

Expanding horizons – Opening doors

Summer/Autumn 2016

Letter from the editor

Hello Unlimited members and supporters
Welcome to our summer/autumn newsletter. Just as we were about to go to print we received the very sad news that Peter Hindshaw had died. We have a brief obituary on page 3 and will remember him more fully in the next newsletter.



Peter had many hobbies and he really enjoyed watching sport on the TV. Did you enjoy watching the Paralympics this summer? There was a lot of great sporting action and also stories of triumph over adversity. However sometimes with all the coverage of superhuman heroes it is good to remember the everyday lives that we disabled people live, just wanting to get on with our jobs and hobbies and care for our families without barriers being put in our way. Peter spent a lot of time fighting for practical improvements to daily living and made a real difference to disabled people living in Oxfordshire.

We will be celebrating Peter's life and works as well as holding our annual meeting on Saturday 22nd October in Oxford. Places are limited so do let us now if you are coming. We would love to meet more of you face to face so please do come to our tea party. (details on p3).

Remember, Unlimited is here to support you but we can't do that without your input. If you cannot make it to our annual meeting do get in touch to share your news (see the back page for how to do this). You might have discovered a new service you want to share because it is great, or complain about a problem that needs tackling. You might think we focus too much on Oxford so help us change that by telling us your stories wherever you live in the county. The picture of me was taken at a national event where I was speaking to Social Workers about the problems disabled people face.



Best wishes

PS. We are very grateful to Ability Matters for supporting the costs of distributing this newsletter. They are a national company so they can provide you support with wherever you live through their catalogue, and they have a shop on the Abingdon Road Oxford which you can pop into. We have included one of their leaflets with this mailing.

News updates

Guideposts funding loss

The Guideposts independent living centre in Abingdon has lost funding as a result of County Council budget cuts. It may have to close after the end of September. This is really sad news not only for the staff who work so hard and disabled people and their carers, but also as it is such a short sighted measure which may end up costing more in the long run. Local, practical, flexible support which tackles problems as they occur is so much more cost effective than trying to fix major problems down the line.

Carers' consultation closing date 14th November

At some point in our lives, many of us will care for a relative, friend or neighbour who needs support in their daily lives. If the person you care for couldn't cope without you and you aren't getting paid for what you are doing, then you are a carer, one of 61,000 family, informal or unpaid carers in Oxfordshire.

The County Council is carrying out a consultation in two parts: they want your views on the Oxfordshire Carers' Strategy and the proposed options for carers' personal budgets (to find the best way of meeting the needs of as many carers as possible). You can complete the consultation online via www.oxfordshire.gov.uk or on paper. Contact by email on carerssupportreview@oxfordshire.gov.uk or phone 01865 323410.

Unlimited on the BBC

BBC Radio Oxford have been featured twice this summer on the Breakfast Show with Howard Benson, once about the challenges faced by disabled people losing mobility benefits with PIP reassessments and the other time about getting disabled people into employment. It was great to give a local angle to these important national news stories.

Services for us designed by us

The County Council's Adult Health and Social Care team have begun to implement a co-production way of working and invited Unlimited to be part of the implementation team with Margaret Simpson from the 50 plus Network and Larry Gardiner, a Lay Member of Oxford University Hospitals NHS Trust alongside other disabled people and carers. It won't be a quick process but more news on progress in our next newsletter.

South Oxfordshire Design Plan

Unlimited member Kimberly Hunter has made a submission to the South Oxfordshire Design plan consultation. She used OXTRAG's excellent 'Who put that there' document (see page 5) and information from Unlimited's One Small Step project to do this.

Accessible festivals

Both the Cowley Road Carnival and Oxford Folk Festival have in touch with Unlimited asking for our input to help make both events more accessible in 2017. More on this in the next newsletter.

Unlimited on the national stage

During 2016 committee member Joanna Matthews has been attending the Independent Living Strategy Group which meets four times a year in the Houses of Parliament and is chaired by Baroness Jane Campbell.

