

15. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF COUNCIL

(a) Question notified in time for replies to be provided with this Briefing Note

(1) **Question to the Board Member City Development (Councillor Colin Cook) from Councillor Jean Fooks**

Dial-a-Ride bus service

When will the City Council contract with the County Council Integrated Transport Unit for the provision of a second Dial-a-Ride bus for the elderly and less mobile citizens of Oxford?

Response: To be given orally at the meeting.

(2) **Question to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Price) from Councillor Graham Jones**

Break the bag habit campaign

Will the Leader kindly inform us if replies have been received from our MPs Andrew Smith and Nicola Blackwood in response to the Council's unanimous motion on the issue of plastic bags?

Response: To be given orally at the meeting.

(3) **Question to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Price) from Councillor Jean Fooks**

Town Hall café

The story of the Town Hall café has been an embarrassment to the City Council. How much has been spent on the several refurbishments to date, how many months has it actually been operational since it first opened?

Response: The Town Hall Café first opened in 2006 and was fully operational until November 2011. In October 2011, the contract with the caterers (Fosters) came to an end which provided an opportunity to look at the café provision. A procurement exercise was undertaken and this resulted in the appointment of a new caterer (Ambassador) to run the café. Ambassador proposed changes to the café offer, with an increased space, longer opening hours, higher quality food and a desire to host evening events. A refurbishment was agreed as part of this exercise (£37k allocated from the budgeted Town Hall repairs and maintenance programme) which would

give a return on investment based given on new rental figures within 3 years.

The café was closed in November 2011 whilst the procurement exercise and refurbishments were being progressed. A pop-up café operated in the space for 6 months in 2012. The refurbished café opened in October 2012. This long period of closure arose because of contractual, design and construction issues.

Unfortunately the new café suffered operating difficulties and was closed for a month in March 2013 whilst another contractor was identified. Lemon Zest now operate the facility successfully on behalf of the Council.

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(b) Questions notified by the deadline in the Constitution (replies to be given orally at Council)

(4) **Question to the Board Member, City Development (Councillor Colin Cook) from Councillor Jim Campbell**

Covered Market - Consultants

Can you tell us how much was paid to the Council's consultants to draw up the terms of the Council's 2012 Rent Review?

(5) **Question to the Board Member, City Development (Councillor Colin Cook) from Councillor Jim Campbell**

Covered Market – Rent increase

Can you as the portfolio holder explain to us how some proposed rents in the 2012 Rent Review have increased by more than 50% to cover a 5 year period when inflation was less than 20% and at a time of a severe economic downturn?

(6) **Question to the Board Member, City Development (Councillor Colin Cook) from Councillor Jim Campbell**

Covered Market – Arbitration expenses

Following the last Rent Review in 2007 the Council paid out £80,000 in arbitration expenses. Can you tell us how much has been paid so far following the 2012 Review, and how much the final sum is likely to be?

- (7) Question to the Board Member, City Development (Councillor Colin Cook) from Councillor Jim Campbell**

Covered Market - Tenancies

Can you please tell us how many new tenancies have been granted in the last five years to *independent local* traders?

- (8) Question to the Board Member, City Development (Councillor Colin Cook) from Councillor Jim Campbell**

Covered Market – Performance enhancement

In January 2012 a report on the Future of the Covered Market contained a list of 12 recommended next steps. In November it was decided to identify consultants who would prepare a Strategy for Performance Enhancement in the Covered Market. Why has this taken so long?

- (9) Question to the Board Member, City Development (Councillor Colin Cook) from Councillor Jim Campbell**

Covered Market – Market traders

You were quoted in the *Oxford Mail* of October 18th as saying that the crisis facing the Covered Market is partly due to “the age of some of the traders who are looking to retire and cash in their chips”. Do you accept that you made this remark and do you still stand by it?

- (10) Question to the Board Member, City Development (Councillor Colin Cook) from Councillor Elise Benjamin**

Support for Covered Market traders

Will the Portfolio Holder join me in supporting the Covered Market traders in their campaign to save the market from excessive rent rises?

(11) Question to the Board Member, City Development (Councillor Colin Cook) from Councillor Elise Benjamin

Covered Market – Rent increases of 50%

Does the Portfolio Holder agree that rent increases in the Covered Market in excess of 50% are inappropriate in the current economic climate and will place a large number of traders at risk of losing their businesses and their livelihoods, threatening the existence of the historic market?

(12) Question to the Board Member, City Development (Councillor Colin Cook) from Councillor Elise Benjamin

Covered Market – Benchmark data

Can the Portfolio Holder provide benchmark data from other local authorities to justify the average 50%, and in some cases as much as 70% proposed increases in Covered Market rents?

