

LIVING WITH NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN JERICHO AND WALTON MANOR

**A discussion paper examining the likely impacts upon the neighbourhood of
forthcoming and expected developments**

Paul Cullen – November 2010

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1. Introduction

Many new developments are planned or proposed in or near Jericho and these will have a substantial impact on the local community. Some are quite small, while one in particular will be massive. Their combined effects will be felt by most members of the community. Residents, schools and other places of education, shops, restaurants and other businesses will all experience change as a result of further development.

This note discusses what the changes are likely to be, their potential effects on the neighbourhood, and how the neighbourhood might help shape and adapt to change so as to benefit, rather than suffer, from it.

The note proposes that a dialogue should take place among the local community, and with developers and city planners, about the issues that change will bring. This will help develop a consensus about how Jericho can successfully adapt to the expected changes. The note does not suggest a way forward – it is hoped that the city and county councils will participate with the community in ensuring that the best ways are found to determine and manage change for the benefits of this community.

2. Developments approved or planned

A number of recently approved developments will mean more people coming into the area:

At 123 to 127 Walton Street, and in Little Clarendon Street, permission has been granted to provide 35 student study rooms and six retail units whereat present there are four retail units. A small amount of on-site parking will be permitted for personnel.

On the Acland Hospital Site, between Woodstock and Banbury Roads, Keble College have been granted permission to develop student accommodation comprising 240 student bedrooms, accommodation for Fellows, a café, library, teaching and research buildings. This site will be opposite the new Mathematical Institute buildings to be created in the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter (ROQ) (see below).

At Somerville College (north of Little Clarendon Street) in association with the first phase of the ROQ development Somerville College will build three new buildings along the wall that the College shares with the ROQ site, including two accommodation blocks for 68 students. The third block will provide new teaching and library facilities. Accompanying these plans are proposals to provide a new east/west link for pedestrians and cyclists, connecting Walton Street with Woodstock Road and available for the public to use.

At the former Radcliffe Infirmary site (now the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter (ROQ)) between the Woodstock Road, Somerville College, Walton Street, Observatory Street, and Green Templeton College, the University plans a massive development extending to more than 10 acres (4.231 hectares). Floor space in excess of 120,000 square metres is planned. The time span for the whole development will be about twenty years. Permission has been granted for the first buildings on the site. The Mathematical Institute will be 'a three-block scheme with a pair of five-storey wings joined by a two-storey glazed entrance lobby.' The Humanities Building and Library will bring together the four faculties of English, History, Theology and Philosophy and 'form the centrepiece of the entire development', featuring a two-storey copper and glass 'lantern' rising above a subterranean library, as well as a number of 'robust blocks' arranged in 'the manner of a traditional Oxford quad'. No start or completion dates have yet been given for construction of the blocks.

Perhaps ten thousand daily visits to the site will be made. The development site will itself be almost 'car-free' in that parking for only one hundred cars will be provided, with vehicle access to the site being from Woodstock Road. Additional spaces are to be provided for Green Templeton College and for Jericho Health Centre (which will also re-locate to the site), 'by negotiation'. Car parking spaces for Green Templeton and the Health Centre will be accessed from Walton Street. Three thousand cycle parking spaces are proposed for the ROQ site.

Jericho Health Centre, at present at the corner of Walton Street and Cranham Street, will move at an unannounced date to a new building offering more facilities at the north-west corner of the ROQ site, serviced from Walton Street. This will make its present accommodation available for other uses.

At the former Boatyard Site beside St Barnabus Church in Jericho two previous planning applications for development of housing, with provision of community facilities, have been refused. There will come a point at which the site comes onto the market (its owners being in administration) and a further planning application is expected. This may be accompanied by proposals to provide a new crossing of the Oxford Canal for pedestrians and cyclists.

The Cranham Street flats (formerly Grantham House) stand vacant and the City Council intends to sell the site for new housing development. Grantham House provided sheltered accommodation for elderly people whose travel needs were few. When the Grantham House site is redeveloped it too will bring additional residents to the area.

3. Likely effects of the developments

All the above developments will intensify the use made of local facilities, bringing new residents (both single people and families), and new daily visitors. The greater intensity will increase many of the problems already experienced in the neighbourhood, unless steps are taken to anticipate the changes and prepare for them.

3.1 More people living in the area. The student accommodation mentioned above will bring more than 340 newcomers to the area, and may well also be rented outside

term time to short-stay visitors. Most will have no car, and will need to shop, eat and be entertained. They will need to travel for study as well as for other reasons, and many of them will expect to cycle within the area and to park their cycles in and around the neighbourhood. They will receive visitors who will need to use local streets, and perhaps car parking spaces, when making visits.

