

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL

Monday 8 February 2016

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COUNCILLORS PRESENT: Councillors Humberstone (Lord Mayor), Cook (Deputy Lord Mayor), Malik (Sheriff), Abbasi, Altaf-Khan, Benjamin, Brandt, Brown, Clack, Clarkson, Coulter, Darke, Fooks, Fry, Gant, Goddard, Gotch, Haines, Hayes, Henwood, Hollick, Hollingsworth, Kennedy, Lloyd-Shogbesan, Lygo, Munkonge, Pegg, Pressel, Price, Rowley, Royce, Sanders, Simm, Simmons, Sinclair, Smith, Tanner, Tarver, Taylor, Thomas, Turner, Upton, Van Nooijen, Wade, Wilkinson and Wolff.

Council heard tributes and observed a minute's silence in memory of former Councillor and Lord Mayor Barbara Gatehouse.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillors Anwar and Paule submitted apologies.

2. MINUTES

Council agreed to approve the minutes of the ordinary meeting held on 7 December 2015 as a true and correct record.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations.

4. APPOINTMENT TO COMMITTEES

There were no appointments.

5. ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Lord Mayor announced:

- The list of engagements enclosed with the briefing note to draw Councillors' attention to the events attended since the last meeting;
- the upcoming Veterans' Medal of Honour Presentation and single act of commemoration;
- his charity dinner

The Leader of the Council announced:

- that work to transfer land ownership and secure the Oxpens site was complete, and thanked officers;
- the successful opening of the Rosehill Community Centre and the work of the Community Services team;
- that Oxford was designated the fittest city in the country;

updates to the devolution proposals submitted to government.

6. PUBLIC ADDRESSES AND QUESTIONS THAT RELATE TO MATTERS FOR DECISION AT THIS MEETING

There were no addresses or questions.

7. PROPOSED FREEHOLD PURCHASE OF THE OLD SCHOOL, GLOUCESTER GREEN

Council considered a report to the City Executive Board on 17 December 2015 seeking approval for the principle of acquiring the long leasehold interest in The Old School, Gloucester Green, including the confidential Appendix 1 circulated with the City Executive Board papers, and the relevant draft minute of the City Executive Board meeting.

Council resolved to:

increase the budget within the Council's capital programme by the requisite amount in 2015/16.

8. REVIEW OF THE STATEMENT OF LICENSING POLICY 2016 - 2021

Council considered a report presenting the revised Statement of Licensing Policy, considered by the Licensing and Gambling Acts Committee on 26 January 2016.

Council resolved to:

adopt the revised Licensing Policy Statement attached to the agenda.

9. OXFORD FLOOD ALLEVIATION SCHEME – DELEGATION OF PLANNING POWERS TO OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Council considered a report outlining the proposed Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme ("the Scheme") and seeking approval for the delegation to the Oxfordshire County Council of any planning responsibilities that would otherwise be exercised by the Oxford City Council in relation to the Scheme.

Council resolved to:

- 1. delegate the discharge of the District Planning Authority functions of the Oxford City Council to the Oxfordshire County Council, in connection with the processing and determination of the expected planning application for the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme, under section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972;**

2. **authorise the Head of Planning and Regulatory Services, in consultation with the Head of Law of Governance, to negotiate and agree a Memorandum of Understanding with the Oxfordshire County Council to determine the operational arrangements of the delegation of the Oxford City Council's planning functions in relation to the Scheme;**
3. **agree that a long stop date be placed on the delegation such that the delegation will be revoked if any Scheme application is not determined by the 18th February 2019.**

10. COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE PROGRAMME MAY 2016 TO MAY 2017

Council considered a report proposing the programme of Council and committee meetings for the 2016/17 council year (May 2016 to May 2017 inclusive) following a review agreed by Council in December.

Council resolved to:

1. **approve the programme of Council, Committee and other meetings attached at Appendix 1 for the council year 2016/17; and**
2. **delegate the setting of dates for the Standards Committee to the Head of Law and Governance.**

11. CITY EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES

Council had before it the minutes of the City Executive Board meetings of Thursday 17 December 2015, Thursday 14 January 2016 and Thursday 21 January 2016.

On Minute 127 (Councillor addresses), Councillor Fooks asked when the revised tree policy would be considered. Councillor Lygo replied this was in progress and could be considered by Scrutiny Committee prior to the Board.

On Minute 160 (Oxford Local Development Scheme), Councillor Wolff asked that the key views of Oxford be taken into account when considering increasing the height and density of buildings. Councillor Hollingsworth replied that views would be taken into account along with other factors including maintaining a varied skyline.

12. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF COUNCIL

Members of Council submitted 38 written questions to Board Members and the Leader of the Council. Written answers and summaries of supplementary questions and responses are in the supplement to these minutes.

13. PUBLIC ADDRESSES AND QUESTIONS THAT DO NOT RELATE TO MATTERS FOR DECISION AT THIS COUNCIL MEETING

Council heard addresses from members of the public. The full text of the addresses where these were delivered as submitted and questions and responses are in the supplement to these minutes.

1. Alasdair de Voil, I Love Oxford Tours Director delivered an address requesting scrutiny of the contractual arrangements for the provision of tourism information services (address attached).

Councillor Price drew the speaker's attention to the written response in the supplement (response attached)

2. Roger Parry, Summertown Stars AFC delivered an address requesting Council to provide Facilities at Five Mile Drive Recreation Ground from September 2016. He presented a petition with over 500 signatures.

Councillor Lygo, the Board Member, replied, saying in summary:

The old pavilion facility at Five Mile Drive is being demolished due to its poor condition. It was previously used by Summertown Stars for toilet facilities, storage and to be able to make hot drinks. As a replacement we recently provided the club with a mobile unit which has toilet facilities, storage, areas to make hot drinks and a space for officials to use if needed. We will leave this facility on the site for the immediate future while we work with the club around alternate funding options at Five Mile Drive. Without raising expectations we will work with you to improve facilities.

We have worked closely with the club and the Oxfordshire F.A over the past few years. Currently we are undertaking a major refurbishment at Cutteslowe Park lower pavilion which is the main home of Summertown Stars. This is a significant investment from Oxford City Council, Football Foundation and Sport England of around £750,000.

And also be aware that there will be a meeting between relevant parties to look at the issues around the pavilion's maintenance.

3. Nigel Gibson, Save Temple Cowley Pools delivered an address titled Closing Temple Cowley Pools - the consequences (address attached).

Councillor Lygo, the Board Member, replied summarising the current usage of the replacement facilities.

4. Oxford University Student Union President Becky Howe delivered an address in support of the motion titled 'Scrapping of student grants and curbing of access to higher education for disadvantaged young people' (address attached).

Councillors Rowley and Hayes thanked Ms Howe for addressing the meeting.

5. Patrick McDonald, Oxford Catalyst Ventures Ltd delivered an address titled a growing social injustice - building starter-homes for first time buyers in Oxford (address attached).

Councillors Rowley and Hollingsworth, the Board Members, replied in summary that as even housing for purchase at 80% of market rate is unaffordable for most people in Oxford, this is why we will continue to focus our limited resources on providing affordable rented housing. However the speaker made some very good points and suggestions and Board Members would be happy to continue discussions with Mr McDonald to find ways to provide the housing people in Oxford need. The Council had launched a review of the local plan and in due course would be seeking comments on this.

6. Jane Alexander and Heather Dalitz delivered an address titled Oxford - Health Consequences of Poor Decisions (address delivered as attached with additional comments).

Councillor Lygo, the Board Member, gave a brief reply.

7. Judith Harley asked a question about land at Cox's Yard, Temple Cowley (text attached) and also asked why the plot was only fenced off in the last year.

Councillor Hollingsworth , on behalf of the Board Member, referred to the written response published in the supplement:

The land in question was not purchased in 2010: it was acquired as part of Temple Farm, Temple Road for the sum of £2800 on 9/4/1936. Temple Cowley Pool, Library and part of the School were subsequently built on the majority of the site. The land was officially registered in the City Council's freehold ownership in 2010 as part of the Voluntary Registration of Title (VRT) scheme. The small piece of land is currently unused as the Council has no direct access. In the short term there are no expectations for use or disposal, due to this issue of access. Longer term the land may be used to support local development. As far as officers are aware no income has been derived from the land. It may be possible to provide a written answer to the last point.

14. OUTSIDE ORGANISATION/COMMITTEE CHAIR REPORTS AND QUESTIONS

Council had before it the report of the Leader of the Council outlining the work of the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership.

Councillor Price moved the report and answered questions around accountability and transparency of decision making.

Council noted the report.

15. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE UPDATE REPORT

Council had before it the report of the Scrutiny Committee Chair.

Councillor Simmons moved the report and asked for suggestions for major review topics for 2016/17. Councillor Rowley thanked the Housing panel for their work and Councillor Price noted that the committee's work would be submitted for a Municipal Journal 'excellence in scrutiny and governance award'.

Council noted the report.

16. MOTIONS ON NOTICE

Council had before it eight motions on notice and amendments submitted in accordance with Council procedure rule 11.17, and reached decisions as set out below.

Council agreed to suspend the standing orders relating to the total time allowed for motions for the first motion only.

1. Fairtrade Mark

Councillor Price proposed a submitted cross-party motion, seconded by Councillor Fooks and supported by Councillor Wolff.

On being put to the vote, the motion was declared carried.

Council resolved to adopt the motion as set out below:

Oxford City Council, as an important consumer and opinion leader, should continue to support and facilitate the promotion and purchase of foods with the FAIRTRADE Mark as part of its commitment to the pursuit of sustainable development and to give marginalised producers a fair deal.

Oxford City Council resolves to continue to contribute to the campaign to increase sales of products with the FAIRTRADE Mark by supporting the campaign to achieve the recertification of FAIRTRADE status for Oxford.

To this end, Oxford City Council resolves to ask the Executive to:

1. Continue to offer FAIRTRADE Marked food and drink options internally and make them available for internal meetings.

2. Promote the FAIRTRADE Mark using Fairtrade Foundation materials in refreshment areas and promoting the Fairtrade Towns initiative in internal communications and external newsletters.

3. Use its influence to urge local retailers to provide Fairtrade options for residents.

4. Engage in a media campaign to publicise the recertification of Oxford as a Fairtrade Towns initiative.

5. Nominate a Council representative to sit on the Fairtrade Steering Group.

6. Support on-going work to promote Fairtrade.

7. Continue to support organised events and publicity during national Fairtrade Fortnight – the annual national campaign to promote sales of products with the FAIRTRADE Mark

2. Affordable private housing

Councillor Gant proposed his submitted motion, seconded by Councillor Wade:

Council notes

- *the increasing inability of people on low and middle incomes to be able to afford to buy or rent in or near the city, and that this is hampering the efforts to attract or keep key workers such as nurses, teachers, social workers, junior university staff and other essential employees*
- *that there are examples of innovative approaches and solutions to this problem in other parts of the country. Examples include the partnership between Pocket Homes and the Mayor of London and the creative policy of Cambridge City Council to assist the university to house employees in housing they can afford as the ‘affordable housing’ element of a development*
- *the work in hand to consider setting up a Local Housing Company and welcomes the work being done to encourage Oxford University and the Hospital Trust to plan to provide housing for their staff.*

Nevertheless, Council considers the need to be so great that, despite uncertainties in future Government policy which may prevent some desirable measures, it is urgent to explore all possible means of addressing the shortfall of essential affordable housing to rent or buy.

Council therefore asks the Executive Board to ask officers to investigate with the utmost urgency what changes are needed in the city’s policies to enable new models of housing and tenure to be allowed in new developments to help to meet this need. Council requests a report back to the April Council on the progress made.

