Questions to Board Members.

1 Question to Board Member for Communities (Councillor Bev Clack) from Councillor David Williams

Donnington Recreation Ground

Would the Board Member care to elaborate what plans he has for the development of Donnington Recreation Grounds and the supposed rebuilding of the Community Association Building in a new grandiose format.

Could he give details of the planned leasing arrangements with the Community Association for the management of this grand pavilion and indicate how much will be spent and where the money is coming from.

Could the Portfolio holder also explain why the plans for this new venture have only been discussed in private with former Labour Councillor Bill Baker and the Chair of the present Community Association and why the local Councillors for the area (myself and Councillor Elise Benjamin) have been excluded from these discussions.

Further to the point could the Portfolio holder give a precise timescale for the implementation of this project with a clear commitment that a period of local consultation will be included in the proposal?

Reply

The Committee of the Donnington Community Association has been pressing for some time for improvements to the site and to their building, and discussions have taken place over the past year with the Chair and the Secretary about the scope for partially funding an improved centre from additional housing. No plan has yet emerged from those discussions, and there will be a strategic review this coming year of our community centres that will include Donnington. The Chair and Secretary at Donnington are also the main officers of the Federation and I have had discussions with them about this review since taking on this portfolio.

2 Question to Board Member for City Development (Councillor Cook) from Councillor Elise Benjamin

Covered Market rent rises.

Will the Portfolio Holder please provide an update on negotiations with the Covered Market traders, who are fighting the Council's attempt to increase rents by up to 70%?

Reply

Five reviews are currently going to arbitration. The outcome of the arbitration is expected in July. At the request of the CMTA tenants, the Council has agreed to a separate consolidated arbitration in respect of the CMTA reviews with the same arbitrator. The respective agents are in contact regarding the consolidated arbitration to agree the process going forward.

3 Question to Board Member for City Development (Councillor Cook) from Councillor Elise Benjamin

Covered Market Charter

Will the Portfolio Holder please reassure the Council that, unlike his predecessor, he will ensure that the Covered Market Charter is followed, and that no more chain stores are allowed into the Covered Market, thus preserving its character?

Reply

I am not aware of the document Cllr Benjamin refers to. If Cllr Benjamin is referring to the Covered Market Leasing Strategy I can reassure her that all lettings have been, and will continue to be, in compliance with that Strategy.

4 Question to Board Member for Corporate Governance and Strategic Partnerships (Councillor Bob Price) from Councillor Craig Simmons

Supporting Oxford's Turkish Community

Will the Labour and Liberal Democrat leaders join me in supporting Oxford's Turkish Community who recently staged a vigil in Cornmarket street in support of those peaceful protesters in Gezi park and Taksim Square, suffering violence at the hands of the Erdogan Government?

Reply from Councillor Bob Price, Leader of Council

I am sure that all members of Council will support the right of the Turkish people to express peaceful opposition to the policies of the current government, and will deplore the use of violence leading to some deaths in breaking up these protests.

Questions to the Board Member for Corporate Governance and Strategic Partnerships, and Leader of Oxford City Council, (Councillor Bob Price) from Councillor Dick Wolff.

Castle Mill development, Roger Dudman Way

(a) Regarding the planning process for the Castle Mill development:-

Could the leader confirm that the construction of the Oxford University buildings on the former railway siding at Roger Dudman Way not only went ahead but that the structural works were completed without carrying out the required land contamination surveys and resulting remediation prior to the start of development, despite the fact that both officers and applicants believed the land to be contaminated (as minuted in a meeting between officers and developers on February 5th 2011) and the Phase 1 Environmental Review (dated July 2011) recommended that "the presence of . . historical contamination should be investigated in detail"?

Could he also confirm that the Planning Committee was not informed, that the University had not only failed to research contamination adequately and supply the necessary information within the required time, but had also erroneously declared on their application dated 1st Nov 2011 that contamination was *not* "suspected for all or part of the site" when both officers and applicant knew this to be incorrect?

Would the leader confirm that it is therefore not possible to justify the claim (made by both City Council and University developers) that correct planning process was followed with respect to this application?

Given the persistent claims being made that the planning process was *not* flawed, would the leader therefore agree with the MP for Oxford West & Abingdon that an independent inquiry into the whole handling of this application by Oxford City Council "may be the only way we will get to the bottom of it", and would he agree that the very fact that this statement has been so publicly made by a local MP brings our Council into disrepute?

