

BROAD ST, OXFORD

The Plan



BEFORE



AFTER



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Broad Street

is one of the great urban spaces of Europe. The rich variety of architecture; the lives that have been lived and lost in the place; and the dynamic role of the street in the centre of Oxford, combine to give The Broad a powerful beauty and significance.

The street began life as a disreputable ditch outside the city walls. Gradually, as the University emerged from the back alleys; as the walls came down; and as the fine Wren and Hawksmoor buildings grew up, Broad Street became an elegant thoroughfare and meeting place.

A long history of memories and traditions has made The Broad into something of a chameleon. At its eastern end, the street is the climax of the University precinct from St Mary's up through Radcliffe Square and the Divinity Schools to the Clarendon and Sheldonian. It is the ceremonial heart of the University and the focus of visitor interest in the city. By contrast, the western end of the street is still part of the commercial town, with a long-established row of specialist shops linking to the Covered Market, George Street and Cornmarket. In the middle of The Broad the Colleges are dominant. Trinity and Balliol connect down Turl Street with Exeter, Jesus and Lincoln. Each of these identities combines to create Broad Street and its colourful personality is dependent on the dance between them.

The character and role of The Broad also changes as it connects to the adjoining lanes and streets. Each street needs to be considered in the context of its neighbour.

Although the width of The Broad gives the space a rather grand, discrete appearance, it is an integral part of the street and traffic system of Oxford. The street runs parallel with The High and had become a congested alternative rat-run. The Oxford Transport Strategy interim schemes for the street have been exploring ways of making things better for pedestrians, but have tended to leave the place in a rather temporary and unresolved state. As a rat-run full of traffic the street was a nightmare, but without any cars or people The Broad became lifeless.

In December 2002 the Oxford Preservation Trust assembled a steering group of the main interested parties to provide a vision for the street. The group includes Oxfordshire County Council, Oxford City Council, the University of Oxford and the Colleges fronting onto Broad Street, The Oxford Civic Society, representation of Oxford's business community, English Heritage and CABE. In February 2003 the steering group appointed Kim Wilkie Associates to study Broad Street, consult with the main bodies and interest groups, and produce a succinct vision for the future of The Broad.

The 18 month study is summarized in this report and offers the following main recommendations to:

1. pave the eastern end of The Broad as the University 'Square' at the head of the sequence of pedestrian spaces from St Mary's to the New Bodleian (estimated cost £4.5m);
2. open the empty platform outside the New Bodleian as a south-facing café to animate the new square as part of the University's evolving plans to reorganize the library (estimated cost £0.5m);
3. reconnect the western end of The Broad within the framework of the *Oxford Transport Strategy* (estimated cost £2m);
4. reduce the accumulated clutter of street markings, signs, furniture and lights to produce a clearer and safer sequence of urban spaces, where the architecture can be read and pedestrians can feel comfortable, in line with English Heritage's *Streets for All* policies;
5. upgrade the surrounding and connecting streets with complementary high quality and simple paving materials, as part of the City's *Public Realm Strategy* Radcliffe Square and Catte Street;
6. replant trees in Parks Road, Holywell Street and surrounding Colleges to lean over into the space and bring green shade without interrupting the architectural or ceremonial sequences of the street;
7. form a new Broad Street executive group to agree a way forward and raise funds for one of the most important spaces of the city, where so many different interests overlap.