Councillor Hollingsworth proposed his submitted amendment, seconded by Councillor Rowley.

Add further (points) under “Council notes”

- *that work has begun on a new Local Plan, taking forward Oxford’s planning policies to 2036*
- *that the commitment to the provision of social housing for rent, which has the considerable merit of actually being affordable unlike so-called ‘affordable housing’ as defined by the current Government, is a fundamental part of both our existing and future planning and housing policies*
- *that proposals to replace social housing requirements with ‘key worker’ housing while making no adjustment to the ‘market’ element on large sites*

runs counter to the spirit and letter of this Council's planning policies, and should not be supported

- *that major employers who are also major landowners who seek to provide housing for their employees can and should bring forward proposals that do so without the entire removal of social housing requirements from these sites*
- *that at this time of great uncertainty caused by the rapid and incoherent evolution of Government policy, albeit an evolution underpinned by an ideological desire to destroy the social housing sector entirely, the resources of the Council are best used by planning for a range of different eventualities rather than by taking precipitate action that is likely to prove nugatory*

Delete Sentence beginning "Nevertheless...."

Amend final sentence to read:

Council therefore ask the Executive Board to continue to develop the new Local Plan, to work with major public and private employers to develop balanced schemes for housing development, and also to explore, in the light of Government policy, options that will support the continued and increasing provision of genuinely affordable social housing for rent, permanently affordable housing for purchase or shared ownership and an appropriate number, range and balance of all housing tenures in Oxford, and to regularly report to and engage with all Councillors on these efforts.

After debate and on being put to the vote the amendment was declared carried.

On being put to the vote the amended motion was declared carried.

Council resolved to adopt the following motion:

Council notes

- ***the increasing inability of people on low and middle incomes to be able to afford to buy or rent in or near the city, and that this is hampering the efforts to attract or keep key workers such as nurses, teachers, social workers, junior university staff and other essential employees***
- ***that there are examples of innovative approaches and solutions to this problem in other parts of the country. Examples include the partnership between Pocket Homes and the Mayor of London and the creative policy of Cambridge City Council to assist the university to house employees in housing they can afford as the 'affordable housing' element of a development***
- ***the work in hand to consider setting up a Local Housing Company and welcomes the work being done to encourage Oxford University and the Hospital Trust to plan to provide housing for their staff.***

- *that work has begun on a new Local Plan, taking forward Oxford's planning policies to 2036*
- *that the commitment to the provision of social housing for rent, which has the considerable merit of actually being affordable unlike so-called 'affordable housing' as defined by the current Government, is a fundamental part of both our existing and future planning and housing policies*
- *that proposals to replace social housing requirements with 'key worker' housing while making no adjustment to the 'market' element on large sites runs counter to the spirit and letter of this Council's planning policies, and should not be supported*
- *that major employers who are also major landowners who seek to provide housing for their employees can and should bring forward proposals that do so without the entire removal of social housing requirements from these sites*
- *that at this time of great uncertainty caused by the rapid and incoherent evolution of Government policy, albeit an evolution underpinned by an ideological desire to destroy the social housing sector entirely, the resources of the Council are best used by planning for a range of different eventualities rather than by taking precipitate action that is likely to prove nugatory*

Council therefore asks the Executive Board to continue to develop the new Local Plan, to work with major public and private employers to develop balanced schemes for housing development, and also to explore, in the light of Government policy, options that will support the continued and increasing provision of genuinely affordable social housing for rent, permanently affordable housing for purchase or shared ownership and an appropriate number, range and balance of all housing tenures in Oxford, and to regularly report to and engage with all Councillors on these efforts.

3. Tackling Oxford's unaffordable private rented sector

Councillor Hollick proposed his submitted motion, seconded by Councillor Thomas

This Council notes that:

- *Oxford's housing is the most unaffordable in the country*
- *the Private Rented Sector is a significant (>25%) and growing part of the market*
- *the high turnover of tenants in the City contributes to the higher rents*
- *the current Government's housing policies are only likely to make the housing situation in Oxford worse*

This Council further notes that:

- *Letting agencies contribute to the high cost of renting by charging up-front fees, and benefit from short-term tenancies which maximise revenue.*
- *Neither landlords nor tenants are best served by this arrangement*

- *There is overwhelming popular support for rent control measures (59% for, 7% against)*
- *Rent control is common in many cities and the benefits of certain types of rent control are well-researched (for example, see the recent study commissioned by Camden Council in 2014)*

This Council therefore asks the City Executive Board to do what it can, using its influence and existing powers, to tackle unaffordability in the private rented sector in Oxford. Measures to include:

1. *Setting up a new letting agency, either as part of the proposed housing company or separately, owned and operated by the Council*
2. *Operate this letting agency according to best practice by:*
 - (a) *charging no fees*
 - (b) *offering longer tenancies*
 - (c) *publishing and promoting fair rent levels*

This letting agency should adhere to ‘third generation’ rent controls coupled with strong contractual rights (including first refusal rights on the next tenancy and flexibility for landlords wishing to occupy/sell and so on)

3. *The Council should also offer accreditation to other agencies wishing to operate under this standard.*

Councillor Rowley proposed his submitted amendment, seconded by Councillor Hollingsworth:

Under "Council notes", third bullet point, delete "*the high turnover of tenants in the City*" and substitute "*the Thatcher and Major governments' introduction of the Assured Shorthold Tenancy as the default legal standard, combined with the effect of a high transient population*".

Under "Council further notes", first bullet point, insert "*especially to students who are often asked to pay a retainer up to a year before moving in*".

Under "Council further notes", fourth bullet point, delete "*many cities...*" to end and substitute "*many other EU Member States, and indeed there are calls to strengthen these controls to combat housing insecurity.*"

Delete "*This Council therefore asks...*" to end of clause and substitute:

"This Council notes the efforts already being made to tackle the lack of affordable private rented housing in Oxford, including the Real Lettings project approved by CEB which seeks to make accommodation available at LHA rates, and our proposed ‘rent guarantee’ scheme which we hope will increase the number of private rented properties available via Home Choice and secure tenants' rights by giving the Council a role in the management of the property.

This Council is sympathetic to the principle of rent controls, and our policy representations will bear this in mind. However, we note that current proposals, such as the study commissioned by Camden Council in 2014, rely on a voluntary agreement between the Council and selected landlords. Experience of Oxford's housing bubble suggests that the feasibility of this may be very limited. Council does not therefore believe that, in the current

legislative climate, setting up such a scheme should be a priority in our work to expand the availability of affordable housing in our City.

Council asks the City Executive Board to proceed with its existing plans, and also in the longer term to take into consideration:"

Under point 1 following, delete "either as part of the Housing Company or separately".

Under point 2(a), add "to tenants".

Under point 2(b), add "where appropriate".

In sentence following, after "*This letting agency should*" delete "adhere to" and substitute "look at the feasibility of voluntary agreements involving".

After "*third generation rent controls*" add in parentheses "inflation-linked rent stabilisation".

Under point 3, delete "should also offer" and substitute "may also consider offering".

After debate and on being put to the vote the amendment was declared carried.

On being put to the vote the amended motion was declared carried.

Council resolved to adopt the following motion:

This Council notes that:

- ***Oxford's housing is the most unaffordable in the country***
- ***the Private Rented Sector is a significant (>25%) and growing part of the market***
- ***the Thatcher and Major governments' introduction of the Assured Shorthold Tenancy as the default legal standard, combined with the effect of a high transient population, contributes to the higher rents***
- ***the current Government's housing policies are only likely to make the housing situation in Oxford worse***

This Council further notes that:

- ***Letting agencies contribute to the high cost of renting by charging up-front fees, especially to students who are often asked to pay a retainer up to a year before moving in, and benefit from short-term tenancies which maximise revenue.***
- ***Neither landlords nor tenants are best served by this arrangement***
- ***There is overwhelming popular support for rent control measures (59% for, 7% against)***
- ***Rent control is common in many other EU Member States, and indeed there are calls to strengthen these controls to combat housing insecurity.***

This Council notes the efforts already being made to tackle the lack of affordable private rented housing in Oxford, including the Real Lettings

project approved by CEB which seeks to make accommodation available at LHA rates, and our proposed “rent guarantee” scheme which we hope will increase the number of private rented properties available via Home Choice and secure tenants’ rights by giving the Council a role in the management of the property.

This Council is sympathetic to the principle of rent controls, and our policy representations will bear this in mind. However, we note that current proposals, such as the study commissioned by Camden Council in 2014, rely on a voluntary agreement between the Council and selected landlords. Experience of Oxford’s housing bubble suggests that the feasibility of this may be very limited. Council does not therefore believe that, in the current legislative climate, setting up such a scheme should be a priority in our work to expand the availability of affordable housing in our City.

Council asks the City Executive Board to proceed with its existing plans, and also in the longer term to take into consideration:

- 1. Setting up a new letting agency owned and operated by the Council***
- 2. Operating this letting agency according to best practice by:***
 - (a) charging no fees to tenants***
 - (b) offering longer tenancies where appropriate***
 - (c) publishing and promoting fair rent levels***

This letting agency should look at the feasibility of voluntary agreements involving “third-generation” rent controls (inflation-related rent stabilisation) coupled with strong contractual rights (including first refusal rights on the next tenancy and flexibility for landlords wishing to occupy/sell and so on)

- 3. The Council may also consider offering accreditation to other agencies wishing to operate under this standard.***

4. LHA and Supported Housing

Councillor Hollingsworth proposed his submitted motion, seconded by Councillor Rowley.

After a short debate and on being put to the vote, the motion was declared carried.

Council resolved to adopt the motion set out below:

This Council notes that the provision of services to homeless and vulnerable adults in Oxford is already threatened by Oxfordshire County Council’s proposed cuts to budgets that support those services, at a time when the number of people either sleeping on the streets or at risk of sleeping on the streets is increasing sharply.

This Council therefore opposes absolutely proposals put forward by the Government in the 2015 Autumn Statement to cap Housing Benefit at the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) level on all tenancies, including supported accommodation, from 2018. The effect of this cap will be to make supported social housing such as homeless hostels, housing for vulnerable adults, the sick and the elderly, immediately financially unviable.

Housing Associations and charities have described the impact of this proposal as catastrophic. Even though the scheme does not come into effect for two years, already new sheltered and supported housing schemes are being put on hold or cancelled because it is not clear that the organisations running them will be able to afford to do so after 2018.

This Council believes that this Government, through this and other legislative and regulatory changes announced since the 2015 General Election, is committed to the wholesale destruction of all forms of social housing.

It further believes that this latest proposal, which will leave the most vulnerable people in our society – those with longstanding physical and mental health problems, often stemming from service in our armed forces or from childhood trauma and abuse – literally on the streets without support, to be completely incompatible with the basic tenets of a civilised society.

This Council therefore supports the campaign led by the National Housing Federation and others against the proposed changes to the Housing Benefit cap, and asks the Leader of the Council to write urgently to both of Oxford's MPs asking them to oppose these proposals in the strongest possible terms and to instead support the properly funded provision of support for sheltered and supported accommodation for all vulnerable people in Oxford.

Motions not taken

5. The Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 (proposed by Councillor Benjamin, seconded by Councillor Wolff)
6. Scrapping of student grants and curbing of access to higher education for disadvantaged young people (proposed by Councillor Hayes, seconded by Councillor Hollingsworth)
7. Climate Change and Government Policy (proposed by Councillor Brandt, seconded by Councillor Simmons)
8. Community Involvement in Community Centres (proposed by Councillor Wolff, seconded by Councillor Simmons)

These motions were not taken because the time allowed in the Constitution had elapsed.