Reply

The report to West Area Planning Committee in February 2013 advised that there were a number of conditions, including number 16, where details were still required to be formally submitted and agreed. It did not advise Members that information required by part of condition 16 had not been received in a timely manner as the University was seeking to remedy this. Officers gave a verbal assurance that the conditions were being complied with, in good faith. A subsequent review of the evidence shows that in the case of

one of the conditions (Condition 16) the University was late in submitting information and the Council has requested additional analyses, so the condition is not discharged. It is open to the University to remedy this, which it has been doing through further analyses and reports. The University had completed a risk assessment before commencing development, but had not agreed the content of the report and submitted this to the Council prior to starting on site.

If there has been a breach of a part of this condition it is open in the first instance to the University to remedy this after the event. Retrospective compliance is a possibility in view of the nature of the breach and its timing. While the matter is still under investigation there is no ground for litigation or pursuing the partial demolition of the development.

(b) Regarding the *potential environmental hazard* presented by the Castle Mill development :

Would the leader confirm that the builders of the Castle Mill development have chosen, against the recommendations of the ground investigation undertaken by the Frankham Consultancy Group to set the buildings on piles, to set the buildings on spread foundations some 2m below ground level and below the water table by a depth of between 2m and 4m, and that this use of excavated deep foundations (as opposed to piles) made a completed contaminated land risk assessment even more important prior to building?

Could he also confirm that the developer has still not satisfied the Council or the Environment Agency that the development does not represent an environmental hazard?

Will the Council, given the risk to public health and environment, consider issuing a stop notice as for 10 months the University has been given the opportunity to deal with the breach of condition retrospectively without resolving this serious matter?

Reply

It was agreed some time ago that there would be an enquiry that would review the planning processes and would seek to identify lessons to be learnt and potential changes to future procedures for handling planning applications. The structure and terms of reference of that enquiry are under discussion and it is of cousre intended to be thorough.

(c) Regarding the *visibility* of the Castle Mill Development:

Would the leader confirm that, contrary to the wording in the planning proposal "will not be visible from the majority of Port Meadow", that the Roger Dudman Way buildings are in fact highly visible from most of Port Meadow even as far as Wolvercote and from the other side of the river, as well as from every other vantage point (Oxford Canal, railway station etc.)?

Therefore would the leader please suggest any measures which could be taken to restore the views of the 'Dreaming Spires' and Grade I listed St Barnabas tower from Port Meadow, which would not involve lowering the roofs of the buildings? And if unable to do so would he agree that in order to restore the view the roofs must be lowered?

Does he believe that the choice of white painted walls and reflective roofs is the best choice for minimising the visibility of the buildings? If he does not, would he agree that the developer appears to have made not the slightest effort to minimise their visual impact?

Reply

The officers' report to West Area Planning Committee of 15th February 2012 referred at some length to the matter of its built form and visual impacts, including views from Port Meadow. Paragraphs 7 to 18 of that report in particular referred to these issues and concluded by indicating that a judgement had to be made by members of the committee:

"....as to whether the degree of change to the views and landscape setting in this direction which would result from the proposed development is sufficient to warrant refusal of planning permission, taking into account other benefits and objectives to be weighed in the balance. Certainly it is not the case that the development would be entirely hidden from view from Port Meadow or that there would be no impact from the development on the landscape setting and on public views. Rather officers have come to a conclusion, on balance, that with the mitigation described in place then in similar fashion to the extant permission the impact is not such that taken in context with the benefits of the development in provided much needed purpose built student accommodation at an allocated site that planning permission should be denied."

The report to committee included views of Oxford from the Port Meadow "View Cone" at Wolvercote with advice on the character and significance of the view so that the officers' recommendation could be understood and Members could in turn weigh in the balance the positive and negative impacts with an understanding of the heritage significance of the view.

Members were not misled about the height of the development. The report clearly stated that the development would not be screened from view from Port Meadow, though the intended mitigation would assist in the development sitting more comfortably within its wider context. Rather in this view it would sit between a line of trees and greenery set along the edge of Willow Walk in front of it and a second line of trees and greenery along the eastern side of the railway line set behind it. An image was submitted with the planning application which showed the intended position of the development compared with the extant 2002 planning permission. This constituted a suitable representation of the intended development to assist committee in coming to its decision on the application.

In addition attached to the report to the Committee in Feb 2013 was an image taken on 24th January 2013 of the development as built. These and other images were displayed at the committee and showed that the tree line and that the 'red line' photograph were accurate.

