

## OTTERY ROAD TO REGENERATION STARTS HERE...



Ottery St Mary's interesting and intriguing history can be traced back in some cases well over five hundred years, and has resulted in a rich, fascinating and at times mysterious legacy. Yet the town was founded and developed when travel was on foot or horseback, with goods moved by horse and cart, and the nearest thing to public transport was a coach-and-four. Its a delightful history, but it did bequeath us a central area ill-equipped to deal with the coming of the motor car.

Until perhaps 30 years ago, the car was mostly regarded as a convenient upstart of great social value but no great concern, while its larger commercial relatives were simply an essential consequence of modern life. But times change, attitudes change, and vehicles are nowadays seen in a very different light. Ottery is far from the only historic town to become aware, perhaps belatedly, that growth in the numbers and size of motor vehicles since the 1970's has seen traffic begin to dominate its narrow, quaint - and once quiet - streets.

As public consultations on the recently adopted Neighbourhood Plan progressed, it quickly became clear that traffic issues worried many people in and around the town. Two principal concerns emerged: vehicle size and numbers, and inadequate parking space - for residents and visitors alike.

An independent public realm study commissioned to support the Plan's development reinforced those views. Amongst several other things it noted that traffic is making it difficult for cyclists and pedestrians to get around, and restricting opportunities to develop open public spaces for social purposes. It suggested "regeneration" - exploring concepts such as greater priority for pedestrians, measures to reduce car dominance, carving out more public spaces, giving more prominence to the town's heritage, and enhancing the perceived quality of the town's public "face."

The level of local concern on traffic issues generally, coupled with the study's findings and various heritage and conservation topics also raised in consultations, led directly to the Neighbourhood Plan including two formal policies and two projects covering the issues involved. If you're local to the area, you'll probably appreciate that the topics mentioned are simultaneously complex, intractable and closely inter-related.- yet inescapably the town shows well-lived-in signs of advancing years, with some comfortably familiar streets and facades looking slightly frayed at the edges.

Ottery St Mary Town Council sees the Neighbourhood Plan as providing a rare opportunity and a springboard to help lift the town into today's more sensitive and enlightened age, while building on its strengths, opening up its prospects, smartening up our surroundings, limiting the impact of motor vehicles - and developing its cultural strengths. Though not underestimating the scale of the challenge, the Council hopes you agree that regeneration will make Ottery a better place to live and work, and help to support local businesses, attract and encourage people to visit, shop, relax - and appreciate the wealth of history locked into our streets and buildings.

All this said, regeneration on this scale is a major task, and finding a workable way forward - and ultimately funding it - will be a fraught and complicated process. The Town Council, through its Regeneration Group task force established in 2016, is steadily developing a roadmap via which all the various aspects of such a project can move forward - but it is taking time.

With roads, traffic and parking all big local concerns, a traffic sub-committee was set up in February, and will present its proposals to the Town Council in March 2019. Conserving and promoting the town's history and heritage is another key factor in moving this major project forward, and a sub group covering these important areas will also be assembled in due course. If you're interested in joining this group, please e-mail [cllr.josefinagori@gmail.com](mailto:cllr.josefinagori@gmail.com)

An important part of these groups' work is to evaluate and advise on how the regeneration process should begin to progress. This will include researching what local people feel about various specific matters through informal surveys, the first of which, covering traffic and parking issues, is due to appear in October. It will be available in the Ottery Gazette, in leaflet form, and online, and we very much hope you will complete this and future surveys - to help us map out the best way forward along Ottery's exciting Road to Regeneration.

**Look out for future updates on the progress of the Ottery St Mary Regeneration project.**

*Cllr. Josefina Gori*

*Chairman – OSM Regeneration Working Group*

<http://www.otterystmary-tc.gov.uk/Ottery-St-Mary-Town-Council/Default-32285.aspx>

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