



The wind and the willows ...



Danny Dorling, Halford Mackinder Professor of Geography at Oxford University, recently gave a talk on cycling that electrified our members. In case you missed it, here is his summary of the case for a radical solution to our transport challenges.

Oxford and its county are changing. I was brought up in the city, left in 1986 and returned in 2013 to find a city transformed. Cornmarket had been pedestrianised. Cycle lanes had been painted on pavements. Most of the city was now a 20mph zone. Many things had got better – and they will get better again.

But the city is also now full. It has built up to its greenbelt boundary. Compared to wages and salaries, rents and house prices have never been so high. I have made and lost many new friends in just three years. Most leave because they cannot afford to stay. Without access to the depleted stock of social housing, someone with a career in Oxford can no longer afford a family-sized home unless at least one adult in their household is very highly paid.

Progress often takes a step back as the extreme unaffordability of the city currently demonstrates. New initiatives can also be bad initiatives. The image above shows bikes squeezed between cars on the main approach from the train station to the city centre and the creation of a new death trap. I use it often.

Transport has become congested because there are more people in Oxford. The hospitals have expanded. New businesses have started in the city and both universities have grown. And no one – no one – planned for all this. There is no plan for England's largest city between Birmingham and London. There has been no foresight.

A new secondary school is to open in September 2017. As I write, no one knows where it will be built. In June the city thankfully proposed more housing,

to the north and south, but not better transport links, let alone building housing to the west and east where there is land above the floodplain nearer to the centre. In May permission was given to build on open countryside in Oxfordshire. There will be more homes, but how to avoid more traffic?

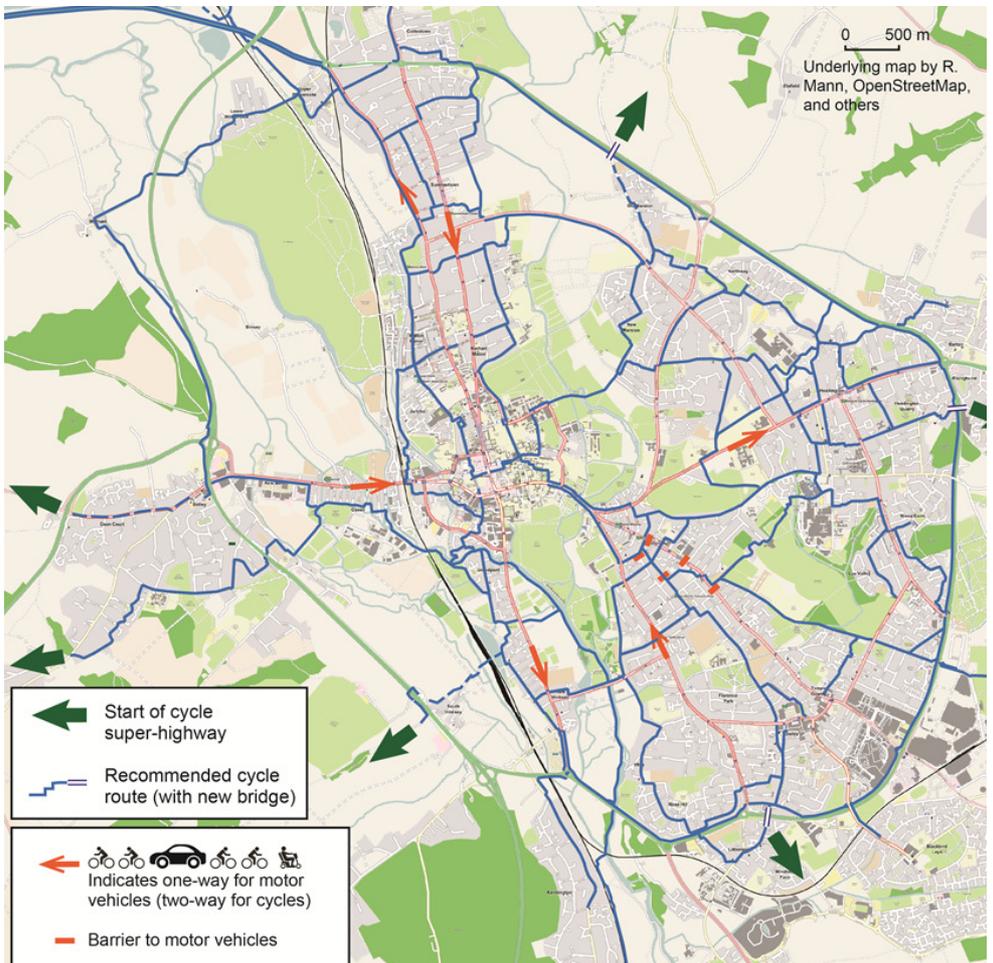
A child will be leaving Oxford today who will return in three decades' time and they will also see a very different city then. Change is inevitable. The city and county have never fossilised. These will probably be the kind of changes that have already happened elsewhere, not least within Sheffield, where I lived before returning to Oxford, with its wonderful tram network. Oxfordshire may be a little slower on the up-take than South Yorkshire but that does not mean it will not change.