The Head of City Development submitted a report to the West Area Planning Committee on 7th February 2013 which reviewed the 2012 planning permission (reference11/02881/FUL). The Committee resolved:-

To instruct the Head of City Development to negotiate with the University of Oxford in order to ameliorate the size and impact of the development given planning permission under 11/02881/FUL

To instruct the Head of City Development to submit a report back to this Committee at the earliest opportunity on the progress of his negotiations, and by the scheduled April 2013 meeting at the latest

To establish a working party to recommend to the Council any changes to procedures or policies which the process of handling and determining the application 11/02881/FUL (including the pre-application and consultation stages) might suggest would be desirable.

The University has commissioned consultants, LDA Design, to prepare a Landscape Mitigation Strategy. This will consider a wide range of options for mitigation, including options on the buildings, on site, near but off site and also further afield.

(d) <u>Is the leader content that the Castle Mill development should stand</u> in its present form as a permanent memorial to his term of office as Leader of Oxford City Council?

If so, will he encourage the Council's tourism officer to build on the little stream of people currently visiting Port Meadow in order to wonder at this example of contemporary "environmentally sensitive" (sec. Longcross builders) architecture by promoting such visits and including views of the development in the city's tourism literature?

If he is not so content, what remediation measures does he believe could be undertaken that might restore his pride, and what steps has his administration taken so far in this direction?

Reply

Development Control is not an executive function and hence is not determined by the policies of the administration. The planning process is regulated in a quasi-judicial manner through the application of Council approved policies, and, in particular, the Core Strategy. The West Area Planning Committee will no doubt be able to comment on the mitigation measures proposed by the University of Oxford, as the developers of this scheme.

6 Question to Board member for Finance and Efficiency (Councillor Ed Turner) from Councillor Craig Simmons

Council Tax exempt houses

Can the Portfolio Holder please tell me how frequently the Council checks that properties with council Tax exemptions are still eligible?

Reply

With the exception of Student exemptions, all awards of Council Tax discounts and exemptions are reviewed on an annual rolling review basis.

Student exemptions are awarded to the end date of the course they are attending or end of the tenancy, whichever is the sooner.

7 Question to the Portfolio Holder for Youth and Communities (Councillor Bev Clack) from Councillor Dick Wolff

Communities and Neighbourhoods Team

Can the Portfolio Holder please explain how a reduction in the Communities and Neighbourhoods team will impact on support for area fora?

Reply

The original restructure documents were agreed by a cross-party group. There is no reduction in the Communities and Neighbourhoods team in terms of fulltime equivalent posts. What we have done is to realign resources to focus on council priorities especially for areas of greatest need. The Communities & Neighbourhoods Team will provide the following resource to Area Forums:

- There will continue to be a co-ordinated support service to the organisational aspects of Area Forums;
- Support to the annual planning meeting for agreeing Area Forums topic/location etc;
- Publicising meetings and minutes via the website, using social media, production of standard posters and emailing residents on database;
- CAN will administrate the booking of venues for Area Fora up to a total cost of £150 per annum (Additional costs will have to be met through ward members' budgets);
- We have also developed an Area Support Officer post within the new structure which is currently being advertised. This post will carry out the organisational aspects for the Area Fora. In the meantime the planning meetings for the Area Fora have been arranged and are taking place;
- In addition each Area Forum meeting will be attended by a member of the council's Corporate Management Team to provide a strategic oversight and deal with any service issues/questions arising.

8 Question to Board Member for Housing (Councillor Scott Seamons) from Councillor Craig Simmons

Council House Rent Increases

In the light of the unexpected £1million surplus in the Housing Revenue Account reported to CEB on 12th June, will the Portfolio Holder reconsider the above inflation rent (average 4.6%) and service charge (average 3/.6%) increases it had levied on Council house tenants this year?

Reply

I think it is important to make clear that the £1.2m benefit to the HRA wasn't unexpected but couldn't be guaranteed. It was a result of our prudent accounting which made provision to cover the risk of an adverse result of a rent review at Southfield Park and a successful negotiation that meant that the provision was not needed. The Council tonight will be asked to confirm a CEB decision to allocate some of this money for service improvements such as tenancy fraud and environmental works on estates and a much needed stock survey that will enable us to have even more effective targeting of our housing investment programmes.

I think it is also important to point out that this was a one off benefit and if used to effectively reduce rents then that would erode the income base of the HRA going forward and would restrict our abilities to provide excellent services, invest in our existing housing and continue to build new housing for those most disadvantaged in the City. The City Council with average rents of £96.83 continues to offer good value for money when compared with other social housing providers and certainly the private rented sector. Indeed in a recent survey 77% of our tenants thought this was the case.