By St Barnabas Church in Jericho there will be more residents at the Boatyard site in due course. The same will be true for the Grantham House site in Cranham Street. As yet residents' likely characteristics are unknown, but they too will need to shop, eat, be entertained, receive deliveries, have equipment serviced in the home, and travel.

3.2 More people visiting the area daily

The Keble (Acland site), Somerville, and of course the ROQ plans include more teaching and library facilities, as well as more research at the Acland site. This will bring more people to the area, and the size of this new community of academic and support staff will be huge. To the three thousand ROQ cycle parking places must be added the numbers walking and arriving on foot from public transport ; it can be envisaged that perhaps ten thousand or more visitors will want to come to the University and college developments alone on a normal day. Most will not use a car in central Oxford but to their numbers must be added those who will seek to drive to nearby streets, park there and complete their journeys on foot.

3.3 Effects of construction

While construction traffic for the ROQ site will enter and leave the site via its Woodstock Road gateway, the visual impact is already being witnessed in the shape of a large tower crane dominating the skyline. At other development sites, in addition to the visual impact of construction there will be an increase in motor traffic on local streets as construction and other contractors' vehicles penetrate the area.

4. Likely outcomes of more residents and more visitors

4.1 More activity in the neighbourhood every day

The activities associated with very large increases in numbers of people in the area will create considerable burdens for local residential and shopping streets. The area will be busier with a variety of activities, not only at daytimes during the week, but during evenings and at weekends.

4.2 More demand for shops, eating, drinking and entertainment

Many of those associated with colleges of the University will no doubt return to their colleges for meals, but there will be many non academic personnel seeking to shop or eat locally. There will also be greater demand for local cafes, restaurants, bars and entertainment in Little Clarendon Street, Woodstock Road and Walton Street in daytime, the evenings and at weekends.

4.3 More vehicles making deliveries and servicing visits to the area

The additional servicing visits made to the new developments will be considerable. Residential or otherwise, sites will receive visitors, mail and deliveries. Premises and their equipment will need to be serviced. In the early stages of development of the ROQ site, most demand will be at the Woodstock Road side of the site, but as the site becomes more fully occupied, with new buildings being created closer to Walton Street, there will be a natural attraction for delivery drivers to park in Walton Street while they make deliveries to the site – the result could be a considerable volume of service vehicles travelling through and parking in Walton Street and neighbouring streets.

4.4 More local parking demand

Many people will access the area by bicycle or on foot, perhaps in conjunction with public transport; but unless steps are taken to curtail it, there will be an emerging desire from some visitors to arrive by car, park in local streets and finish their journeys on foot. Some residents of new developments will also wish to park cars and this could lead to considerable pressure for street space to be converted to additional car parking spaces.

4.5 Demand for places at local schools will grow. A growing population is already producing children who need to travel to school as well as to accompany parents on other journeys. To this will be added demand for more journeys to and from local schools (as well as other journeys that children make). More children may mean more staff, more servicing, and will mean more journeys to and from school.

5. Present day problems in the neighbourhood

5.1 The night-time economy – and litter

The development of the night-time economy in Walton Street has created considerable problems for the local community in terms of late night noise and disturbance. Late night revellers seem unable to comprehend that raised voices disturb those who merely wish to sleep.

Considerable numbers of pedestrians spill into the carriageway outside the evening venues at times, creating a seemingly hostile environment for those simply wishing to go on their way, as well as causing risk to themselves and others.

Accompanying the night-time economy is the problem of litter; the streets display the discarded packaging, and often the food remnants, of ‘fast meals’ purchased at night and discarded wherever the purchaser had eaten enough.

5.2 Transient resident population

There are localised issues arising from the fact that some family homes are occupied by students, bringing with them some of the issues associated with young people living temporarily in an area with which they have no association. Noise is part of the

problem, and this may well relate to the plentiful availability of alcohol in the neighbourhood.

5.3 Motor traffic congestion and air pollution

The area witnesses considerable problems related to congestion and related effects of motor vehicles. That Walton Street is a convenient alternative to Woodstock Road, for journeys passing through the city centre, is confirmed by the fact that during St Giles Fair (in which St Giles is closed for two days each September) Woodstock Road traffic is diverted via Walton Street.

At the southern end of Walton Street, Worcester Street is part of the link by which motor vehicles cross the city centre between north Oxford and Oxpens, Botley Road and the rail station. This narrow street is frequently congested with vehicles at a standstill, and air quality there is very poor. Despite its poor environment it is the only practical route for many people walking or cycling between Jericho/ north Oxford and the rail station.

Walton Street connects with Worcester Street, offering drivers an alternative route between Woodstock Road and Hythe Bridge Street, avoiding the traffic signals at St. Giles/ Beaumont Street. The outcome is rat running in St Bernard's Road (eastbound), and especially in Observatory Street and Little Clarendon Street (both one-way westbound), with long vehicle queues bringing noise and air pollution to street users and to the residential properties fronting and adjoining the southern end of Walton Street.