The meeting started at 5.00 pm and ended at 8.50 pm

To: Council
Date: 8 February 2016
Title of Report: Questions on Notice from members of Council and responses from the Board Members and Leader

Introduction

1. Questions submitted by members of Council to the Board members, Leader of the Council, by the deadline in the Constitution are listed below in the order they will be taken at the meeting.
2. Responses are included where available.
3. Questioners can ask one supplementary question of the councillor answering the original question.

Questions and responses (updated after the meeting to include supplementary questions and responses)

Board member for Climate Change and Cleaner, Greener Oxford

1. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Tanner

Would Cllr Tanner agree that the wording of the council's standard letter to property owners telling them to clean graffiti off their property might be seen as unnecessarily aggressive, and could potentially cause upset or distress to an elderly or vulnerable resident? Would he agree that ward councillors should be copied in by email as a matter of course when such letters are sent out? Would he also agree that the letter should suggest that recipients might like to contact their ward councillors?

Written response

Councillor Gant brought this to the attention of the Streetscene Services Manager last week and we have reviewed the letters sent to property owners. As a result we have changed the wording from "We expect you to remove the graffiti" to "We would like you to remove the graffiti". This change has been put into effect immediately.

I think copying in both ward councillors and also suggesting the property owner could contact their ward councillor seems an unnecessary administrative burden for the Streetscene team. Attached is a copy of the current standard letter. *(Separately at the end of this document)*

2. From Councillor Brandt to Councillor Tanner

In light of the Portfolio Holder's commitment, in response to an earlier question, to increasing pollinator-friendly plants in the city, can the portfolio holder provide an update regarding the plans for planting this spring?

Written response

We have considered the planting species used in our bedding displays to ensure that we are utilising a greater number of bee friendly species. These include species such as Feverfew, Thyme, Cosmos, Alyssum, Salvia & French Marigolds.

In addition we have identified areas within parks to establish wild flower meadows. The wild flowers and the management practices used will also encourage pollinators (including bees). This work is being done in conjunction with Friends of the Earth, BBOWT and a local Ecologist.

Finally it should be noted that we have planted bee friendly plants and shrubs in the new parking bays which form part of our Great Estates Programme.

Supplementary question

Can we include homes for pollinators?

Response

Yes, this can be discussed.

3. From Councillor Brandt to Councillor Tanner

Can the portfolio holder update the council about the progress made to comply with the Compact of Mayors and the Covenant of Mayors, both of which the council has signed up to in the last two years? How has the council made use of the resources available to signatories?

Written response

Oxford City Council signed up to the Covenant of Mayors in September 2014. The focus of officer time has been spent on the Covenant of Mayors process which is to produce a Sustainable Energy Action Plan in 2016.

Working with consultants, officers are developing this plan in liaison with a very wide range of stakeholders, including Councillor Brandt. As a member of the Carbon and Natural Resources Members Board she has been invited to participate in the development of this work. Officers will focus resource on the Covenant first and then examine what further benefits may be realised with the Compact of Mayors.

4. From Councillor Brandt to Councillor Tanner

I am sure that many residents will have heard that the Council successfully bid for Government OLEV (office for low emission vehicles) funding to trial the installation of on-street electric vehicle charging points. Will the Portfolio Holder join me in thanking those officers involved in developing the bid and could he also set out the process for choosing the trial sites and how members could get involved?

Written response

Yes. I would like to put on record my thanks to officers who led the development of this bid with partners.

Officers are looking for residents who drive, or would like to drive an electric or plug-in hybrid vehicle, but who struggle with charging as they park on streets. A desktop survey and street surveys will also identify other potential streets where off street parking and charging is not available. The City Council will make efforts to install on-

street charging solutions on streets nominated by residents if they are deemed suitable after the detailed surveys by County Council and SSE.

Members can be involved by identifying residents who may wish to take part in the trials, and encouraging them to contact the City Council at us via airquality@oxford.gov.uk

Board member for Crime, Community Safety and Licensing

5. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Sinclair

Can the Portfolio Holder update us on the implementation of the controversial PSPO?

Written response

The City Centre Public Spaces Protection Order went live on Monday February 1st. Signage is in place in key areas and the order is available on the council's website.

Officers have an information sheet to give to people who have questions about the order.

Supplementary question

What guidance has been given on how close someone has to be sitting to a cashpoint to be classed as aggressively begging?

Response

we will leave it to the judgement of officers.

Board member for Culture and Communities

6. From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Simm

Given that ward members for Rose Hill felt obliged to contribute 78% of their joint ward budget towards the cost of hiring rooms at the new community centre so that activities in support of the Silver Threads Club and associated fundraising could continue, does the Board Member consider that closer co-operation is needed between officers to ensure that room hire charges in socially deprived areas are affordable by community groups of residents who live there?

Written response

There are very substantial local and targeted concessions at Rose Hill to make the new community hub accessible to the entire community, and of course some of the running costs are financed by investment council budgets – the centre is not currently self-financing. Some groups who were getting free use, or using smaller, lower cost spaces have been supported to enable them to more easily make the transition to the new centre. In relation to the spend from ward councillors, this was agreed not because of the lack of affordability of the centre, but in recognition of the valuable role they, and the Rose Hill Community Association, play in supporting the local community.

Supplementary question

Do you think there will be an increase in requests for assistance with funding?

Response

No, ward members are showing their support for these groups but it is not likely to need to continue.

7. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Simm

Is the Board member satisfied that council made good use of public money by providing facilities for a GP surgery at RHCC without ascertaining if a GP practice would be willing to move in?

Were the facilities at the new RHCC based on an aspirational wish list or a proper analysis of need and existing provision? In particular, was any account taken of the effect that providing publicly-subsidised activities would have on other organisations which already provide those activities, for example small local charities which rely on hiring out rooms?

Written response

On the question of a GP surgery: Initially, prior to the NHS reorganisation gifted to us by the Tory-Lib Dem coalition, the Primary Care Trust had indicated it would be willing to commission a new GP surgery. When, after these reforms, the health authorities decided this was no longer possible, the decision was taken to include a health facility which could be used flexibly either for GP or other health services. From that point on, we have been working with the Clinical Commissioning Group to improve health services in Rose Hill, most of which will be provided locally for the first time. As of April a range of preventative services will be delivered from the new community hub, and we will be pressing for the range of services to be expanded. None of this would have been possible if the health part of the building had not been constructed.

The new community centre was developed through detailed and extensive consultation to ensure it would meet the needs of the community. There are very few community accessible rooms in Rose Hill so I do not believe the centre will have a negative impact on other facilities, and indeed the meeting rooms in the new centre largely replace those provided at the existing community centre. We are also consulting on our Community Centre Strategy that shows how we will work to develop an accessible community facility offer across the city.

8. From Councillor Benjamin to Councillor Simm

When will the latest plans for the East Oxford Community Centre be revealed?

Written response

We have more work to do on the feasibility study; once this is complete we can then plan our next steps.

Supplementary question

What is the timetable for publication?

Response

As soon as practicable, and we will keep you informed.

Board Member for Customer Services and Corporate Services

9. From Councillor Fooks to Councillor Brown

Last July I asked if there could be more member involvement and cross-party discussion on HR matters in the Council. Following a discussion in September I understood that proposals would be brought forward fairly soon. Nothing appears to have happened. Would the portfolio holder please start discussions with the unions and with members as to how this might be achieved, to enable better member oversight of HR decisions? Would the model of the old Joint Committee be one to follow?

Written response

I have had discussions with officers and members following my discussion with Councillor Fooks on this issue, and I don't feel there is any need to put in place any more mechanisms for members to talk to the unions than are already in place. I have listed them below. It is important that members do have that opportunity, but it is also important that we recognise that responsibility for staffing matters is delegated to the Head of Paid Service and thereafter there is a scheme of delegation in place to officers.

- Members are involved in the appointment process for Chief Executive and Directors.
- Council considers all new and amended employment policies.
- Scrutiny has the opportunity to review operational issues
- Group Leaders also have the opportunity to meet separately with trade union officials and the Head of Business Improvement who has operational responsibility for HR.
- Where there are specific issues of significance, items are brought to the cross party working group (for example the 2013 – 2018 pay deal).

Supplementary question

Would you welcome input from other group's members?

Response

All group leaders are able to talk to the trade union representatives and the Head of Service.

Board member for Housing

10. From Councillor Smith to Councillor Rowley

I understand that as many as 50% of the council owned garages in Blackbird Leys & Northfield Brook are vacant.

Does the CEB member agree with me that the council should consider demolishing some blocks of garages with a view to providing free car parking spaces for local residents and where appropriate freeing up land for housing development?

As a first step towards realising this aim will the council undertake an audit of garages in Blackbird Leys and Northfield Brook to identify possible sites for such development?

Written response

Thank you for your helpful suggestion.

The Council garage vacancy rate on Blackbird Leys is 37%, compared to 21% across the City. Both figures are too high, and we are looking at how they can be reduced.

We have already successfully redeveloped some under-used garage sites for new Council housing, while others have become open-air residents' parking areas. What can be done on each remaining under-used garage site will be determined by local needs, the size, shape and location of the site, and of course the effect of Government policy on our finances. Some of the garages on Blackbird Leys could be affected by our regeneration plans for the central area of the Estate.

I have asked officers to review all our under-used garage sites with a view to either improvement and increased letting or demolition and redevelopment to provide much-needed housing.

Supplementary question

Can we take this opportunity for redevelopment and, given the high percentage of vacancies, can Blackbird Leys have priority?

Response

Yes, and yes although there are other areas with high vacancy rates.

11. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Rowley

I have previously asked about the implications for Oxford City Council of the Supreme Court's decision to overturn a decision by Westminster Council to house residents out of the borough, (Nzolameso v The City of Westminster) released on 2 April 2015, given that the City are following the same practice. I was told that officers would respond once they had time to digest the ruling. Have they been able to reach a view?

Written response

Officers are still formulating a full view. An internal report was produced last year and this has now been reviewed by Counsel engaged by the Council. Officers will now review that advice and bring forward any changes, should any be considered necessary.

Supplementary question

When will the advice be made public?

Response

We will have to fully consider what is a complex matter and will not commit to publishing anything before this is complete.

Board member for Leisure, Sport and Events

12. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Lygo

We welcome the use of our City streets for cultural and sporting activities, but the closing of main artery roads, including St Giles, on a Sunday causes frequent disruption to our Residents' lives. Would the City now prepare a draft policy in consultation with Residents, for the number of events (including months, days of the week, and timings) when the centre of Oxford is to be disrupted?

Written response

We always consider the level of disruption with all event planning and work hard to balance the community benefits that come from well-managed, vibrant events against

any disruption that they might cause. This is already included within our event management plans and discussed in the meetings of the multi-agency Safety Advisory Group. Protocols are already in place to regulate events in Broad Street and Bonn Square and we are meeting with representatives of the Westgate Alliance to discuss events in the new spaces that will be created as a result of the Westgate development. I do not believe we need to create a new events-specific policy.

Supplementary question

Should there be a standing committee of councillors in wards affected by these events so they can discuss the issues?

Response

Relevant ward councillors will be contacted individually and they have the opportunity to discuss concerns with officers and the Board member.

13. From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Lygo

We have been told in public addresses by members of the public that groups using Temple Cowley Leisure Centre were automatically offered transfer to the new facilities at Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre, initially at little or no extra cost. Please can the Board member supply a list of all groups using the Temple Cowley Leisure Centre during the twelve month period before it was closed, and a list showing how many of those groups continue to use BBL leisure centre from 1/2/16?