9 Question to Board Member for Housing (Councillor Scott Seamons) from Councillor Sam Hollick

Re-classifying spare rooms

In response to the Government's appalling new bedroom tax, will the Portfolio Holder consider the approach taken by Leeds Council to help vulnerable tenants and look into the possibility of re-classifying "spare" rooms as "non-specific" rooms in Council housing?

Reply

There is an assumption in the question that is not correct. As one of the leading authorities as a national pilot in welfare reform we have examined a whole range of measures that will mitigate the impact of the changes on our residents including the actions that Leeds and other Authorities have taken. Clearly Oxford is in a very different situation to Leeds in not having lots of difficult to let stock and in already having a classification system that is much tighter in its interpretation. The reclassification is not as simple as it sounds and could carry with it risks of retrospective claims for reductions. The net effect would be a reduction in the income base which would impact negatively on our HRA business plan and put at risk our continuing aspiration to provide excellent services, a well maintained stock and new council housing going forward. Our strategy to mitigate the impact of welfare reform agreed by Council is to target resources to help

people on a case by case basis with exchanging homes, moving homes and helping people get back to work.

10 Question to Board Member for Housing (Councillor Scott Seamons) from Councillor Sam Hollick

Container Housing

Has the Portfolio Holder considered any innovative solutions to meeting the City's housing crisis, for example the provision of high quality "container" housing, which the Public Sector and Local Government magazine called "a cost effective and sustainable approach to building design"?

Reply

This Council cannot be accused of lacking in innovation given our ground breaking joint venture with Grosvenor Estates to build 350 new Council homes to a very high standard and for social rent, and our own new build programme that will provide 112 new units over the next 2 years. Our main problem of course is the availability of land and we will explore all opportunities to maintain a supply programme going forward.

11 Question to Board Member for Housing (Councillor Scott Seamons) from Councillor Sam Hollick

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

The board member will be aware of the case brought to councillors' attention in an email on 15th June, where the council's policy on HMOs is requiring people to move out of a house where they are living as a family, because they are not considered a family by the definition of the policy. Could the board member explain what options they are considering to prevent council policy from causing disruption to peoples lives as in this case?"

Reply from Councillor Ed Turner

Firstly, it is not the council's policy that defines a house in multiple occupation and what constitutes a family; this is defined in national legislation made under the Housing Act 2004.

The Council has a policy of licensing houses in multiple occupation, which clearly needs to be applied consistently, but with appropriate flexibility.

The situation in this case is rather more complicated than it would appear: although the person affected has raised it in both the press and with many councillors, I do not think it is appropriate to divulge personal details in this forum, but am happy to speak with the councillor about the details outside the meeting, and will also be writing to the person affected.

12 Question to the Board Member for Cleaner, Greener Oxford (Councillor John Tanner) from Councillor Craig Simmons

Electric vehicle charging points

Will the Portfolio Holder please explain the reason for the delay in the installation of electric vehicle charging points, and when we can expect to see the promised number installed?

Reply

The City Council has provided charging points at car parks as we said we would. ChargeMaster has responsibility for any increase in the numbers of electric charging points.

The existing network was installed by Scottish and Southern Energy (SSE) now owned by ChargeMaster consists of dual charging points at each of the following Council owned car parks:

- Pear Tree, Redbridge and Seacourt Park and Ride
- Headington Car Park
- Summertown Car Park
- Union Street
- Westgate Car Park
- Worcester Street Car Park

Usage figures for June 2011 to December 2012 (79 charging sessions in total).

Westgate	9
Worcester Street	36
Summertown	19
St Clements	5
Headington	0
Unions Street	1
Peartree	1
Seacourt	1
Redbridge	7

13 Question to Board Member for Finance and Efficiency (Councillor Ed Turner) from Councillor Jim Campbell

Oxford Pound

Following recent interest in the media and the apparently successful introduction of the Bristol Pound in collaboration with the Bristol Credit Union, will you consider looking into the feasibility of introducing the Oxford Pound in this city?

Reply

This is an interesting idea, and I understand one which is currently taken up by 0.2% of Bristol's population (although arguably one with some pitfalls, for instance in the appropriate payment of tax!). However, given the savage cuts imposed upon Oxford City Council by the Tory / Lib Dem coalition, and recent reports of at least a further 10% average to be hacked off government grant, I do not think I should ask finance officers to prioritise the promotion of such a scheme when there are more urgent priorities. However, if another organisation were to take on the promotion of this, or if the Scrutiny Committee decided it should be a priority, I am sure we would look at such work with interest.

