

Roof shark draws planners' teeth

By Michael Fleet

THE glass-fibre shark that has adorned the roof of a terraced house in Oxford for six years can remain as a symbol of rebellion against drab uniformity, Mr Michael Howard, Environment Secretary, has ruled.

The 25ft shark, with its head crashing through the tiles of No 2 New High Street, Headington, has become a tourist attraction but has infuriated the local council ever since it was put up without planning permission.

At a public inquiry, councillors were accused of being killjoys for wanting the shark removed.

Mr Peter Macdonald, the DoE planning inspector, said in his decision: "I cannot believe that the purpose of planning control is to enforce a boring and mediocre uniformity."

"Any system of control must make some space for the dynamic, the unexpected and the downright quirky, or we shall all be the poorer for it. I

believe that this is one case where a little vision and imagination is appropriate."

Mr Bill Heine, the shark's owner and a BBC local-radio phone-in host, said the decision was "wonderful news" and a victory for common sense. "The shark is one of the most exciting pieces of public sculpture in the country. It will live on forever."

Mr Howard said the council had been too concerned about damage to the supposed harmony of the street, and had noted that the area was "essentially undistinguished".

The shark was made by Mr John Buckley, an Oxfordshire artist, and has been in newspapers and on television programmes around the world.

Mr John Power, chairman of Oxford City Council's planning committee, said the ruling was a "victory for anarchy".

He added: "I intend to try to challenge the decision and will be seeking legal advice."



Oxford shark: victory for the unexpectedly quirky