(13) Question to the Board Member, City Development (Councillor Colin Cook) from Councillor Elise Benjamin

Covered Market – Rent rise justification

Can the Portfolio Holder explain the thinking behind such extreme rent rises in the current economic climate?

(14) Question to the Board Member, City Development (Councillor Colin Cook) from Councillor Elise Benjamin

Covered Market – Precedent of rent rises

Is the Portfolio Holder aware of the precedent such rent rises will set and how worried other independent traders in Oxford are that if the Covered Market rent rises go ahead other landlords will increase rents at similar levels?

(15) Question to the Board Member, City Development (Councillor Colin Cook) from Councillor Elise Benjamin

Covered Market - Petition

Will the Portfolio holder be recommending to members of his group that they show support for local independent traders by signing the Covered Market petition?

(16) Question to the Board Member, Leisure (Councillor Van Coulter) from Councillor Elise Benjamin

Temple Cowley Gym replacement

Can the Portfolio Holder explain the difference between the £200,000 allocated in the budget to replace Temple Cowley Gym with new facilities at Oxford Spires, and the contribution towards the £200,000 cost reported in the recent Oxford Mail article about the new gym.

Response: The investment in OSA is not linked to the repair budget at Temple Cowley Pools. It is part of our commitment to support the provision in Cowley and to deliver the Leisure Strategy. The Leisure Strategy (2009) states; The City also needs to work more closely with schools to increasingly open up their sites to the community..... less than one minute drive from Temple Cowley is Oxford Community School. The school site is already open until 10.00pm offering commendable community access.....

(17) Question to the Board Member, Leisure (Councillor Van Coulter) from Councillor Elise Benjamin

Opening hours of the Gym at Oxford spires School

Can the Portfolio Holder inform me of the planned opening hours for the new Gym at Oxford Spires School, how this will fit in with the school timetable, and how this will differ from the current opening hours of the Temple Cowley Gym that it will apparently replace.

Response: The gym project is at an early stage and the opening hours have not been developed.

(18) Question to the Board Member, Leisure (Councillor Van Coulter) from Councillor Elise Benjamin

Oxford Spires Academy Gym and public safety

Can the Portfolio Holder explain what plans are in place to safeguard school children at Oxford Spires Academy once the gym is open to the public.

Response: This is not a new matter for the school and they have effectively used the school as a community facility for many years. They will of course review their safeguarding arrangements as the plans for the facility progresses.

(19) Question to the Board Member, Housing (Councillor Scott Seamons) from Councillor Craig Simmons

Community co-owned housing – Barton development

Will you consider including community owned co-housing in the Barton development and/or look for suitable sites in Oxford where co-housing could be sited?

(20) Question to the Board Member, Housing (Councillor Scott Seamons) from Councillor Craig Simmons

Rogue Landlord prosecutions

Will the portfolio holder join with me in welcoming tough action on rogue landlords. But could he also explain what went wrong in the recent prosecution of an East Oxford 'slum landlord' that resulted in him being given a lighter sentence because Oxford City Council failed to inform magistrates he had previous convictions.

(21) Question to the Board Member, Cleaner Greener Oxford (Councillor John Tanner) from Councillor David Williams

Air quality measurement

Measuring air quality is an important function of the local Authority. A few years ago the authority moved from just measuring the quality of the air in the obvious centres such as Carfax to also monitoring standards in numerous other hot spots around the City such as the Plain , Summertown Shops , Weirs Lane and Headington Shops.

The reported failure of the UK to hit targets set by the EU on air quality will very soon become a major issue with perhaps the Government passing on the fine they face to local authorities and holding them responsible for

their failure to meet the EU health standards.

Could the Portfolio holder confirm that the local authority has been monitoring the local hot spot away from the City Centre. Could he give the measurements taken at those localities and the dates and time of the testing.

Could the Portfolio holder also give an assurance that Oxford has met the EU standards and will not be involved in any dispute with central government about meeting targets.

(22) Question to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Price) from Councillor Craig Simmons

Cycle King shop fire – Fire Service

Will the Leader join me in congratulating the fire service for their prompt action in tackling the serious fire at Cycle King on the Cowley Road on 31st March which was contained without loss of life or serious injury.

(23) Question to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Price) from Councillor Craig Simmons

Cycle King shop fire – Compensation for other traders

Will the Leader consider what can be done to compensate those businesses either side of Cycle King who were forced to close due to the fire - many of whose trade remains affected by the pavement closure.

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