One small step

It seems a long time ago now but on a lovely sunny day in March Unlimited members held a day of action on Cowley Road, Oxford, to promote our One Small Step project. We did this as part of national **Disabled Access Day**.

The idea of the One Small Step project is to encourage shops, cafes and other business to be more accessible to disabled people – whether they are wheelchair users, have assistance dogs or are hard of hearing – by taking simple, practical steps to make a difference. We particularly want to get across the idea that good access does not need to cost a lot of money. We know it isn't always easy if you run a small business and need to make a profit so we offer simple solutions where possible.



Dave Holmes, with Jez the dog, and John Wells man the stall

We chose the Cowley Road for our day of action because of the survey carried out by Unlimited members and Age UK volunteers in summer 2015 to find which shops and cafes were easy to get into and which could do better. As a result of what we learnt through the survey and follow up visits we decided that both shopkeepers and disabled shoppers would benefit from knowing more about rights. We also thought both business holders and disabled people could do with some practical top tips on how to make things better. We produced two fact sheets which we handed out on the day.

Many thanks to Unlimited members who did help on the day (particularly Mark Pear and John Wells) and to all the members of the public who said hello, joined up as members and made donations. Aside from looking at access issues we were able to have helpful chats with people who had problems and issues they wanted information about or a bit of help with.

We are very grateful for the support we received from the Cowley Road branch of Costa Coffee. They were happy for us to set up our stall outside their premises, gave us free drinks and let us use their accessible loo (although we did have to encourage them to mend it first!). Pastiche Café and Rick's Café (both independent traders) also gave us free coffees (good job Costa got their loo mended ...).



Press coverage



Unlimited Oxfordshire members launch One Small Step project. Photo credit Oxford Mail

We were really pleased that both the Oxford Mail and BBC Radio Oxford interviewed Unlimited members and helped us promote the project and the day of action. Oxford Mail sent a photographer (see picture) and a printed a great article in the paper. We were the lead item on BBC Radio Oxford breakfast programme on 16th March and one of their journalists made a short video of John Wells and Ibrar Khan demonstrating how difficult it can be to negotiate Cowley Road if you are a wheelchair user.

You can see the video on our Facebook page.

Next steps

From our survey of Cowley Road we noticed the same problem over and over; newly refurbished cafes and restaurants were still not accessible to wheelchair users and others with mobility problems and simple measures to help blind and deaf people had not been taken when premises were redecorated. We thought that legislation had been put in place to make sure this didn't happen and that both the Equality Act 2010 and the Building Regulations (Part M) would prevent physical barriers to disabled people going out and about with their friends.

To us this seems to a problem with the apparent ineffectiveness of Local Authority control over new or refurbished buildings meeting accessibility criteria. Our concerns include planning consent in the first place, the enforcement of the relevant Building Regulations, and the signing off process when the building or refurbishment has been completed.

With the help of City Councillor Craig Simmons we have secured a meeting with Patsy Dell, Head of Planning and Regulatory Services, Oxford City Council, to put our concerns to her. Our aim is to explain the access problems disabled people still face in new buildings and to get a commitment to toughen up building inspections.

Unlimited Oxfordshire's annual members gathering 2016

Come and join us for a tea party in central Oxford to celebrate the life and works of Peter Hindshaw

Find out what we have been up to and plans for the upcoming year

Have your say about issues that are bugging you

Help plan campaigns for 2017

Take part in our Annual General Meeting

Saturday October 22nd

Starts at 2.30pm Tea and cakes will be provided

RSVP

Parish Rooms St Giles' Church Hall, 10 Woodstock Rd Oxford
OX2 6HT

The Parish Rooms are nearly opposite Brown's Restaurant. The building is accessible with a ramped entrance from the pavement. It is close to bus stops on the Woodstock and Banbury Roads (including park and ride stops from Redbridge, Pear Tree and Water Eaton) and there is some street parking (free for blue badge holders) nearby on Woodstock Road (next to the Radcliffe Observatory) on Keble Road, and St Giles. The disabled parking bays on St Giles are not next to the kerb and for the bays on Keble Road there is plenty of space and time for unloading (it is a dead end street). From central Oxford (e.g. Cornmarket Street) a slow walker will take 10 minutes. There is a pedestrian crossing to the north and south of the front door to help with safe crossing. Assistance dogs welcome (church yard close by for business).

