nuffield) should meet up to take the proposals forward.



Funding

This is a largely unknown site with no obvious value.

- A. Hence commercial areas need to be identified first.
- B. Major financial institutions with the capacity to invest long-term capital can then be involved.
- C. A phased and realistic delivery plan should make the most of the site's assets e.g. river, canal and green spaces, as well as the main railway station.
- D. With private funding in place, additional grants and loans can be sought from government, including 'prudential borrowing' for housing through the Public Works Loan Board, and support for studies from the Local Enterprise Partnership.
- E. Oxford might also follow Cambridge University's example in raising a bond to fund local infrastructure and housing delivery.



Built heritage near Botley Road

Next steps

- A. The principal landowners need to meet regularly to continue to understand each other's ambitions and expectations.
- B. The spatial linkages need to be mapped to identify the key infrastructure requirements, short and long term and feasibility studies will be needed to resolve key options e.g. transport links.
- C. A budget will be required to engage the community (especially young people) in what the area can offer and funding sources and management arrangements need to be identified and investigated.



Oxford Replanned by Thomas Sharp

4. Conclusions

'We need to get a vision, then a framework and a structure to make it happen'

Bob Price, Leader of
Oxford City Council



'We have to look fifty years ahead; we need a framework that is flexible so investors are bound to something they can evolve'

Patrick Eve, Savills' Partners

'The next step is to ask the stakeholders what their plans are, (and in a larger venue)'

Peter Thompson, Chairman of
Oxford Civic Society



5. List of participants

Nick Church
Helen Barry
Elise Benjamin
Phil Bowley
Alex Robinson
Jon Rowland
Sara Fuge
Matt Oliver
Gwilym Hughes
Ian Green
Peter Thompson
Tony Turton
Sir Hugo Brunner
Sir Clive Booth
Andrew Pritchard
John Goddard
Iain Critchlow
Paul Goffin
Phil Southall
David Edwards
Laurie Jane-Taylor
Alex Hollingsworth
Bob Price
Fiona Piercy
Susanna Pressel
Debbie Dance
Richard Venables

Bev Hindle
Sally Jefferies
Catherine Quinn
Roger Smith
Nick Rees
Margaret Maden
Edward Cade
Bruce Cockburn
James Taylor
Roger Evans
David Rudlin
Nicholas Falk
Chris Church
Gillian Argyle
Wendy Robinson
Patrick Eve
Paul Comerford
Stephen Gallagher
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Nicholas Goddard
Benjamin Palle
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Kevin Mimms

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