

Duchess delight over hospital's family unit visit



P12-13



P20

Bicester Christmas lights switch on.
Image: Ed Nix



Countdown to Christmas right across county as lights go on

PAGE 53



P33-48

Taste of festive magic at market

WEEKEND

Boatyard revamp project 'scrapped'

Campaigners urge council to buy plot at risk of decay



PLANS for the redevelopment of a historic boatyard on the Oxford Canal have reportedly been abandoned by the landowner, who is leaving the plot 'derelict'.

Jericho Wharf has suffered dereliction over the past 20 years, according to the Jericho Wharf Trust, a group aiming to turn the canalside into a "long-promised" community hub with a working boatyard and housing and avoid "lazy gentrification".

The campaigners have now said

By Madeleine Evans

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the landowner, Hong Kong-based Cheer Team Corporation, has "finally conceded they have no new scheme" more than two years after planning permission was granted.

The group is urging Oxford City Council to issue a Compulsory Purchase Order for the site, allowing the authority to force the sale of the land from the company to a

developer with a scheme that the community backs.

Peter Stalker, a trustee of the Jericho Walk Trust, said the "time has now come" for drastic intervention by the council.

He said: "Jericho Wharf is the last piece of canalside land in Oxford that could be used responsibly. To fill it with student flats would be awful, it's such an historic site."

Continued: Page 2



P7

'Cash cow'
ZEZ cameras
make £1.8m

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Unwrap More Buyer Interest This Boxing Day

Property searches surge on Boxing Day.
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FKSales
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News

'Rage bait' is word of the year for 2025

'RAGE bait' has been named as the official word of the year for 2025 by Oxford University Press.

The phrase is defined as "online content deliberately designed to elicit anger or outrage by being frustrating, provocative, or offensive, typically posted in order to increase traffic to or engagement with a particular web page or social media content".

Publishing the Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford University Press has argued that the phrase is appropriate for this past year.

Casper Grathwohl, president of Oxford Languages, said about this year's winner: "As technology and artificial intelligence become ever more embedded into our daily lives - from deepfake celebrities and AI-generated influencers to virtual companions and dating platforms - there's no denying that 2025 has been a year defined by questions around who we truly are; both online and offline."

The fact that the word rage bait exists and has seen such a dramatic surge in usage means we're increasingly aware of the manipulation tactics we can be drawn into online."



Flight Sergeant Mark Clayton. Image: MOD Crown Copyright

New coach for RAF Falcons

A NEW coach has been appointed for the RAF Falcons Parachute Display Team.

Flight Sergeant Mark Clayton, who was a member of the Falcons from 2010 to 2012, takes on the role for the 2026 display season.

His duties include training the team for the displays, leading them in the shows, and ensuring they are qualified as military freefall instructors and high-altitude instructors.

Flight Sergeant Clayton said: "I'm looking forward to the responsibility of leading a professional group of parachute jump instructors on displays around the world into some iconic venues, representing the RAF wherever we go. By the time we come to the end of this exercise, we will be in a great place with the team's freefall skills, leading us on to begin display training for the upcoming season in 2026."

RAF Brize Norton is the UK's largest RAF station.

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Landowner abandons boathouse makeover plans

Continued from Page 1

Mr Stalker added: "That's why we've been so persistent with it - some would say we've been too persistent - but we have to hold our ground."

"They expected us to walk away, but we won't. We've been here for 25 years."

The site is subject to demands from multiple different groups, including the boaters, the Canal and River Trust, community groups and St Barnabas Church, which owns part of the land, but Mr Stalker said they're all in agreement on how to use the land.

The player which no one can account for, however, is the landowner.

Cheer Team Corporation bought the site in 2013 for £2.6million, "too much" according to the Trust, whose "more realistic" £2million offer was outbid by the real estate management company.

Since planning permission was granted at appeal a full decade later, in February 2023, no steps have been taken to action the agreed-on plans, which included the much-needed community elements and working boathouse as well as housing.

In June this year, documents seen by this newspaper showed the landowner was attempting to get new planning approval, for a £35million scheme to build 230 student flats on the site.

But the Trust believes this, too, has now been abandoned.

Cheer Team Corporation didn't respond to requests for comment, and neither did Cornerstone Land, the Oxfordshire property development company appointed to carry it out.



Philip Pullman has spoken out on the importance of the Jericho Wharf. Image: Will Pryce

A petition calling for a Compulsory Purchase Order has been launched by the Trust, demanding an end to "20 wasted years of developer greed and incompetence" which already has more than 2,000 signatures.

An accompanying Save Jericho Wharf campaign video said: "The site remains derelict, because the owner paid too much for it."

"His latest idea is housing totally unsuited to Jericho, and no boathouse or community centre - too damaging to his profits."

"So, he won't build, he won't even repair the site's crumbling walls."

Their message to the landowner is "Build or sell up, and get out".

Mr Stalker added: "That's why we've finally got to this point and have asked the city to step in so the development can be done in a reasonable fashion, balanc-

ing the community needs and making a profit from the site through housing."

"The council have quite rightly pointed out the risks in terms of what they can do."

"But we have always remained optimistic that a Compulsory Purchase Order is possible, and we hope the council will be able to take action."

A spokesperson for Oxford City Council said: "The City Council's aspirations for the site have been set out in successive Local Plans, and we have valued positive dialogue with Jericho Wharf Trust over many years."

"However, pre-application advice is confidential, and so we are not allowed to comment on any such discussions."

"Compulsory purchase may only be used as a last resort, after all reasonable attempts to acquire the land through negotiation have been exhausted."

"It must be supported by a compelling case in the public interest that justifies interference with private property rights and only used where statutory authority has been granted by acts of Parliament."

"Owners are entitled to compensation, including disturbance payments to address inconvenience and disruption."

"The authority must also comply with a strict legal procedure, including notifying the owner and providing an opportunity to object."

In its winter issue, the Inland Waterways Association declared Jericho Wharf a "heritage risk" waterways asset, along with countless other historic, underinvested sites on Britain's net-

work of canals and rivers.

More than 400 boaters call the canal in Oxford their home, with a boat home lifestyle providing one of the only options to live in the city centre affordably.

The nearest working boathouse for city canal users is a 10-hour round trip away in Eynsham, and without a place to get their boats serviced nearby, boaters risk damage to their floating homes and unchecked disrepair which could lead to them sinking. Several already have.

Long-time Jericho local and celebrated author Sir Philip Pullman recently brought the matter to a fore at an event with the Jericho Living Heritage Trust.

Marking the community's 200th anniversary, attendees said Pullman "spoke eloquently about the canal's historic importance - and has long warned against losing Jericho's heritage to lazy, profit-driven gentrification".

Writing back in 2006, shortly before the release of the first film based on the author's His Dark Materials trilogy, Northern Lights, Mr Pullman said: "I used part of Jericho and the canal in my trilogy His Dark Materials, because people who lived and worked on the water, and the network of canals that spread through the whole kingdom, were useful for my story. But I didn't realise how much the present-day life of the canal was under threat until recently, when the boathouse business came to a head."

For the Jericho Wharf Trust campaigners, Mr Pullman's words written two decades ago are still just as true today, and their fight to save a piece of community heritage goes on.