Places are limited so do let us know you are coming. First come, first served. Email Rosie on info@unltdox.org.uk or ring Ruth on 0800 044 8192 to book a place, find out about a transport or let us know about dietary requirements. We want to make sure we have tea and cakes for everyone.

A tiny part of the tea party will be taken up with our annual general meeting. We have to have this formal meeting once a year but it won't take long we promise!

Unlimited Committee 2016 and 2017

Unlimited is a charity run by disabled people for disabled people. It has a small committee of volunteers who carry out all the activities you have been reading about in the newsletter.

Being on the committee

To be on the Unlimited committee the most important thing you need is to have experience of disability, either because you are a disabled person or have looked after disabled people (either as a carer or in your job). We are not looking for experts with lots of professional experience but the ability to listen and care about other people is important.

- Do you have personal experience of living with a physical or sensory impairment, or both?
- Can you help the committee make good decisions and spend Unlimited's funds wisely?
- Can you attend at least one meeting each month and make time to read papers and emails in between meetings?
- Do you want to make a positive difference to disabled people living in Oxfordshire?

At the annual general meeting in October the following people are happy to stand for election. However we do need at least two more people to join them. We are a friendly, informal group and will give you the support you need to join in with meetings. All we need in return is a few hours a month to attend a meeting in Oxford and read some documents in between meetings. Contact Rosie on info@unltd.org.uk or phone Ruth on 0800 044 8192 to ask questions and put your name forward. A simple process will be held at the AGM to put people on the committee.

Rosie Blacker

In my working life I am a Personal Injury and Clinical Negligence Solicitor and regularly see the difficulties faced by those with a disability in Oxfordshire. I joined Unlimited Oxfordshire in order to help to make a real change in the community. I have been on the committee for two years.



Ruth Conway

I championed the inclusion of disabled people in the education being offered at the Colleges where my husband, Martin was President. Becoming Carer for Martin has added new insight. I have experience in teaching and in leadership roles in a range of church and community groups. I have been a committee member for several years.



Martin Conway

I have first-hand experience of being a wheelchair user after losing my right-side in a stroke. In my working life I served with the Student Christian Movement, Councils of Churches (nationally and internationally) and as President of the Selly Oak Colleges in Birmingham. I have been a committee member for several years.



Joanna Matthews

I live in Oxfordshire, not far from Oxford. I have worked for several disability charities and. I have a mobility impairment from a long term chronic illness. I joined Unlimited Oxfordshire in 2011 and have been on the committee since 2012. I am putting myself forward to stand as interim Chair for one year.



Steph Talbot

I joined Unlimited Oxfordshire in its first year. I had a major stroke in 2000 which resulted in a lot of sight loss. I have been on the committee for one year.



It is with great sadness we announce that Peter Hindshaw, Chair of Unlimited, has died. Peter had already decided to stand down. He had been poorly for some time. Peter was the initial chair of Unlimited when it was founded and apart from a period when Gwynneth Pedler chaired the charity Peter has been our only Chair. He has guided Unlimited through its start up, its registration as a charity and its development as a voice for disabled people in Oxfordshire. We shall miss him very much.



Dave Holmes has decided he will be resigning at the AGM. Dave had been on the committee since 2009, serving as membership secretary for several years, previously serving as Treasurer.

For many Dave is the face of Unlimited because he has attended so many events to recruit new members. It is thanks to Dave that our membership numbers are so healthy. He is still in good health but feels it is time to stand down. He will be a hard act to follow.