Written response

City of Oxford Swimming – moved to the Leys Pools & Leisure Centre

St. Christopher's School – moved to the Leys Pools & Leisure Centre

Oxford Swans Disability – moved to the Leys Pools & Leisure Centre

John Henry Newman School – moved to the Leys Pools & Leisure Centre

Church Cowley School – moved to the Leys Pools & Leisure Centre

John Watson School – moved to the Leys Pools & Leisure Centre

St Francis School – moved to Barton Leisure Centre

Our Lady's School - space offered at the Leys Pools & Leisure Centre (not yet taken up)

Rose Hill School.- space offered at the Leys Pools & Leisure Centre (not yet taken up)

14. From Councillor Fooks to Councillor Lygo

The half-marathon staged in Oxford last October gave many people the chance to run through the city, but caused major inconvenience and in some cases loss of earnings, to a number of residents and businesses. Can the portfolio holder explain why he has gone ahead with booking a similar event this year, without meeting with councillors whose residents were affected by the event, in order to discuss the best route and date to ensure there is no repetition of this nuisance?

Written response

Around 7,000 people took part in the half marathon and the event was hugely popular with the participants. The half marathon is held on public highways which come under the jurisdiction of the County Council. I have called a meeting of a working group on

11th February to discuss details of the route. I hope that the working group will be able to come up with plans for the next event which will take into account the concerns raised by residents and businesses. Both the City and County Councils want the half marathon to become a world-class event which is enjoyed by participants and onlookers alike.

Supplementary question

Why have we had no information about the 2016 event?

Response

Initial information will be given at the working group meeting.

15. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Lygo

What is the cost to the council per user of the gym at the Rose Hill community centre? How does this compare with the cost to the council of subsidising each gym visit in facilities run by fusion leisure, which will shortly reach zero?

People within reach of Rose Hill now have access to a high quality gym at a lower rate than residents elsewhere in the city. Those living within certain postcodes are subsidised further. How would the board member justify this to residents elsewhere in the city?

Written response

The centre has only had the formal opening on the 30th January so it is too early to supply this data.

Local community rates help to connect local residents with the facilities within their communities. Rose Hill also offers discounted rates for community groups from across the city.

Supplementary question

When will information about costs be available to members?

Response

It was too early to supply this but it would be made available in due course.

Board member for Planning, Transport and Regulatory Service

16. From Councillor Darke to Councillor Hollingsworth

Will the portfolio holder work with Leader in order to write to the Government in protest against their amendment to the Housing & Planning Bill proposing that alternative providers be used by developers to prepare reports and recommendations on planning applications? The amendment is ill conceived and potentially dangerous by: misunderstanding the decision process which must take account the interests of neighbours / communities and not only the interests of developers; risking the viability of local planning authority services by allowing alternative providers to taking away fee income and workload planning capability from the local planning authority; undermining the probity and professional competence of the local planning service; demoting the value and status of the local development framework and local planning policies.

Written response

The short answer is yes, gladly. These proposals open up a race to the bottom in terms of quality of decision-making, where external providers – with no knowledge or experience of the local area – will be able to undercut Local Authority planning departments. The risks of poor quality or unacceptable reports being put in front of planning committees is obvious, and the risk that short-cuts are taken in public engagement and consultation is not so much a risk as a racing certainty. Previous experience with other public services suggests that what will happen is that the private sector will cherry pick the cheapest and simplest work, leaving local planning departments under-resourced to handle complex and difficult cases.

The fact that the Government tabled these proposals without warning or consultation just before Christmas does not suggest to me that they have been carefully developed or considered. Shadow planning minister Roberta Blackman-Woods, a former member of this Council, has said that even the Government must see that the “potential for this mechanism to generate a degree of corruption and totally inappropriate conflicts of interest is probably endless”. I could not agree more.

17. From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Hollingsworth

Members of the public who attended a recent Planning Review Committee meeting reported that they were confused about the wording of an extra condition attached to the planning permission which was introduced during the debate, and they were worried that the members may not have fully understood this either when they came to vote. Lack of clarity around wording of conditions has also happened at area planning committee meetings. Does the Board Member believe we can improve current practice to make this process more transparent and understandable for everyone?

Written response

My personal experience as a member of the WAPC is that members are clear about the issues on which they are voting, and that Chairs and officers take great pains to ensure that members are so. Members of the PRC are all experienced members and are able seek clarification from officers on any matter in front of them if they need to; moreover officers are, in my experience, rightly ready to support members in understanding what are often highly complex legal issues. Thus in my experience there is not a lack of clarity in the wording of decisions; members of planning committees do not arrive at their decisions lightly, and do so weighing up complex evidence and advice.

It is always important to keep issues such as support for decision making under review, of course, and the new Head of Planning and Regulatory Services will meet with committee chairs, vice chairs and opposition members shortly to review how the committees are being supported by officers and will pick up any issues then.

Supplementary question

Response

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18. From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Hollingsworth

A group of local residents has expressed concern that the outcome of Planning Review Committee decisions is always to uphold the officer recommendation, so we collated publicly available information on the website of all PRC decisions made since Jan 2012 to test this assumption. Given that the information below is correct, they don't believe it is worth-while for members of the public to spend time and sometimes money on preparing evidence to show a contrary view on applications when decisions are almost certain to go against them at PRC – what is the Board Member's view?

Planning review committee outcomes Jan 2012 – Jan 2016

Planning review committee outcomes Jan 2012 – Jan 2016

Date	App no.	Brief details	Area decision	Officer rec.	PRC outcome
27/01/16	15/00858/FUL	Latimer/London Rd student blocks	Refuse (EAPC)	Approve stc	Approve stc
29/04/15	14/02940/OUT	Littlemore Park	Refuse (EAPC)	Approve stc	Approve stc
29/04/15	14/01348/FUL	Aristotle Lane	Approve (WAPC)	Approve stc	Approve stc
26/01/15	14/01495/FUL	Williams St.	Approve (EAPC)	Approve stc	Refuse (appeal upheld)
29/10/14	14/01012/FUL	117 Fairacres Rd	Approve (WAPC)	Approve stc	Approve stc
09/07/14	13/02629/FUL	157 Green Ridges	Refuse (EAPC)	Approve stc	Approve stc
30/10/13	13/01929/FUL	81 Edgeway Road	Refuse (EAPC)	Approve stc	Approve stc
26/06/13	12/03278/FUL	Cowley Community Centre	Refuse (EAPC)	Approve stc	Approve stc
28/09/12	12/01369/FUL	St Clements Car Park	Refuse (WAPC)	Approve stc	Approve stc
25/07/12	11/02446/FUL	Cantay House	Approve (WAPC)	Refuse	Refuse
26/06/12	12/00495/FUL	Magdalen College	Refuse (WAPC)	Approve stc	Approve stc

stc – subject to conditions

Written response

The PRC is an important part of the committee system, where it operates to ensure that decisions made by the two Area Planning Committees can be called in and reviewed. As the list provided by the questioner shows, in ten out of 11 cases called in the officer recommendation was to accept. All planning decisions, whether delegated, taken at Committee or taken at PRC, need to take into account the professional advice of officers in arriving at a decision.

In the case of a decision referred to PRC, the most common reason for referral is that the original decision may not have been 'safe', in the sense that the decision was not in

accordance with local and national planning policies, and was thus liable to fail at appeal. The PRC has to consider the application on its merits, and thus is it statistically likely that given the substantial majority (7 out of 11) of cases have been called in following a refusal contrary to officer recommendation, decisions by the PRC are more likely to lean towards giving greater weight to the professional advice of officers.

It is normal practice to have a separate committee to assess decisions before the decision is finally confirmed. This approach accords with national best practice and is an approach that helps to assess the risks to the council from decisions that may end up at planning appeal. Given the quasi-legal nature of planning decisions it is important that there is a review approach in our decision making process.

Supplementary question

Given that the two committees both have experienced councillors but come to different decisions, are there any reviews of the reasons for these to see if there are training points which can help make more consistent decisions? Can these be used in future training for members?

Response

I will discuss how to do this outside the meeting.

19. From Councillor Fooks to Councillor Hollingsworth

Despite repeated requests and apparent agreement to provide it, members still do not have clear information on how the spending of the Community Infrastructure Levy will be open to community wishes. Please can all members be given this information, with an indication of the amount of CIL available in their wards?

Written response

The Community Infrastructure Levy is divided into three pots of money, as follows: 15%, rising to 25% in areas with an approved neighbourhood plan, can be spent on locally agreed priorities (in areas with a parish council this sum is paid to that council); 5% is set aside for administration and implementation; the remainder is spent on City-wide priorities. This last pot is already allocated to various projects within the capital programme which forms part of the Consultation Budget; these projects can be identified by the CIL marker in the relevant narrative description.

There is a common misconception that the Regulation 123 list kept by the Council is a list of projects which can be funded by CIL; this is not the case. The r.123 list is in fact a list of things that CANNOT be funded by s.106 agreements tied to particular planning applications. Thus while it is therefore likely that CIL moneys collected for city-wide use will be used on schemes on the list, because they can't be funded by s.106 agreements, putting a scheme on the r.123 list can actually make it less rather than more likely that that scheme will be funded.

The neighbourhood portion of the levy can however be spent on a slightly wider range of things than the rest of the levy, provided that it meets the requirement to 'support the development of the area' (see Regulation 59C for details).

We intend to present a report to April CEB which will seek to agree the geographical boundaries of the neighbourhood areas. This would take into account Parish boundaries, and the boundaries of the Neighbourhood Forums which are preparing Neighbourhood Plans; in some cases these boundaries do not match those of the City Council ward boundaries, meaning that sums will need to be allocated at a postcode level in some wards. The rest of Oxford will be split into areas that reflect the

development expected to take place. The report will also set out the process for involving the local communities in the decision on how the 15% of CIL within those geographical areas would be spent.

At present approximately £35k of CIL has been raised and passed on to Parish Councils, and a further £285k raised in unparished areas of the city. There is wide variance at a ward level, with no CIL having been raised in St Margaret's and Iffley Fields wards and £186k raised in Carfax ward. As noted above, because some parish and neighbourhood forum boundaries do not match ward boundaries, the precise areas and figures will differ from ward boundary breakdowns, and will be reported in full as recommendations in the CEB report.

Supplementary question

Can we have the detail of this?

Response

The report to the City Executive Board's April meeting should provide this.

20. From Councillor Fooks to Councillor Hollingsworth

Will the portfolio holder ensure that the promised leaflet to inform residents of what is and is not allowed in a Conservation Area is drafted, approved and publicised as soon as possible?

Written response

Yes. The Heritage team is aiming to produce guidance which will be published on the Council's website within 3 months. This will be in a format that can be printed off as a guidance leaflet as well.

21. From Councillor Fooks to Councillor Hollingsworth

At the County Council Cabinet meeting on January 26th, Cabinet approved the delegation to the Director of Environment and Economy to exercise Compulsory Purchase Powers if needed for the purchase of land for a number of schemes. Among these schemes was land at Worcester Street, 'required for a bus turning area to enable the pedestrianisation of Queen Street and longer term bus routeing changes as part of the City Centre Transport Strategy'.

Does this mean that the potential for a major revitalisation of this area with the reinstatement of the canal terminal and ancillary buildings will be put in jeopardy?

Written response

While the County Council have taken this step, and the County Council and the landowner are in discussion, we have no reason to believe that this will jeopardise the current plans for the wider regeneration of the area.

Supplementary question

Can this be kept under review?

Response

Yes.

