English Historic
Towns Forum

Report of the Annual Conference
Transportation & the Historic Public Realm
Oxford on 19th – 21st October 2005

Early arrivals in Oxford on **Wednesday** afternoon met in the Great Hall at Christchurch for a sumptuous cream tea in splendid surroundings. Blue Badge Guides then took the party on a tour of Oxford.
Re-convening at the Town Hall, EHTF Members gathered for the **Annual General Meeting**. Minutes will be circulated to attendees and are available on the Members' section of the website. A short report will also be included in the next Newsletter.
The Lord Mayor of Oxford, Councillor Bob Price, welcomed delegates to the City at a Reception held in the Museum, where they were offered guided tours of the exhibits. Supper at "Bistro Je T'aime" was a very pleasant culmination to the first evening.

On **Thursday** morning **Ian Poole**, Chair of EHTF, welcoming delegates, said he was looking forward to a very full programme of presentations and study tours and was pleased to be able to offer three of the Forum's guidance documents, which related to the topics under discussion, free of charge to all delegates.

Lord Mayor of Oxford, **Cllr Bob Price**, offered a residents view of some of the problems facing the City and looked forward to learning from those gathered for the conference.

Professor Phil Goodwin, transport 'guru', advisor to Government and Professor of Transport Policy at the Centre for Transport & Society at the University of the West of England, opened the conference with an enlightening presentation on our "love affair with the car" and the importance of managing demand.

Michael Crofton-Briggs, Chief Planning Officer at the City Council and **Peter Mann**, the Assistant Head of Transportation at Oxfordshire County Council together outlined the background and the problems facing Oxford. Although arrival in the City was equally 33% by car, bus and bicycle – statistics which many would envy - the impact of all three on the historic public realm needed a "balanced approach". Through complementary measures, creating opportunities and the adoption of a Public Realm Strategy the City and County together were tackling the problems.

Andy Wren explained how he was working 'Miracles' in Winchester as Project Manager of an EU funded project, which was part of the CIVITAS programme, in partnership with Hampshire County Council and with Rome, Barcelona and Cork. A transport policy for Winchester had been developed to "maintain and improve access whilst reducing the impact of traffic on its people, the economy and the environment."

Rob Surl is Head of Transportation at Shropshire County Council, a member of the EHTF Executive Committee and one of a group of four who led the Historic Core Zone Project from its inception in 1999. He updated delegates on the Project in Shrewsbury and in particular on the Park & Ride scheme which had complemented the ethos / principles / practicalities / implementation of the Project.

Rob also added his own very short 'soapbox session' to alert officers to the Transport Innovation Fund – a new £9.5bn funding initiative which he felt could be used to great advantage by small towns and cities.

Ian Poole, also an HCZ project leader, asked what had been learned from the project and how the principles might be applied more widely. Many of the major issues remained: the lack of maintenance budgets, 'line mania' and the surfeit of signs which plague our towns and cities. However, the campaign was gathering momentum, with many other organizations adding to the ground swell, which Ian hoped would encourage Government Departments and Highways Authorities to listen.

Steve Bee, Director of Planning & Development at English Heritage, presented a succession of images from the "Streets for All" campaign which clearly demonstrated the do's and don'ts of street management. A document had been tailored for each of the English regions and reiterated the de-clutter mantra.

Ian invited the speakers, together with **Debbie Dance** , of the Oxford Preservation Trust and **Colin Davis** of CJDA Ltd to respond to questions from the audience.

Following lunch, a new addition to the conference format was introduced. Two "Soapbox Sessions" were presented by **James Mackay**, Secretary of the Warwick Society and **David Wilson**, Vice Chairman of the Chichester Society. James offered an interesting 'retrospective' of Warwick from the year 2015, and David explored the potential for the development of bus transport.

The afternoon sessions were offered in two strands, allowing delegates to choose three topics which were of particular concern to them, out of the six.

Graham Thompson, Development Manager at Land Securities plc and **John Rigby**, Economic & Development Director at Exeter City Council, explored the links and impacts between retail and transport, with several examples including the Princesshay retail development in Exeter. The importance of the creation of high quality public realm, they agreed, was fundamental to a successful scheme.

Jon Pinkerton, a Partner at Donaldsons, posed the question "Car based shopping – are there alternatives?" Currently 60% of shoppers arrive at their destination by car and this can not be sustained, with the increasing congestion and pollution being experienced.

Malcolm Pickett, 2004/5 President of the British Parking Association, asked whether locations were 'geared up' to accept what he saw as an ever increasing number of visitors, for which the quality of the parking experience should be as high quality as the quality of the destination itself.

Graham King, Head of the City Planning Group at Westminster City Council, gave delegates some insight into the implementation of technological solutions from the impetus, through the processes to the costs and specifications.

Malcolm Buchanan, Chairman of Colin Buchanan and **Roger Elphick**, Head of Highway Management at Durham County Council, explained their approach to the transport problems in Durham – a World Heritage Site. Through a careful travel study and an inclusive strategy, which included the controversial congestion charging, improvements to transportation in the City and to the public realm have been achieved.

Nigel Eggleton, the Commercial Director of the Oxford Bus Company, described the philosophy behind the strategies shared with the Go-Ahead Group, and how a range of problems were being addressed.