Getting out and about in Oxfordshire



The Oxfordshire Comet
Transport from your door to destination
[Image of Comet minibus sent by Joanna]

Oxfordshire County Council has a new, bookable transport service, called the Oxfordshire Comet. It's a not-for-profit service, created to help people without suitable access to public transport to make the journeys they want.

The Comet can be booked by individuals, groups, schools, organisations and local communities for one-off journeys, regular and group trips, and even regular routes for local communities (similar to a bus route). The service is available 10:15am – 2:30pm Monday to Friday (not Bank Holidays).

The Comet can do one-off journeys, regular and group trips. It can also offer regular routes for local communities, similar to a bus route. A community group interested in setting up a regular route should contact Robert Savage (see below). There is a fund that communities can apply for to trial the Comet service.

Robert.savage@oxfordshire.gov.uk
07557 082599

Costs will vary based on your journey and travel type
To book a journey call 01865 323201
For full terms and conditions visit
www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/comet

Journey Assistance Cards - get help when you need it

Journey Assistance Cards are available for you to use if you need a bit more help when using the bus. They'll make it easier for you to let bus drivers and other transport staff know what extra help you need. You can use your cards any time of the day, seven days a week.

You can apply for a card by phoning 01865 772250 or emailing oxford.enquiries@stagecoachbus.com

The cards can be used on all buses, not just Stagecoach services.

Once you have your Journey Assistance Cards, simply hold them up to the bus driver so they know what your needs are. Remember you may also be able to get discounted travel on the bus so that you can travel free or more cheaply on buses in Oxfordshire and beyond.

Who put that there?

As disabled people and carers we all know how annoying it is when it is difficult to make our way safely along a pavements and footpaths. This is a list of things can stop us getting on with our everyday lives:

- Inaccessible crossings
- Shared space
- Parking on pavements/ narrow pavements
- Advertising boards
- Street and café furniture
- Temporary street works
- Wheelie and recycling bins or bags
- Overgrown shrubbery & branches
- Dog fouling.
- Other hazards e.g. shop displays
- Problems with historic materials (e.g. cobbles)

Luckily help is it at hand. Our friends at OXTRAG have written a great document which provides information on maintaining and improving the accessibility of our streets to everybody.

Called 'Who put that there' it is a simple document showing commitment which everyone involved agrees to work by. This charter identifies the issues faced by disabled people and actions OXTRAG suggests to address these issues.

It has been developed in liaison with Didcot Access Group (DAG), Mobility Issues Group Wallingford (MIGWAL), Guide Dogs UK, individual disabled people and Unlimited Oxfordshire.

You can use this document to find out more about legal responsibilities of those that look after our pavements and to challenge people and organisations that block your right of way.

Our legal rights

Obstruction of the highway by Street Furniture and Temporary Works are broadly addressed by the Highways Act 1980 s.175A. This imposes a duty on highway authorities and other persons to have regard to the needs of disabled people. The obligation applies to the placing of permanent road obstructions (e.g. lamp posts, bollards) and temporary obstructions (e.g. builders skips, itinerant trader pitches or stands).

The Traffic Regulations Act 1984 s.2 and the Town and County Planning Act 1990 S249, 250 protect safety in pedestrian precincts.

Since October 2004 duties under Part III of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 have insisted that service providers must have taken reasonable steps to remove, alter avoid or provide reasonable means of avoiding problems relating to physical features (such as approaches to buildings).

If you would like a copy of 'Who put that there?' contact OXTRAG on email OXTRAG@gmail.com
Or phone Unlimited and we can organise a copy being posted to you.

“Moaners’ Corner”

John Wells has something to say about the state of Oxford City’s roads



Oxford city’s roads are in a dreadful, and dangerous, state of disrepair. Many of us know this, and there are innumerable complaints to the local authority. The prime concern of local government should be to maintain the local infrastructure; they should only then build grandiose road schemes if they have spare finances. Why are our roads so bad? Towns and cities poorer than Oxford seem to maintain their roads reasonably well, despite the national debt crisis.