22. From Councillor Brandt to Councillor Hollingsworth

Can the portfolio holder update as to the response (if any was received) from Uniform, regarding their PublicAccess system used by the council in the planning portal to capture comments? Will they agree to review the list of titles offered and either remove the need to provide a title completely (which this council seems to agree would be the best outcome) or at least change it to a more egalitarian set of choices which also respects gender diversity? (the options currently being Lord, Lady, Doctor, Mr, Mrs, Ms, Miss and Rev).

Written response

Discussions with Uniform are still on-going: the Head of Services will provide an update to Councillor Brandt (and to all other Councillors who wish to be kept informed) separately.

23. From Councillor Benjamin to Councillor Hollingsworth

It is now over 1 year since Temple Cowley Pools and Gym were closed. Can the Executive Board member tell me why the building is still boarded up?

Written response

Catalyst, as owners of the property, are working up a planning application. As owners of the site they have the right to board up the buildings as a security and site safety measure in the meantime, and that is what they have done.

In December 2014 the Council entered into a long lease (999 years) with Catalyst in regard to this site. Although the Council still holds the reversionary freehold interest which is exercisable after only another 998 years, until that time (December 3013) the Council has no rights over or in the site. For all practical purposes, therefore, Catalyst is the sole controller of the site. The Council has no right to enter the site without Catalyst's permission, or to make use of the site in any way. Catalyst is the sole occupier of the land and the Council is not responsible for any activities carried out at the site. The only right reserved by the Council was in regard to an ability to request Catalyst to demolish any existing structures on the land. This right was reserved primarily to ensure that the site would constitute no health or safety risk to the public.

On Catalyst receiving planning consent for its proposed housing development at the site, the Council will be obliged to transfer its remaining freehold interest to Catalyst.

24. From Councillor Benjamin to Councillor Hollingsworth

In July 2015 a Green motion was passed which stated "Council notes the lack of clear and consistent advice for property owners wanting to install external wall insulation. Council therefore asks the Executive to prepare guidance, such as that available from Havering Council, to post on the council website." Can the Executive Board member please tell me whether the agreed guidance has been produced?

Written response

The agreed guidance is currently being drafted, led by the Energy Efficiency Projects Officer. The draft guidance has been developed across the Council, consulting with Planning, Environmental Sustainability and Building Control colleagues and will be finalised in the next month. This will then be reported to April CEB.

Supplementary question

What was causing the delay when other councils have such guidance?

Response

Regardless of the reason I will see how this can be speeded up.

25. From Councillor Benjamin to Councillor Hollingsworth

You have previously stated, in response to a question at a Full Council last year, that officers are 'currently exploring options for providing a map-based solution for known HMOs that will help both applicants and members of the public to obtain a clearer picture on HMOs in any particular area within the City'. Has any progress been made on this?

Written response

Officers have been able to generate two types of map based data on HMOs and this has been provided to a residents association for them to use in their local area. We are still awaiting feedback on how useful they found the information. A map has been added to the Council's website and we are continuing to look at better ways of being able to display the data using corporate IT systems.

26. From Councillor Benjamin to Councillor Hollingsworth

Will the portfolio take the opportunity offered by the newly formed JV and the necessary review (following the exclusion of the ice rink) of the Oxpens MasterPlan SDP to remove the proposed hotel from the plans to free up more space for much needed affordable housing?

Written response

The ambition for the Oxpens site is a mixed use development as part of the city centre. This includes a range of possible commercial, institutional, leisure and residential uses. The adopted Oxpens Master plan SPD provides a policy framework, which includes the Council's affordable housing policies. The final scheme proposals, when they are submitted, will be judged against the framework and the Local Plan policies. While uses that fall outside the framework and local plan policies would need to be justified on their merits, there is no requirement for a specific suggested use within the range of potential uses to appear in any proposed scheme.

Supplementary question

Would you agree we should be taking every opportunity to maximise the provision of sustainable and affordable housing, especially given the difficulty employers reportin recruiting because of the high cost of housing?

Response

Everything I have said here would point to that, yes.

27. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Hollingsworth

How does the Councillor explain the discrepancy between the fact that reported number of students living out remains static but number of registered student HMO's is rocketing?

(Note: Saville's estimate in a recent report that 10,000 students live out)

Written response

I am not aware of such report or research being published by Savills, or the basis on which the claims are made as to student numbers. The City Council's own monitoring

of student numbers and accommodation in the Annual Monitoring Report 2014-15 (published November 2015) assesses the student numbers annually for the two universities.

Data provided to the City Council by the universities shows that at 1 December 2014 there were:

- 2,910 University of Oxford students living outside of university-provided accommodation within Oxford; and
- 3,451 Oxford Brookes students living outside of university-provided accommodation, within the City (Annual Monitoring Report 2014-15, paragraphs 3.47-3.53). This was a temporary fluctuation and Brookes put in place measures which have already brought the numbers within targets (3000 students living outside university-provided accommodation) for the 2015/16 academic year.

Any variation between these figures and those mentioned in the question might be because different criteria are used. For example the Savills figures might include students living in their family homes, part time students, or students at other academic institutions.

Supplementary question

The number of students living out – and exempt from Council Tax – is of concern. Could an independent review be commissioned?

Response

During the update of the local plan we may or may not commission such a survey although limiting the number of students living in the private rented sector was a key part of policy. There were a number of factors contributing to the discrepancy including privately provided purpose-built student residences and students of other educational establishments not covered by our policy.

28. From Councillor Benjamin to Councillor Hollingsworth

What protection will the City Council provide for existing Bed and Breakfasts against the proliferation of hotel proposals for the City?

Written response

Oxford is in need of both good quality hotel and good quality bed and breakfast accommodation, and there is no evidence that the two sectors cannot and should not thrive alongside one another in a city like Oxford.

The Oxford Hotel and Short Stay Accommodation Futures Study assessed the demand and supply of accommodation for both the hotel and bed and breakfast providers, and identified a limited supply of 3 star hotels and only a few 2 star hotels. Whilst there has been some increase in hotel provision since then this has comprised mainly luxury / boutique hotels and a number of 3 star hotels in the City centre, together with some development on the outskirts. The greatest proportion of the city's hotel stock is still located outside the City centre.

The Core Strategy identifies a projected need for up to 15 sites for hotel, hostel and serviced-apartment development in Oxford up to 2026, to fully meet the identified market potential for new provision. Occupancy levels in Oxford are at around 70%, a clear indication that demand for short-stay accommodation remains high. The Economic Development Team has in recent months received about 5 enquiries from hotel operators, highlighting clear developer interest in Oxford as a location.

A recent report prepared by Tourism South East on 'the economic impact of tourism on Oxfordshire', published in August 2015, showed that of the total tourism value of £1.86 billion generated in 2014, 40% of total turnover was received by businesses in Oxford. Having adequate and affordable hotel accommodation brings a substantial and direct benefit in terms of income for local business and employment for local people, benefits that are lost if visitors cannot stay in the City.

The Local Plan provides the over-arching policy context that promotes Sustainable Tourism within Policy CS32, which seeks to encourage longer stays and greater spend in Oxford. The policy supports the amount and diversity of short-stay accommodation by allowing for new development in the City centre and main arterial roads and also by protecting and modernising existing sites, including bed and breakfast accommodation.

The Local Plan 2036 is at the early stage of preparation but further research will be carried out to update the background evidence on tourism and its important role within Oxford's economy. This will provide the context to review the present policies on short-stay accommodation and the role played by Bed and Breakfast accommodation in adding to the diversity of provision within the City.

While I do not believe that well run hotels pose any threat to well run B&Bs, as they are appealing to different and complementary markets, I do support the national campaign headed by national trade body The Bed and Breakfast Association to ensure that rooms let via websites like Air B'n'B are subject to the same sorts of fire safety and environmental health regulation criteria as other hotels and bed and breakfasts. It's vital for the safety of people staying in these rooms, for neighbours living nearby who might be disturbed by traffic or noise, and of course for well-run establishments who are adhering to the rules and want a level playing field to operate on.

Deputy Leader of the Council, Board Member for Finance, Corporate Asset Management and Public Health

29. From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Turner

Given that it has been recognised in many fora that the Rose Hill estate is an area that needs its own GP, does the Board Member consider that the generous space allocated at the new community centre for a GP will be used as effectively if instead it houses miscellaneous health-related services sometime in the Spring as listed in a CCG leaflet given to the public at the centre opening?

(List includes counselling/talking space; mind well being (sic); enhanced primary care services for people with long-term conditions; early detection service for heart failure; stop smoking service; some hospitals services being considered are: eyes and women's services (sic))

Written response

As a Liberal Democrat, Councillor Wilkinson will be familiar with the Health and Social Care Act, part of her party's legacy in government. That legislation disbanded the Primary Care Trust, which had agreed to commission a GP surgery, and instead put GP commissioning in the hands of NHS England, which regrettably decided that it would not commission a new surgery at Rose Hill at this time. Of course, that decision

could be reviewed in the future (an option which would not be available had the health facility not been built).

It is my view Rose Hill does need access to primary care, including GP services. That is why I have devoted a great deal of time to lobbying the health authorities for proper health services from the centre, and I will continue to do so. I think the proposals Councillor Wilkinson mentions are a good step in the right direction, but we will be pressing for more. There is the potential to provide a good range of services making a real difference at the centre (and of course any health provision on Rose Hill will be an improvement on the current situation), and I think the ambition of Oxfordshire CCG to provide services aimed at reducing health inequalities in the area is a good one.

One advantage of providing health provision other than through a GP surgery is that it could be available to people who do not wish to change their GP, whereas this option would not have been open to local people if the only provision was a new GP practice. Ideally I would like to see a range of services, including open-access GPs (possibly on referral from people's existing practices), at the centre, and that is what I continue to campaign for. It would have been nice if the Liberal Democrats had joined in our efforts on this when they had ministers in the Department for Health, rather than carping from the sidelines.

30. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Turner

Will the portfolio holder join me in taking the opportunity of the publication of our latest Treasury Management Strategy to celebrate the fact that Oxford City Council was the first to publicly divest (its direct investments only) from fossil fuels as part of a wide ranging new ethical policy?

Written response

I'm happy to celebrate the policy, though since we have never, to my knowledge, held such direct investments, I would not wish to go overboard in my celebration.

31. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Turner

Will the portfolio holder say whether he is committed to now look at our indirect investments (or request Finance Panel to do so) to see what opportunities there are to more widely enforce our ethical investment policy?

Written response

There are no problems enforcing our existing ethical investment policy, which covers direct investments. I am always interested in the comments of the Finance Panel and have no wish to dictate its work programme! My recollection, however, is that indirect investments were within the scope of the Panel's original review and that the Panel received advice on the inherent difficulties (in relation to access to information and appropriate placement of funds) and costs (in loss of interest and in necessary additional officer capacity) in applying the policy to indirect investments, which is why the policy was formulated as it is.

Supplementary question

Thank you for the response, and for giving the Panel leave to pursue this topic.

Response

The Finance Panel is independent and can give or withhold its own licence, but it is important to understand it is unlikely, given what we've heard from other councils, we

can pursue this policy without needing extra staff and taking a serious hit on investment income. If that were the case we would not recommend or get support for it and do not consider it worth pursuing except perhaps when reviewing the budget or policy.

32. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Turner

Who will be held to account for letting the Tower Block Refurbishment run £7m over budget eating into our affordable homes and energy efficiency programmes?

