

Letters & Opinion

The Oxford Times

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The community deserves the best for Jericho boatyard site

The plight of the more than 400 boaters who call the city centre section of the Oxford Canal home is reason enough to get a working boatyard back on the historic site at Jericho Wharf.

Beyond that, the demonstrable need for a fit-for-purpose, accessible community centre and public space for people in Jericho makes the argument convincing.

And local people's pleas to build something Oxford can be proud of next door to the 'Jericho Basilica' of St Barnabas Church, proves the logic behind the fight.

In the 33 years since the old boatyard – home to Orchard Cruisers – shut down, Jericho Wharf has become a battleground between community interest and the cynical investment and speculative development which blights modern Oxford.

That battle didn't even begin with the current unflinching landowner.

The most recent bid from Cheer Team Corporation, which bought the site in 2013 to replace the hard-earned compromise of a blended community and profit-driven development with 230 student flats, has been described as cynical, made worse by the company's total lack of engagement with the locals on the ground and the boaters on the canal.

But before that, the canalside community struggled under the site's ownership by British Waterways, which similarly saw several lapsed or rejected planning applications for the site pass through its machine.

Ever pragmatic, the locals in Jericho, championed by the Jericho Wharf Trust, emphasise that they too want whatever is eventually built to make money, through profitable housing.

But they and the city's planning authority have been emphatically and admirably uncompromising on the requirement that any new development must cater to the community's need for a boatyard, community centre and public space.

In the last 20 years of the wharf's (at least) 170-year history, campaigners have successfully made themselves a stone in the shoe of an apparently pitiless landowner who, given free reign, would have bulldozed the crumbling remains of the boatyard site in favour of sleek new builds.

Over time, Jericho Wharf has become representative of the struggle between the city's heritage and its progress, and how the two might fit together.

It is as integral to the 200-year-old suburb as any other building or structure in the storied neighbourhood.

With support only growing for the Jericho Wharf Trust's appeal, campaigners remaining doggedly committed to the fight and the landowner stubbornly stagnant, it can only be a matter of time before the city reclaims this piece of its heritage.

When it does, it will be thanks to the remarkable persistence of a group of volunteers and heritage champions who are determined to preserve the best of Oxford's past.

Insensitive language

I WAS disappointed to see an Independent councillor talk about councillors “putting nails in their own coffin” in a vote over transport issues.

Whatever your views of the issue, in a world where two British parliamentarians have been murdered in recent years, this is not at all a nice phrase to use. The same councillor recently apologised after being found guilty of bullying and harassment after an independent investigation.

I have strong views on many political questions, I know many of my friends and neighbours on Rose Hill do too, but we always manage to talk in a respectful and civilised way to each other.

I would like to appeal to people to think carefully about the language they use.

I know horrible social media algorithms are making public language more and more unpleasant by the day, but I really believe most people in Oxford would rather see kindness and reasonable disagreement, not more talk of politicians in coffins because of the views they hold.

Labour city councillor Ed Turner
Rose Hill and Iffley Ward

Pull or push?

DEAR Anneliese Dodds, MP for Oxford East

Shabana Mahmoud aims to reduce pull factors attracting migrants to the UK, rather than decrease push factors causing desperate people to migrate.

Push factors include devastation caused by climate-driven natural disasters, the slashing of international aid budgets, and the export of weapons which are then used to destroy communities.

For nearly four years Western governments have provided just enough weaponry to perpetuate the war in Ukraine, but not to allow Ukraine to win.

The UK government claims that these arms sales directly support “the UK deference (sic) industry, creating UK jobs, and delivering on this government's growth agenda and Plan for Change” (Gov.uk).

Shabana Mahmoud said “many refugees remain unemployed several years after being granted protection, depending on taxpayer funded benefits to live in the UK.... To the public, who foot the bill, the system feels out of control and unfair.”

In contrast, in 2023, the London Assembly organised a conference to examine “employment barriers for asylum seekers and refugees.” The government's data comes from PAYE records, and so does not take into account people who are self-employed (gov.uk) like Amazon or Deliveroo drivers.

The problem is that “foreign-born workers without UK citizenship are around three times as likely as UK-born workers to be in the gig economy... where individuals are classified as self-employed despite working under conditions more typical of employees” (Resolution foundation).

Words are important. Choosing to frame immigrants as ‘others’ who are not like us, who do not share our values, and who game the system is extremely dangerous.