Gridlock

Much of the region, the A40 and A34 especially, is often gridlocked with traffic. People have become used to queuing and polluting in their vehicles. Ridiculous proposals are still made. The modern-day version of building a road through Christchurch meadow is the suggestion of putting a tunnel under the High Street to allow cars to traverse the city underground and generate even more traffic. Of course, that won't happen. But we should worry that it was even proposed.

More of the city centre will be pedestrianised, or at least made car free, while buses slowly inch their way through. Many more tourists will come and hopefully we'll learn to spread them out a little more and give them a better experience.

A proposals for six roads to be made one way only for cars, lorries and buses. Cycle routes are shown in blue from Richard Mann's maps of Oxford. Cycles would then have more space for two-way traffic on these routes.





... how to encourage more cycling

The case for cycling

Eventually there may be trams again in Oxford, as there were until 1914, but trams are expensive to install. So what can be done that is far cheaper than building new infrastructure? What is the easiest option that does not require any demolition, that will not attract road-protestors, that is both financially viable and environmentally desirable? The answer is bicycles.

In the Netherlands over 50% of people get to work by bike or walking compared with only 15% in Oxford (21% in Cambridge). A quarter of Dutch pensioners cycle, in the UK only 1% do. It's good news that more people in Oxford are cycling and walking now than a decade ago and that commuting by car has decreased (by just over 2%) – but we have a long way to go to reach European levels of cycling or even those of Cambridge.

Two issues need to be addressed. The first is safety because the perceived dangers of cycling are a significant deterrent to many people. We also need more space for safer cycling. The blue routes in the map opposite, first drawn by Richard Mann of Cyclox, are the recommended cycle routes, but they cannot take enough bikes if we are to attract people out of their cars. The growth of the city's population will put even more strain on the road routes.

A one-way solution

We could generate more capacity for bikes and make cycling safer by making six of the arterial routes one-way to **motorised** traffic:

- Banbury, Iffley, and Botley Roads would be one-way into the city
- Woodstock, London and Abingdon Roads would be one-way out of the city
- the Cowley Road should no longer be a route for cars and vans to enter or leave the city.

This would leave space for **four cycle lanes** going in **both** directions on the main arteries of Oxford. Two would be slow lanes, slow enough for a motorised buggy. Cycles and buggies would travel both ways; buses, cars and vans only one-way. (Motorised buggies have

transformed travel for people with disabilities. There are also adaptations to bikes for disabled people.)

Everywhere would still be accessible by car, but their journeys would be longer, albeit with less congestion as fewer people chose to drive. This solution has other benefits. Junctions are far less complex if most of the traffic on the main road is only flowing one way. Crossing the road is also easier – as long as the fast bike lanes don't become too fast. Pollution on the main roads could be more than halved as smoother-flowing traffic emits less exhaust fumes.

All of these things might also encourage more people to walk to work or the shops. Walking and cycling are better for us than sitting in cars or buses so our health should improve too.

Better cycling provision in the city would make housing on the edge possible, but not sprawl. Most people can only cycle short distances. It would free up space on the roads for the growing population and make cycling safer.

Many cities in Europe have already achieved this – but none in the UK. Oxford could be the first.

By making travel around the city safer and easier by bike, you give people the freedom of the city. Schoolchildren, students, workers and pensioners will be able to get about more easily and, who knows, chat and make new friends (or at least be less unaware of each other as strangers in cars).

Simultaneously the building of more housing will not simply result in more gridlock on the roads. Build cycle routes out to the countryside and people need not get in a car to get away, to get to feel the wind and see the willows that are all around us.

I first saw beautiful smooth and wide rural cycle paths in South Yorkshire and Derbyshire criss-crossing the Peak District. They were built away from roads. My children learnt to cycle on them. Oxfordshire children, adults, and tourists have nothing like this – until we choose to create it

Oxford contains many bikes with almost nowhere to go outside of the city. So where would you put cycle super-highways? Here are seven off-road suggestions, and an improved cycle path around the ring road to link them