Written response

It surprises me, since the councillor has a background in capital project management, that this is described as going “over budget”. That is not the case – instead, the initial budget allocated for the project was not sufficient to fund the work which, it transpired, would be needed. There are no indications that the finalised project will go over-budget, and appropriate contingencies are in place. If the councillor is asking who will be held to account for a decision to commission work which is more far-reaching than could have been funded by the initial budget, the answers are a) members of the City Executive Board who agree the scheme, and b) members of Council who agree any revised budget allocation. It should be noted that:

- The scope of the works was extended to reflect the latest best practice on fire safety and outcome of tenants’ consultation.
- The contractors increased their costs because of their assessment of construction/complexity risk for Hockmore Tower
- The Council’s independent consultant’s advice identified additional cost inflation over the tender period because of increasing shortages of materials and labour and lack of capacity in the construction market.

We make no apology for wanting to deliver much-needed improvements to our tower-blocks, and it will be a shame if other councillors would rather not progress with this scheme. Finally, the councillor should be aware that the reductions in our energy efficiency and affordable housing programmes are due to government policy, not our desire to improve our tower blocks, and it is disappointing that he is seeking to muddy the waters in this way.

Supplementary question

Given the size of the miscalculation, could the reason be explained?

Response

As the project planning developed and changed the estimated cost for the proposed works changed. Now that the project is finalised and under contract management procedures the costs should not change. Government policy changed the HRA considerably and we have had to make significant changes which will have a serious impact on tenants.

33. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Turner

Have any allowances been made for a drop in commercial rates income from city centre retailers who are likely to see a reduction in trade due to the Westgate Centre?

Written response

It is not clear to me whether the councillor is referring to the level of income from Business Rates received by our council, or whether he is talking about the rates paid by individual businesses.

If the former: yes, our modelling takes into account as precisely as it can do the changes in business rate income (first a decline, then an increase) caused by the Westgate redevelopment.

If the latter: A percentage reduction in traders' rateable values was given by the valuation office for the closure of the Westgate car park, for the Westgate units as well as the surrounding area.

The valuation office will need to address the financial implications for city centre traders due to the closure of Westgate Centre although we are probably unlikely to know the full extent the closure will have until the centre shuts completely this month.

The individual ratepayers can contact the Valuation Office at any time if they feel their rateable value is incorrect due to external factors

Leader of the Council, Board Member for Corporate Strategy and Economic Development

34. From Councillor Hollick to Councillor Price

Can the Portfolio Holder update us on estimated numbers of HMOs in the City and what percentage of these have been registered under the City's HMO Scheme?

Written response

An updated estimate of 5,240 HMOs based on 2011 census data has been used for the targets for the HMO Licensing Scheme which was renewed for a further 5 years in January and to date 68% of these have been licensed. The Council will continue to take a strong line on enforcement with the new scheme to encourage landlords to comply with the requirement to licence their HMOs.

35. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Price

In passing our ethical investment policy, you kindly agreed to write to Cllr Ian Hudspeth concerning the pensions fund to see what could be done to improve this. Did you ever get a response?

Written response

The reply from the County Council was non committal. It outlined the procedures which are used by the Oxfordshire Pension Fund to review its investment portfolio and distribution across asset classes, and said that our views would be taken into account in future reviews.

36. From Councillor Benjamin to Councillor Price

Given that OxLEP is embarking on a process of updating the County's Strategic Economic Plan (SEP), can you, as our representative on the Growth Board, please tell us:

- a. What input the Growth Board expects to have to this process?

- b. Will it be working with OxLEP to help ensure full public engagement and consultation, including debate at full council meetings?
- c. Will the proposed Plan be debated openly and in public at a Growth Board meeting?
- d. Will the Growth Board be required to approve the final document?

Written response

The LEP Board has already agreed an open process of consultation in refreshing the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan. Two additional strategy documents covering environmental and culture aspects of economic development have already been through an extensive consultation process and will be 'knitted in' to the updated SEP.ow.

A programme of public events has been agreed and provision for on line web based engagement is also being made.

The LEP Board has a significant membership overlap with the Growth Board but the Growth Board Executive will liaise with the LEP Executive to establish an appropriate sequence of engagement and discussion. A steering group for the actual drafting process is being set up. The SEP does not in itself have any formal statutory role in the NPPF and Local Plan process but it is clearly an important background and framing document. Each of the Oxfordshire local authorities will want to have some process for 'sign off' and in our case, I expect that this will involve one or more presentations, a Scrutiny session and reference to the CEB.

The Oxford Strategic Partnership's annual review and report back meeting will be focussing on the SEP refresh later this month.

37. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Price

What is the Council doing to address the massive drop-off in voter registration impacting, in particular, the University Colleges?

Written response

The Council has made great efforts to ensure that under the new system everyone who is entitled to register does so.

Regular briefings on all the activities carried out by our Electoral Services team have been sent to all Members since the beginning of individual electoral registration (IER) in summer 2014. The last briefing was sent to all Members in December 2015 and gave a summary of all the registration activity up to that date.

As noted in the December 2015 briefing, both Oxford Brookes University and Oxford University have agreed to move towards including an electoral registration page in their online registration, to take effect in the new academic year in September 2016.

Since December we have launched another publicity campaign linked to the 'National Voter Registration Drive'. This involved displays being placed in all Oxford University colleges, Brookes, some community centres, Templars Square, Oxford University Press, Homeless Pathways and various other locations in addition to staffed stands in Bonn Square on 3rd February and Broad Street on the 4th February. In addition our social media campaigning continues.

We will be working with the Universities and students' unions in the lead up to the City Council and Police and Crime Commissioner elections in May, stressing students' rights around registering in Oxford and the deadlines around that and absent voting.

The Council is also lobbying the government on various elements of IER, in particular relaxing the rules to allow the direct registration of students and other residents of, for example, hostels and old people's homes. The Electoral Services Manager is a member of the Cabinet Office working party on IER and continues to highlight the need for bespoke solutions to the particular difficulties posed by high student numbers within the city.

Supplementary question

Thanks to the registration team for their incredible work on this. What is the role of the universities in this?

Response

The team were encouraging the universities to be more proactive in promoting registration but the details could not be confirmed at this meeting.

38. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Price

Will the Leader be urging the Leader of Labour Party, the County's MPs and all his Parliamentary colleagues to turn up and support the NHS Reinstatement Bill scheduled for its second reading on 11 March 2016. In short, I believe the Bill proposes to fully restore the NHS as an accountable public service by reversing 25 years of marketisation in the NHS, by abolishing the purchaser-provider split, ending contracting and re-establishing public bodies and public services accountable to local communities?

Written response

The title of this private member's Bill is the "National Health Service Bill". It is listed as the second Bill for discussion on March 11th, following the Second Reading of the controversial Foreign National Offenders (Exclusion from the UK) Bill, proposed by the Tory MP, Peter Bone. It therefore seems likely that there will not be sufficient time for the NHS Bill to be discussed and for it to move to a vote. The Labour Party is of course sympathetic to the overall aim of the Bill, which is to make it the duty of the Secretary of State to promote in England a comprehensive health service designed to secure improvement in the physical and mental health of the people of England, and in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of illness, with the service provided for these purpose to be free of charge, 'except in so far as the making and recovery of charges is expressly provided for, by or under any enactment, whenever passed'. It also seeks the integration of health and social care services – which is already technically government policy. While the objectives are laudable, the Bill, if enacted would involve another great upheaval in the organisation of the NHS, including abolishing the purchaser-provider split, and setting up a series of regional health boards to administer the services. There clearly should be extensive consultation with the public and with NHS employees before embarking on such an upheaval, attractive though many of the features proposed are. I think that PLP colleagues will be supporting the Bill and, if it is put to the vote will vote accordingly. This would allow its detailed provisions to be thoroughly discussed and fed into the wider national debate which is undoubtedly needed on how we best organise and fund the NHS into the long term.

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Direct Services
 Cowley Marsh Depot
 Marsh Road
 Oxford OX4 2HH

www.oxford.gov.uk



Date :
 Our Ref:

Dear Sir/Madam

Removal of Graffiti from Private Premises

It has come to the Council's attention that your property at

.....
 has been blighted by graffiti. The purpose of this letter is to put you on notice that the Council **would like** the graffiti to be removed as soon as possible.

The Council is able to offer you a graffiti removal service. If you would be interested in using this service and would like a quotation of the cost of undertaking this work, please complete the details below.

Customer Name

Telephone Contact Number

Email Address

Please send your details to the Council at the address shown at the top of this letter. Alternatively you can send your details by fax or email. The fax number and email address are also shown at the top of this letter.

If you do not wish to use the Council's graffiti removal service please contact me within the next 7 calendar days with your proposals for removing the graffiti from the above premises.

Please be aware:

- (i) That due to the porous nature of some materials the removal of the graffiti may not be 100% effective; and
- (ii) That the removal of the graffiti may have some adverse effect on some materials such as the surface of bricks and other construction materials and could in some cases cause premature ageing of materials such as plastics and may affect the transparency of glass and PVC etc.

Upon receipt of your details we will contact you to discuss a quote for the graffiti removal and a timescale for the works.

In the meantime please be aware that graffiti is a criminal offence and should be reported to the Police. Your insurers may also be able to give you help and advice.

Yours faithfully

Graffiti Removal Supervisor

SAMPLE



To: Council
Date: 8 February 2016
Title of Report: Public addresses and questions that do not relate to matters for decision – as delivered at the meeting

Introduction

Addresses made by members of the public to the Council, and questions put to the Board members or Leader, registered by the deadline in the Constitution, are attached. Any written responses available are also attached.

Addresses in part 2

1. Alasdair de Voil, ILoveOxford Tours Director (written response below)
2. Roger Parry, Summertown Stars AFC - Request to provide Facilities at Five Mile Drive Recreation Ground from September 2016
3. Nigel Gibson, Save Temple Cowley Pools – Closing Temple Cowley Pools - the consequences
4. Oxford University Student Union President Becky Howe
5. Patrick McDonald, Oxford Catalyst Ventures Ltd - Addressing a growing social injustice - building starter-homes for first time buyers in oxford.
6. Jane Alexander and Heather Dalitz, Oxford - Health Consequences of Poor Decisions

Questions in part 2

7. Question from Judith Harley – Cox's Yard, Temple Cowley (written response below)

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Statement from Alasdair de Voil, I Love Oxford Tours Director

1a) REQUEST FOR ATTENTION OF SCRUTINY TEAM:

I would like to ask that Oxford city council does an internal review to scrutinise the original and the ongoing circumstances of the arrangements and contractual agreement between the city council and county council with Experience Oxfordshire (formerly known as Visit Oxfordshire Ltd.) to provide the provision of tourist information services at Oxford visitor info centre and on its associated websites.

A edited copy of the contractual document for this partnership was released to me after a FOI (freedom of info) request but much of what may have been most useful info was hidden. The reason given for not disclosing fully, was supposed reasons of 'commercial confidentiality'. This included hiding the names of whoever actually signed the partnership into place. I think that at the very least, whoever signed this agreement, has no reason to hide their names and the public and unhappy local tour operators like myself, deserve to know who signed it, so that we know to whom we should be addressing our ongoing concerns about the circumstances of this partnership.

1b) I would like whoever signed this agreement or whoever is now liable for consequences of its agreement, to give a rational explanation of why I can find absolutely no mention in the contract whatsoever of how the councils or Experience Oxfordshire will endeavour to offer an impartial service to those businesses such as independent tour operators, who would be most affected by the new agreement.

1c) Can the council explain precisely what is the legal company/charity and accounting status of the organisation which declares income and tax paid to HMRC for services offered by Oxford visitor info centre. I ask, as according to public information, it appears that it is not Experience Oxfordshire but another named company or charity that records this income. If that is correct, please can the council explain what is the legal relationship between these companies.