Refreshed with tea, delegates re-convened and Ian introduced **Prue Smith** who, until recently, had been the Chair of the EHTF Built Environment Working Group and **Richard Guise**. Together with **Clive Alexander**, of Dover District Council, they had produced a sister document to the popular "Making Better Planning Applications" guidance, entitled – "Making Better Application for Listed Building Consent". Copies of both publications were available to delegates and are also available in pdf format online at www.ehtf.org.uk/admin/getfile.asp?ID=80 and www.ehtf.org.uk/admin/getfile.asp?ID=81 or obtained from the bristol office.

Ian thanked them and the Bristol production team for their work on these documents, which would go some way towards improving the quality, and therefore the speed of processing, of applications.

The afternoon speakers were joined by **Colin Davis** & **Bob Allies**, of Allies & Morrison to respond to delegates' questions.

At 6pm delegates gathered again for **a series of tours** each of which illustrated the issues under discussion. Nigel Eggleton provided transport for a tour of the Park & Ride sites, whilst others made their way to the City Centre to explore the West Gate Scheme, the University Quarter, including a floodlit demonstration in Radcliffe Square of cobble laying (our thanks to Colin Davis for arranging this), the Cornmarket public realm improvement scheme and the West End 'renaissance'.

The **conference dinner**, held at Holywells, was very well attended and offered an opportunity for networking and further discussions.

Welcoming delegates on Friday morning, Ian gave a brief preview of the **new EHTF website,** which he hoped would be 'live' in time for the next event on the 1st December, and would offer Members more online facilities – including conference presentations to download and secure online payments.

He gave a brief resumé of the previous day – which was difficult, he said, having had 18 presentations in 6 hours!

ACCESSIBILITY FOR HISTORIC TOWNS
- Increases in car ownership
- No road building in Oxford since 1970's

- Demand management can work BUT it is not easy
- Consequences in Oxford
- Tensions between:-
    - Transport and built environment; and
    - Cyclists and the public realm

SOLUTIONS
- Park and Ride in large and small towns
- Miracles in Winchester
- Streetscape issues

CONGESTION, DEMAND MANAGEMENT & PARKING
- Retailing & Parking
    - Alternatives?
    - New schemes
    - The need for quality parking experience
- Transport Strategies
    - Whole centre approach - Durham
    - Using technology
    - Buses are important and part of "the scene"

SOAPBOX
- Frustrations in Warwick
- Ideas for making buses better and giving them more priority

The Friday programme, he said, would focus on "Enhancing the public realm in historic centres" and he introduced the first speaker:

David Samuels, an Urban Design Associate at David Lock Associates, talked about thee 'seamless integration' of the public realm and the transport infrastructure, and the strategies which could be employed to make it work. He considered that a viable town centre must have viable public transport and that there must be positive management with bold solutions. He overturned the assumption of the need for a plethora of 'kit' to achieve these.

Brian Evans, a Partner at Gillespies, used examples from across Europe to demonstrate good practice in designing places for people. He advocated simplicity of materials, lighting and design combined with innovative technology and freedom of function. Damage to our towns and cities is often incremental, he said, and we must recognise the needs of all the people who use the places and encourage their involvement. He finished with a quote from Alistair Grey "a city can only exist when it is inhabited in the imagination of its citizens"

"To masterplan or not to masterplan?" That was the question posed by **Chris Miele ,** Director of Planning & Historic Environment at RPS Planning, Transport & Environment. He offered three examples where different strategies had been employed to good effect, a managerial strategy, a vision-based masterplan and a hybrid plan. This emphasizes the fact that no one solution fits all.

The important practicalities of wayfinding and legibility were explained by **Sue Manley**, Director of Placemarque. High quality, locally distinctive signage can make a significant contribution to destination management and to the public realm, she said. Developing a system which relates to the place can reinforce the local identity at the same time as

enhancing the visitor experience. In addition, a full understanding of a complex variety of issues is required to ensure maximum benefits from the investment.

Trevor Osborne, Chairman of the Trevor Osborne Property Group Ltd**,** offered a brief, amusing history of the location of the ambitious Oxford Castle Heritage Project. The old prison is being transformed into a complex which will include a luxury hotel, shops, apartments and restaurants. Restoration, conservation and reuse of the ancient buildings had been key to his plans, which offered the opportunity for the integration of a large area, which included a scheduled ancient monument, with the historic core of Oxford. The project had also given rise to plans for an Academy of Urbanism, which would offer courses in the Castle complex.

In a cleverly illustrated grand finale, **Ben Hamilton-Baillie** said that "Shared Space" was the "new hope for reconciling people, places and transport." He showed graphically the consequences of current transport planning and offered radical solutions, based on proven practices in many European towns and cities. Banishing lines, signs and signals, far from increasing congestion and accident rates, created an environment in which people related directly to each other and behaved in a more considered way. He questioned methods of risk assessment which undermined common sense and offered a quote from Hans Monderman to conclude *"A safe street is one that tells a rich story about its past, its context, and the future hopes of its residents".*

There followed a brief Q&A session, for which Stephen Clark of CB Richard Ellis & James Hulme, of the Prince's Foundation joined the panel of speakers.

Ian closed the conference with thanks to everyone involved in the event, especially Nick Worlledge of Oxford City Council who was unfortunately unable to attend due to illness, and to Nigel Eggleton of the Oxford Bus Company, who had very generously provided free bus travel for delegates throughout the event.

After lunch, delegates who were able to extend their stay a little longer, were taken by the Oxford Bus Company to the Castle Heritage Project for a tour guided by Trevor Osborne.

Copies of the power point presentations provided by the speakers are available from the EHTF office - email: ehtf@uwe.ac.uk or tel: 0117 975 0459.

Chris Winter
EHTF
October 2005