5.4 Narrow and obstructed footways

The effects of motor traffic serve to worsen an already difficult environment for people walking, and cycling in Walton Street. Along much of its length footways are very narrow and inadequate. People have to step into the carriageway to pass each other. As mentioned above, crowds of people are frequently seen outside the bars at weekends, especially in the evenings, spreading across the carriageway and not only creating obstacles and apprehension for passing pedestrians who have to step even further into the carriageway, but creating risks for themselves as well as for others. The same effect is witnessed when people congregate outside the cinema.

The same is true in Little Clarendon Street, a shopping street whose environment is not only degraded by rat running, but whose traders no doubt also suffer the effects that that brings.

Within Jericho, west of Walton Street, narrow footways are obstructed by parked bicycles, again forcing people into the carriageway on foot.

6. Wider issues of travel and access

6.1 Lack of bus links between the rail station and Woodstock Road

Rail patronage is expected to grow at Oxford station and some of this growth will be to/from the new developments north of the city centre. There are no bus routes serving the station that pass along either Walton Street or Woodstock Road (other than route 17, which serves Walton Street hourly on weekday evenings). This is already a major gap in services which will be felt all the more as visitors to the area increase, in particular at the ROQ.

6.2 Lack of a convenient pedestrian/cycle link to the rail station and West End

A convenient pedestrian/cycle link between Jericho and the rail station/ West End and south thereof has been identified as enabling many local journeys to be made safely on streets largely free of motor traffic. The present bridge across the canal in Jericho is an impediment; suggestions for the Boatyard site include a new accessible bridge adjacent to St Barnabas Church. However, the intervening link to Rewley Road via the canal towpath and the present pedestrian bridge across the Castle Mill Stream would need replacing in order for the full potential of a new link to be exploited.

6.3 The need for travel behaviour change

In September 2010 the Secretary of State for Transport, Phillip Hammond, declared that behaviour change will be necessary in urban environments, for transport to be able to make its contribution to carbon emissions targets. The ROQ site development proposals have been farsighted in this respect – very few vehicles will be able to drive to and park on the site. But active steps will be needed to prevent this restriction from producing a search by drivers for parking spaces in local streets.

7. The need for a planning led response

7.1 Developer Contributions

In his report of 14th September 2010 to Central, South and West Area Committee, on the subject of Receipt and Expenditure of Developer Contributions, the Head of City Development stated that ‘Developer contributions are sought to mitigate the impact of development, compensate for loss or damage caused by a development and overcome what would otherwise be a potential reason to refuse an application’.

So far little has been offered that reflects the impact that the proposed developments will have on the local community, despite the potential effects being huge. How will the City as planning authority, and the County as highway authority respond to these impacts – to anticipate them, take measures to address them, and obtain some meaningful contributions from the developers – not only to enable the developments to maximise the benefits they bring to the local community but to help remove some of the identified shortcomings that exist at present?

7.2 How should developers contribute?

The whole impact of all the developments approved, planned or expected in Jericho/Walton Manor will be too great for developer contributions to be assessed on

an individual basis. The neighbourhood will change. How it changes will depend in part on what the community believes the by-products of development should be.

7.3 What are the emerging questions?

This note has outlined many of the challenges that will be faced in Jericho and Walton Manor when all the proposed developments have taken place. There are many questions to answer, among them:

- How will the community respond to at least 340 more short-term residents during University term time, with perhaps others out of term time?
- What will be the effects of much more demand for shopping, dining, drinking, entertainment in the area? How should they be addressed?
- What facilities should be provided for (e.g.) lunchtime recreation and exercise?
- Should Walton Street be closed to through traffic? How will the increasing competition for street space be addressed?
- What will be done to deter visitors from driving into Oxford in the hope of parking in Jericho, circuiting the neighbourhood in search of parking spaces?
- Should the shopping streets – Walton Street, Little Clarendon Street, Woodstock Road and South Parade, be re-shaped to reflect their growing roles as places for people? If so, then how?
- What physical changes will be needed to enable Walton Street to better serve increasing numbers of cyclists, and of pedestrians on its narrow pavements?
- How will better bus services be procured?
- Should an improved lightly trafficked link between north Oxford, Jericho and the rail station/West End be provided via the canal path?
- Should new residential developments be ‘car free’?

8. Next steps – a dialogue between the community, planners and developers

Further development will change Jericho. It must be used to improve the neighbourhood; it could easily create stresses that would ruin this unique community. To help answer the above questions and others, a dialogue needs to take place between the community, the planning and highway authorities, and developers.

It is suggested that in the first instance the local community should be invited to a meeting in order that the issues can be explored more fully, so that Oxford City

Council can then be requested to address the issues of development in the neighbourhood in a coordinated, rather than piecemeal, way.