1d) Concerning 1c), can the scrutiny committee advise if they are confident that none of the individuals named as shareholders or directors in either of above organisations are or were former council members i.e. are you confident there is no conflict of interest?

1e) Concerning 1c) income returns from sales of Oxford Visitor Info centre, will the council accept that due to frequent complaints by local tour operators that we believe that visitor info centre is biased to market its own so-called 'official Oxford walking tours', therefore the city council should review & make known info concerning how much income Oxford visitor info centre earned directly from selling 'official Oxford walking tours', whether as individual tickets or as private group tours. Note that Experience Oxfordshire claim that as they are a private company, they need not answer any FOI request.

1f) Does the city council recognise that according to documentation of the contractual agreement mentioned in 1a), ultimately it is my understanding that the

city council appears to be finally legally liable for any misconduct, conflicts of interest, fraud or any serious charges which an individual may choose to litigate over. Therefore is the city council willing to agree today to conduct a public report and an internal review into the circumstances of why local tour operators like myself are considering taking legal action (to ensure that Oxford visitor info centre and its websites & associated directors & stakeholders stop marketing their own conflict of interest so-called 'official tour')?

1g) REQUEST A PUBLIC INVESTIGATION TO REVIEW WHY MOST OXFORD TOUR OPERATORS ARE UNHAPPY WITH HOW VISITOR CENTRE IS RUN:

Over 9 million tourists are believed to visit Oxford area annually, so it is of utmost significance that those businesses most affected by the necessity for there to be an adequate, fair, professionally & ethically managed visitor information service should be consulted about how much confidence or lack of confidence, they have in the capacity of Experience Oxfordshire to represent their interests.

I request that as the city council claims in its brochures that it understands the need to support local employment generation & local businesses and the significance of tourism industry, it should therefore conduct a public review with local tour operators and guest house owners and hotels- either both existing partners, former partners or organisations which refuse to pay the visitor info centre for partnership status, to hear their concerns and to review why the visitor info centre is so unpopular.

Sincerely,

Alasdair de Voil,
Campaign for a Fair Marketplace and Director of ILoveOxford Tours

To: Council
Date: 8 February 2016
Title of Report: Public addresses and questions that do not relate to matters for decision – as delivered at the meeting

Response to 1 - Alasdair de Voil, I Love Oxford Tours Director

Mr de Voile has addressed the Council on the issue previously and all his points have been answered. He also tried unsuccessfully to commence a legal action on this, which was dismissed by the courts.

Service

The Council is not obliged to provide funding or support for tourism, but recognises tourism's contribution to the city's economy in supporting Experience Oxfordshire. The Experience Oxfordshire contract's primary aim is to seek to ensure that the combined service is delivered in an efficient and effective way, which best meets the requirements of visitors to Oxford and Oxfordshire and other customers. A number of key performance indicators were specified. Governance and arrangements created by the contract ensure that the City Council is able to monitor the performance of Experience Oxfordshire Ltd. In the event of a breach of contract, the City Council would have the right to seek redress.

Company Structure

Experience Oxfordshire is the main trading company, and its subsidiary Experience Oxfordshire Charitable Trust is the registered charity for charitable activity undertaken by the organisation.

Board Membership

None of the Board are existing or former City Councillors. The City Council nominates one Board Member, which is the Executive Director of Housing and Regeneration. There is no conflict of interest.

Walking Tours Income

Experience Oxfordshire is an independent company and is under no obligation to provide Mr de Voile or any other private individual with information. The company submits its annual accounts to Companies House and these are available for inspection.

Legal Liability

Mr de Voil asserts that the Council is legally liable. He is incorrect and further there is no evidence of misconduct. The courts have already rejected Mr de Voile's case and made clear that he will not be welcome if he pursues this.

Finally, there is no legal obligation on Experience Oxfordshire to advertise the services of competing tours in the same way as there is no legal requirement on the City Council to advertise the services of other local suppliers of the discretionary services we provide, e.g. pest control and commercial waste collection etc.

Experience Oxfordshire is a successful membership organisation with membership drawn from across the tourism economy in the city and county

If Mr de Voil thinks that he is not getting a good deal from his membership of Visit Oxfordshire, then the remedy is entirely in his own hands.

For information: Experience Oxfordshire Key Performance Indicators

- To open and operate the Tourist Information Centre on the Premises throughout the year other than on Christmas Day and on any other public holiday in keeping with past practice.
- To continue to run and operate City Centre walking tours
- To produce annual guides and publications to promote Oxford and Oxfordshire to key markets at home and overseas
- To attend key shows to promote Oxford and Oxfordshire – to involve attendance at Excursions and at one Group Travel Fair as a minimum
- To actively engage with Visit Britain and with Visit England to promote Oxford and Oxfordshire
- To produce an annual marketing plan for the Combined Service and to use reasonable endeavours to implement it

Address by Roger Parry, Summertown Stars AFC

Request to provide Facilities at Five Mile Drive Recreation Ground from September 2016

Summertown Stars is one of the largest youth football clubs in Oxfordshire. We have over 500 playing members and over 50 teams. As well as the club's overall growth, of particular note has been the strong development of girls' football – we now have 10 girls' teams and nearly 100 girls playing each week.

We have had a very successful partnership with Oxford City Council over many years. The essence of the partnership is that the Council provides pitches and facilities – which we pay for as we use - and we provide the football – i.e. we recruit the players, provide the coaching and organise the training and matches. In common with other youth football clubs we are a non-profit organisation, and all the work is undertaken entirely by volunteers – we do not have any paid staff.

One of the strands of our partnership is the development of Cutteslowe Bottom Pavilion. It is a £750k project and because Summertown Stars has achieved the highest level of quality assurance with the Football Association – Community Charter Standard – some £600k of external funding has been raised from Sport England and Football Foundation. This has meant that the Council's contribution is £150k or 20% of the project total.

Five Mile Drive Recreation Ground is a very important resource for the club. It has 6 football pitches and each weekend it is used by 22 of our teams comprising 50 girls and 180 boys between the ages of 5 to 13, and their parents. Overall about 40% of our footballing activity happens at Five Mile Drive.

The old pavilion was condemned a few years ago and its demolition is imminent. We are grateful that the Council has put a welfare unit in place but it has been made clear that this is only available until May 2016.

From September 2016 when our new season starts, there will be no facilities at all at Five Mile Drive.

This is an unacceptable situation and is out of step with our partnership with the Council to date. That is why we have created a petition – and to date we have had very strong levels of support with over 500 signatures.

In the petition we are calling on the Council to provide a basic pavilion at Five Mile Drive Recreation Ground from September 2016 comprising toilets, a small kitchen area, and equipment storage facilities.

As one of the parents who signed our petition said: 'at a time when young people are being encouraged to participate in sport for many reasons including physical and mental health and overall well-being, it is unthinkable that there will be no facilities on this site'

At Summertown Stars we are playing our part in organising youth football. We respectfully ask the Council to play their part and to provide decent facilities at Five Mile Drive.

Thank you very much.

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CLOSING TEMPLE COWLEY POOLS – THE CONSEQUENCES

I am speaking to Council this evening in my capacity as Director of the community interest company, set up to take over the operation, at no cost to the Council and taxpayers, of Temple Cowley Pools and Fitness Centre. In stark contrast to many other Labour controlled councils up and down the country, the Labour controlled Oxford City Council decided in December 2014 that they weren't interested in letting the community deliver the health and fitness facilities that we want and need, where we want and need them. Instead, you opted for a payment of £3.6m from Catalyst Housing in return for granting them planning permission for housing that is twice your permitted density. Obviously no conflict of interest there.

Catalyst are now intent, they say under your instruction, on destroying a perfectly sound building before even submitting a Planning Application. This makes absolutely no sense, if you really care about the community for which you are supposedly responsible for looking after. This is a building that is listed as an Asset of Community Value, recognised as such by the Council, and clearly a facility that the community feels can be run for their benefit.

What is this facility that we are talking about? Temple Cowley Pools was rebuilt in 1986, designed with a lifespan, if properly maintained, of over 50 years. It is a rare example of what at the time was a revolutionary design. As well as the 25m competition swimming pool, the sauna and steam suite, the gym and exercise studio, Temple Cowley Pools had the only publicly funded diving pool in the whole county. And because it is self-contained with a range of facilities, could easily be used for womens-only evenings. You, against widespread public opposition, closed this facility in December 2014.

We predicted the consequences of closure – elderly and infirm would suffer increased isolation and reduction in health, a reduction in fitness of the population as they exercise less frequently or not at all, increased carbon emissions as people in the area are forced to drive somewhere else, and an increase in crime. All of these things have happened over the last year, and of course remain unreported by you as you pursue your 'good news' culture.

We demonstrated this clearly with the Blue Hole, the area in which people, as a result of your actions in closing Temple Cowley Pools, now have to travel more than 15 minutes to get to where they want to exercise. Independent research shows unequivocally that if people are forced to travel more than 15 minutes, they don't go as frequently, or at all.

You recently endorsed this in your Leisure Strategy for the next five years, apparently a strategy that you feel is "world class", where you identified areas of Oxford that were more than 20 minutes' walk away from a swimming pool. And in approving your strategy you pronounced yourselves content that people should have to walk so far if they want to swim. I had naively assumed that in developing your strategy you would have the evidence and figures to support – so I asked how many people are affected by this. I should not have been surprised that you don't hold that information. You have determined through your strategy for the next five years that it is perfectly ok for an unknown number of the people, those you are elected to serve and for whom you are responsible for providing health and fitness facilities, to have to travel beyond where they should. And these are people from whom you have taken away a facility, knowingly, actively and deliberately removed their ability to exercise locally. And providing a new gym, at over £500,000, is not a replacement - you can't swim in a gym.

As you haven't worked out how many people are affected by your strategy, we have – working with figures from the council's statistician, over 40,000 of your citizens are no longer able to conveniently access the health and fitness facilities they want – not one of them asked you to take these facilities

CLOSING TEMPLE COWLEY POOLS – THE CONSEQUENCES

away, and despite the people clearly wanting Temple Cowley Pools kept open, and despite there being absolutely no evidence that the building was falling down or actually needed to close, you went ahead and took a political decision in 2009 – Labour in Oxford decided that Temple Cowley Pools would close – for no good reason other than you felt it was politically expedient.

We also asked you to track what the people who used to use Temple Cowley Pools are doing now – you have refused to do that, saying repeatedly that most of them transferred to the new pool at Blackbird Leys. Well, what actually happened was that without anyone's consent, when you closed Temple Cowley Pools you simply moved the database from Temple Cowley to Blackbird Leys – that is not the same as people actually using it. And where you are registered has no bearing on what public facilities you actually use. You obviously have no interest in finding out what people are doing now – as the community interest company, we exist to help the community, so we asked them. Our survey, backed up by many discussions, shows clearly that people are either not going anywhere else, or are not going as frequently. So, the general health of the area is going down (so inevitably placing more of a burden on social services and the NHS), you are not meeting your own measures for target groups exercising, and worse still, as predicted, the crime rate in the area has also gone up. Did you really want all of this to happen? The answer could have been really simple – work with the community, let us take it over and if we made it work then everyone would benefit. Sadly, your different course of action has led to these consequences, which you cannot by any measure call “world class”, and for which you as a Council are completely responsible.

But, you say, the property is sold so nothing to do with the Council. Well, in five years of challenging the Council on everything you have said about Temple Cowley Pools, I have clearly demonstrated that everything you have said is a combination of inaccurate, incomplete, misleading and untrue. And in this case you haven't failed to disappoint me, yet again. The site still belongs to you, the Council, and you are in control of anything that happens there – the sale will only go through if you grant a planning application – one that hasn't even been submitted yet, let alone approved. And there are extremely good grounds for refusal.