Cats at Christmas

TO ensure a relaxing festive period for you and your pet, Cats Protection has gathered some tips to keep cats and kittens safe around Christmas trees and decorations.

While extreme incidents are rare, simple steps will reduce the chance of incident or accident.

Try putting up your Christmas tree a few days early, without lights or decorations, to get your cat used to all the excitement and see if they are likely to climb it.

If they do climb the tree, consider what decorations you put on it and avoid glass ornaments that could smash and injure your cat.

If your cat is a prolific climber, or young and still a bit clumsy, you may want to avoid the tangle risk of long string decorations such as lights or beads.

And ensure your tree has a sturdy base to prevent injury from it toppling over.

If you opt for a real Christmas tree it is worth



A walk in the mist. Sue Craigs Erwin

noting that some parts may be toxic if eaten.

Daniel Warren-Cummings
Cats Protection Central Behaviour Officer

Getting ‘cancelled’

FORMER Oxford Spires poetry teacher, Ms Kate Clanchy, was featured on BBC Radio Four's “Anatomy of a Cancellation,” after inspiring her ethnic pupils to cherish poetry was described by the Guardian, and far-left campaigners as being a symptom of her “white saviour” complex.

Ms Clanchy was also criticised by Caucasian politically correct campaigners for accurately describing ethnic people's skin-colour, and facial features in her book, Some Kids I Taught, and What They Taught Me, published in 2022.

Her former pupils have largely welcomed her book.

Agents of political correctness have a legacy of using their position, and privilege to criticise, exclude, and cancel, Caucasian middle-class individuals whose work, and contribution helps, and inspires ethnic people.

Far greater harm, and unnecessary strife is caused to England's ethnic people by agents of the far left; who always used their privilege to deceptively pretend to speak and campaign for ethnic people.

Sports ground

MAY I through your letters column express my concerns for the future of our sports ground, now owned by Bicester retail village.

I've been a resident of Bicester since 1969, enjoying football, rugby and cricket.

The sports ground must remain a green space, but I fear there could be a retail village plan to build a car park, with work recently starting.

Chaka Artwell Barton

Andy Beaumont Bicester

Local businesses

IT was refreshing to see Layla Moran MP speaking at the Covered Market last week with business owners protesting against the congestion charge, even though it delayed her planned media interview.

In stark contrast, County Councillor Andrew Gant, told those same protesters to “go away” when they arrived - then lurked at a distance while the MP did the talking.

In her pre-budget media interview, Ms Moran said: “We want to see businesses thriving, not

plagued with unnecessary hurdles imposed by the Chancellor.”

Yet our Lib Dem-run county council is plaguing our local businesses with six ‘hurdles’ of their own, the six toll points of Councillor Gant's congestion charge, a tax which is already causing a fall in trade and damage to livelihoods.

This isn't helping businesses thrive; it's choking them.

Perhaps it's time the Lib Dems followed their own advice, instead of preaching one thing and delivering the opposite.

Anne Gwinnett Tackley

Farage ‘rhetoric’

SIR Keir Starmer's suggestion that Nigel Farage should lead an inquiry into Russian interference within Reform UK following Nathan Gill's conviction for taking bribes to push Kremlin propaganda is an entirely inadequate response.

Mr Farage himself made strikingly similar pro-Russia statements at the same time Mr Gill was being paid to promote Moscow's line.

That alone makes him a prime subject of investigation, not an appropriate person to lead it.

No one can seriously believe he would expose potential wrongdoing by himself or by those close to him.

The security services have repeatedly warned that Kremlin-linked actors have tried to cultivate and corrupt UK political figures.

The long-delayed Russia Report, eventually published in 2020 after Boris Johnson's attempted suppression, made clear that the government had actively avoided seeking evidence of such interference. That failure of scrutiny must not be continued.

What is required now is an independent, robust investigation across all political parties - but especially Reform UK, which has for years amplified narratives favourable to Moscow.

Farage's recent pivot to anti-Russia rhetoric appears less like conviction and more like an effort to distance himself from Gill.

It is a bitter irony that Reform supporters across the country are waving cheap polyester flags made in China as a supposed display of patriotism (and calling those who disapprove ‘traitors’), while downplaying the proven corruption of a senior party figure and resisting scrutiny of their own leader's conduct. Real patriotism demands a willingness to confront threats to our democracy, not to look away from them.

Starmer must ensure that any inquiry is conducted independently and under parliamentary oversight. Asking Farage to investigate his own