At a meeting some time ago with the local Highway’s Department I made the joke: “Why in Oxford are the sleeping policemen double the height of those in other towns?” Answer: “Because if they were at the normal height, no one would notice them compared with the other bumps in the roads”. That joke wasn’t appreciated!

Actually, this is not a laughing matter. Ambulance drivers have critically ill people ‘in the back’ who must be treated very gently, but driven fast. This is impossible on the city’s awful roads.

Many disabled (and elderly) people – including myself – have damaged spines; bumps are extremely painful; why should we suffer unnecessarily? Others also suffer:

- Cyclists have to frequently swerve to avoid pot-holes; they sometimes swerve into a vehicle.
- A taxi driver told me his repair garage (part of a national chain) said that the number of taxi shock-absorbers that had to be repaired in Oxford was much higher than anywhere else in the country.
- A friend tripped over a pot-hole outside my house and fell while crossing the road – it could have been very serious if a car were passing.

In the long-term, it is cheaper to maintain roads correctly than to keep patching them the cheapest way possible (these cheap repairs do not last long).

What could (and should!) the council do?

- Use tar that softens at a temperature well above current summer temperatures.
- Ensure all holes dug in our roads should be back-filled the full depth with ballast. When clay is used, air gaps are formed. Over decades this air slowly escapes, the clay settles lower, making a dip in the road surface. Repeated repairs do nothing, as the clay continues to slump.
- Repair pot holes properly. i.e., clear out all loose material, seal round the edges, then add the tarmac.
- When roads are repaired, metal covers (e.g. drain, BT, water tap, etc. covers) should be re-set at the correct height so they are not lower or higher than the road surface.
- When roads are resurfaced, they should be burnt and scraped down to the correct profile using a ‘fire-dragon’ monster (specialist road repair vehicle). Currently roads are just ‘top-coated’. This maintains the hollows in the road which fill with water, freeze in the winter, and damage further the road surface.

What can we do?

- Complain (to councillors, the local press, protests, etc.)
 - Think carefully whom you vote for at the next election.
- Maybe we need ‘safe-roads’ candidates.*

Use Fix My Street online. You will need to know the postcode of the problem and a photo helps too
www.fixmystreet.oxfordshire.gov.uk/

The views expressed in Moaner’s Corner are John’s own but we do agree that disabled people often suffer from poor road maintenance whether in a car or on foot or using a wheelchair or mobility scooter. What do you think about the roads near you? If you want to take some direct action about a problem you can point out problems to your local County Councillor. If you don’t know who that is look at this page online www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/your-county-councillor or phone 01865 792422 to ask.

Help Unlimited to have a voice

Unlimited is a local charity for local people and one of the most effective things we can do is be a voice for disabled people living in Oxford. This is how you can help us to help you. Email info@unltdox.org.uk or phone 0800 044 8192 if you can help with:

- Raising awareness
- Spreading the word
- Influence services
- Keeping Unlimited running smoothly

Just a few minutes?

Follow us on Twitter and spread the word
Like our page on Facebook and share our posts
Read the website and tell people about what we do

A couple of hours every now and then?

Write an article for the Unlimited newsletter about your experiences as a disabled person
Comment on County Council plans and consultations
Take notes at our management committee meeting
Stuff envelopes for membership mailings
Support the Membership secretary, keeping in touch with our members
Share your experiences as a disabled person

A bit more time?

Help produce the newsletter (four times a year)
Organise a display about Unlimited at a community event
Link with other organisations that share similar experiences and/or concerns
Form a local group of members to address issues in your area
Get together a young people’s group who can explore their particular issues
Help gather information e.g. on the challenges of a wheelchair user in Oxfordshire
Take the initiative to liaise with organisations that provide relevant services for people with disabilities, including your District Council.
Help conduct access surveys

Contact details: www.unltdox.org.uk email: info@unltdox.org.uk

Tel: 0800 044 8192 @Unlimited_Ox

Unlimited Oxfordshire is a registered charity no. 1156718
c/o Joanna Matthews, Cherry Cottage, Noke, OX3 9TX