It doesn't make sense to anyone to demolish an Asset of Community Value before planning permission for the proposed replacement is granted. Catalyst have clearly said that you, the Council, are responsible for the timing of the demolition. Labour remains responsible for the fate of Temple Cowley Pools; and whether or not you demolish the building, the Blue Hole will still exist – and our campaign, the community campaign, will carry on as long as necessary to enable people in the area to have the health and fitness facilities they want and need, where they want and need them.

As a council, council officers and councillors alike, you hold in trust the assets of this city on behalf of the public, with a duty to provide services that the public want and need, where they want and need them. It is surely only reasonable that you support the community as much as possible, and give us every chance, if we are prepared to operate a facility that you feel unable to. To that end I am asking you this evening to instruct Catalyst immediately to stop what they are doing and wait until after planning permission has been finally approved.

Nigel Gibson
Director
SaveTCP Community Interest Company

www.savetemplecowleypools.webs.com

Good evening. My name is Becky Howe, and I am the President of Oxford University Student Union.

On 8th July 2015, when the emergency budget was announced, I was at an NUS Conference. I sat with other student leaders as we found out that the government proposed to abolish maintenance grants, and in doing so, destroying vital support to the most disadvantaged students. I'm sure I don't have to describe the mood in the room that day.

Since July, we have been campaigning to stop the abolition of maintenance grants. We met with Andrew Smith and Nicola Blackwood on September 18th, the national lobbying day to save maintenance grants. Andrew Smith wrote to Jo Johnson for us, expressing our deep concerns and disagreement, and Nicola Blackwood also agreed to raise our concerns with Jo Johnson. We joined thousands of other students on a national demo in London in early November, protesting to keep maintenance grants.

Yet, despite huge opposition from students across the country, and in the face of overwhelming condemnation of the socially regressive nature of the proposals, the government deemed it acceptable to try and push through the abolition of maintenance grants in a committee of 18 MPs. The only reason this motion was debated in the House of Commons was due to pressure from student unions across the country, with cross-party support from Labour, the SNP, the Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru, SDLP, the Green Party, and the DUP.

That the government has gone to such lengths to avoid scrutiny on this decision is incredibly concerning.

Furthermore, we're appalled that, despite making no mention of it in their manifesto, the government has taken away this vital support from the future applicants that need it the most. A larger loan is in no way an adequate replacement for a non-repayable grant. Under the new system, students from less well off backgrounds will owe thousands of pounds more to the government than their richer peers.

I'm sure that you're all aware of the arguments given on the national stage against this measure. I'd like to present the results of research Oxford University Student Union conducted over the summer. We surveyed a sample of 211 students in receipt of the maintenance grant. Their responses form my argument that the impact of the abolition of maintenance grants will be three-fold:

1. Debt aversion

- Research from NUS shows that students from the most disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds are the most likely to be debt averse. Without maintenance grants, this could have a huge impact on access to higher education amongst these students.
- We asked our students if, when applying to university, the promise of receiving a maintenance grant had influenced their decision. We asked them to think of this in terms of deciding whether or not to go to university, where to study, what to study, and whether to live at home. 61% said it had significantly influenced their decision, with a further 15% saying it partially influenced their decision.
- In our survey, many students expressed how vital the grant had been to them when deciding whether to come to university or not. One said: 'Without the grant, I would have been worried about the extra debt, and may not have decided to go. Receiving the grant also somehow makes you feel like you do have a right to come here, it sends a message that education is for everyone, that you shouldn't have to worry about how to survive at uni.'
- Another replied 'I think this would be the best possible way to dissuade as many low income background students from applying to university as possible. From the perspective of an applicant, it is almost impossible to see how gaining a university education could possibly be worth £53,000 of debt upon graduating. Especially given that, when applying, my mum had been supporting me on less than £15,000 a year, and I had never conceived of earning more than £30,000 a year.'

2. Financial impact whilst at university

- To my knowledge, in setting this policy, no research has been done on what the effects of these measures will be on **student retention rates** or indeed the impact they will have on the student experience.
- Two words that came out of the comment sections of our survey a staggering number of times were 'stress' and 'guilt'. Our students wrote that the grant had been a 'lifeline', allowing them to '(almost) pay rent every term'. Many replied that, without the maintenance grant, the stress of trying to live in

Oxford would have been overwhelming for them, and their families.

- In this respect, a loan can in no way replace a grant. A loan is just even more money to pay back in future, and our respondents were acutely aware of that. One respondent noted that he would have been incredibly wary of spending any of the money he would need to spend in order to live in Oxford, for fear that ‘every pound will come back and bite me in the future, with interest.’

3. Financial impact after university

- Students from the lowest income households will have to take out higher maintenance loans, so will leave university with thousands of pounds’ more debt than their wealthier peers

The decision reached by the House of Commons – with a margin of only 11 votes – is devastating.

In 2012, when the government trebled tuition fees, they themselves singled out maintenance grants and the lower repayment threshold as the mechanisms by which they would continue to ensure the higher education remains accessible. They have now abolished maintenance grants and retrospectively altered the loan repayment threshold. These actions, along with the proposals in the Green Paper, leave us seriously concerned about the direction on travel in the higher education sector.

Our MPs should stand with the students of Oxford in expressing their disgust at a government that has taken vital support from the students who need it most.

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Address by Patrick McDonald, Oxford Catalyst Ventures Ltd

ADDRESSING A GROWING SOCIAL INJUSTICE

BUILDING STARTER-HOMES FOR FIRST TIME BUYERS IN OXFORD

My name is Patrick McDonald. I have spent my youth, my inheritance and my dignity starting a children's charity called Viva. Viva helps children at risk in the developing world and had its first office on Pembroke Street where we operated from the now dysfunctional red phone box. That phone box was our first office but things have moved on since then. Today Viva helps some 4,500 community-based projects that help children at risk, about 1m+ children at risk.

But I am not here to talk to you about Viva.

I have in fact left Viva in 2012 as I wanted to use my skills to start new charities and social businesses addressing a whole range of challenges. To that end I have started a social innovation firm called Oxford Catalyst Ventures.

And being in Oxford we have been challenge to do something about the great need that we all know exists for first time buyers to 'get on the ladder'. To buy a 'starter home'.

As you know...

Oxford is full of bright young hard-working people with great ideas of how to make our world a better place. They come here from all across the country to work together and they build their lives amongst us. Moreover Oxford has some of the world's best hospitals staffed by young key workers who, like their peers of school teachers, council workers and bus drivers find Oxford an impossibly expensive place to live in.

As they can't afford to buy they are confined to renting and can easily spend up spending 50% of their modest income in not-always-brilliant rental accommodation.

Is this really the best we can do?

I don't think so.

Together with a number of relevant experts we have begun to explore what is possible and we have – to our happy surprise – found that it can be done.

What can be done?

It is possible to build homes, decent, even beautiful homes that are affordable for first time buyers. It has been done in London. It can be done here.

We are building a growing coalition of architects, planners, land owners, policy makers, media people and social investors looking to solve this issue.

We would propose the development of a social enterprise here in Oxford to build such homes. We have notionally called this new company Oxford Smart Housing.

Smart Housing would sell start-homes at a 20% discount to market prices. Only first-time buyers could purchase these homes and they could only be sold onto first-time buyers. As a social business we would be looking to proceed in a collegiate way and aim to improve social; human and environmental capital.

If we succeed in building such mores then that would take pressure of the ever growing social housing list, and if located right would minimise commuting and the pressure on public transport.

All good – BUT – why am I here today talking to the venerable elders of the city.

I am here today because this concept of Smart Housing can only happen if we begin to work together; if we find the political will to solve this problem.

We can put together the social business but can we find the political support to make this meaningful?

I am here tonight to find out.

Thank you.

Patrick McDonald,
Oxford Catalyst Ventures Ltd, Oxford, OX4 1LF

Address by Jane Alexander and Heather Dalitz, Oxford

Health Consequences of Poor Decisions

We have been hearing from numerous people about how they are adversely affected by poor decision making by others, namely Oxford City Council.

All sorts of people, including some who work for the council, have been telling us for some time about how they are unable to access any pool for exercise since the closure of their local swimming pools at Cowley.

In the style of Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn who clearly listens to the people, I would like you to hear this letter to Andrew Smith from Heather:

Dear Andrew

I am delighted to hear that you are still supporting a local swimming pool for East Oxford residents.

I have a newspaper cutting I keep and treasure of you beaming with delight as you jump into the Temple Cowley pool with three fellow Councillors. It would be lovely to be able to see you re-enact that leap.

My whole family from my young niece to her 90 year old granny treasure Temple Cowley pool. Generations of us have used it for fun, to keep fit, for exercise, for learning, for friendship and community service. We have gone there pregnant, glad to have aqua-natal classes to keep us exercising, our bumps buoyed up by the water, making invaluable new friends to share our first experience of maternity; we have taken our newborns there for aqua-babies and ducklings; we and our children have attended swimming classes there, from our first attempts to keep afloat to strenuous lengths timed against the clock; we have learned personal survival and life-saving skills to care for ourselves and benefit our communities; we have met friends in one of the heartbreakingly few locations where all ages can come together in the same place, young, old, with children and without; we have celebrated our children's birthdays with swimming parties and pirate ships. It is the last place I saw my dear friend Jacquie Porter, who did so much for Oxford and has the home in Rectory Road named after her, before she so sadly died. It is not just a pool. It is a place which has played a fundamental role in Oxford lives for decades and has an important place in all our hearts.

We need places like this. We need them where we can walk to them and cycle to them. They need to be in the community, not miles outside the ring road. We need to be reducing the amount of traffic on the roads, not increasing it. The pools will only be used if people can access them easily. Temple Cowley Pool is no more than a ten-minute cycle ride each way from East Oxford. Blackbird Leys is too far to cycle, especially with children, and by bus or car is well over an hour's round trip, given the amount of traffic on the roads.

Please, please, on behalf of me and my two children and my mother and countless other Oxford residents, please do whatever you can to ensure that we in East Oxford once again have access to a local swimming pool. And if there is anything you can

do to delay the wanton destruction of the finest pool in Oxford, with the widest choice of types of changing facilities, the best water quality, the loveliest views of sky and sunset ... please do so.

Best wishes

Heather

QUESTION TO COUNCIL FOR MONDAY 8th FEBRUARY

From Judith Harley, Cowley

Lord Mayor, Councillors,

Last year, in April, 2015, a notice went up in a small, landlocked corner of Cox's Yard, Temple Cowley to the effect that this corner was owned by Oxford City Council and that it would be fenced off from the main yard in due course, which it was. Since then this small corner of yard has been sitting idle. Cox's Yard is as an employment site, is designated as such in the Oxford Local Plan, is in the Temple Cowley Conservation Area, and since March 2015 has been protected from development by an Article 4 Direction issued by the City Council and approved by the Secretary of State.

On checking with the Land Registry, this tiny piece of land appears to have been owned by the City Council since July 2010. On behalf of the residents of Temple Cowley I am asking the following:

1. Why was this tiny piece of yard, in the Temple Cowley Conservation Area, purchased by the City Council?
2. Why is the land sitting idle?
3. What do the City Council propose to do with this plot, both immediately and longer term?
4. How much did the City Council pay for this piece?
5. Is this plot currently earning rent or any other income for the Council?
6. Has the City Council derived any income from this site since it was purchased?

Response:

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