14 Question to Board Member for Cleaner, Green Oxford (Councillor John Tanner) Cllr Jean Fooks

Charging point for electric vehicles in North Oxford

Oxford is committed to reducing its carbon footprint each year for the foreseeable future. One way to do this is to encourage electric vehicles. North Oxford is trying to set up an e-car club, which needs charging points for the vehicles. There is a charging point in the Diamond Place car park but it is not reserved for electric vehicles so is not always available – and an allocated space is needed. Apparently the Council is claiming that to reserve this space for electric vehicles would lose the city £3,500 per year so it is not being progressed.

This seems totally at odds with the aims of the City Council – why is the Council not supporting this venture? Is the £3,500 figure really accurate?

Reply

I am continuing to pursue this issue with officers and I will advise Cllr Fooks when I have made satisfactory progress

15 Question to the Board Member for Finance and Efficiency (Councillor Ed Turner) from Cllr Jean Fooks

Westgate Temporary Car Park

The administration is proposing to put almost the entire underspend of £3.3m for 2012/13 towards temporary car parking to facilitate the Westgate development. How was this figure arrived at? Where can Council and the public see the itemised costs?

Reply

In advance of completion of the revised legal documentation for the Westgate redevelopment between the Council and the Westgate Oxford Alliance, an informal report was considered by the Cross Party Working Group on 13th May 2013 in relation to Westgate which, amongst other things, set out suggested proposals for both temporary car and coach parking during the scheme of redevelopment. The estimate of the costs of the works quoted was based on professional knowledge and enquiry but with only limited information on site conditions and the like that was available at the time. Following completion of the conditional development documentation with the Alliance full design has now been commissioned, detailed investigations are taking place and detailed costs are being produced. Clearly the final cost will depend both on the outcome of the investigations and also the extent of provision which is necessary, so no breakdown can yet be given.

The intention is that a report will be presented in September to seek approval to the inclusion of the scheme within the Council's capital programme. Pending that approval, the Council has prudently established a suitable earmarked reserve to cover the cost of these works. The Council's support in this matter is set in the overall context of the investment and the outcomes of the Scheme, and the desire by the Council to endeavour to protect, to the extent possible during the construction phase, the prosperity of Oxford and the City Centre. I would also note that, were the Westgate not to proceed, we would need to earmark substantial investment to bring the existing Westgate car park up to scratch.

16 Question to Board Member for Cleaner, Green Oxford (Councillor John Tanner) Cllr Jean Fooks

Bulky Waste Collection service

What kinds of domestic waste can be collected by the Bulky waste collection service?

Reply

Bulky waste refers to items that are too large to be taken away with the normal refuse collection. This can mean items such as furniture, beds and mattresses, white goods, fridges and freezers.

We collect the following white goods.

- a. Washing Machine
- b. Dish Washer
- c. Micro Wave
- d. Cooker
- e. Hob
- f. Tumble Dryer

We also collect televisions, computers and screens from **residential properties**.

Due to WEEE regulations we are not able dispose of small electrical items in landfill. Examples of items covered by the WEEE regulations - Deep Fat fryers, Electric fires, Fans & Fan Heaters, Hi-Fi's, Hoovers, Irons, Kettles, Lamps, Printers, Speakers, Stereos. Some of the Bring Bank sites around the city offer **small** electrical recycling facilities.

We are unable to collect the following items through the Bulky Waste Collection Service as they cannot be disposed of at landfill sites.

Asbestos	Laminate Flooring
Air Conditioning Units	Lawn Mowers (Electric & Petrol)
Baths	Mirrors from built in wardrobes - this does not included mirrors on wardrobe doors. These types of mirrors and wall hanging mirrors must be wrapped in newspaper and taped down to prevent shattering when crushed.
BBQ's - Gas, Electrical and drum BBQ's	Oil - Cooking Oil, Car, Diesel
Black Bags - must specify what is in a bag, collection of general rubbish is not allowed on the Bulky Service.	Paint

Boilers	Paving Slabs
Bricks	Photo Copiers
Building Rubble	Pianos
Car Parts	Planks of Wood
Cardboard - large amounts must	Polystyrene
be flat packed and placed out on	
the blue box collection day	
Ceiling/Plaster Board	Radiators
Cast Iron items / Iron made	Roof guttering/down pipes
Carpet or carpet underlay	Rubbish Bags - must specify what
	is in a bag, collection of general
	rubbish is not allowed on the Bulky
	Service.
Concrete	Sheds
Copper Piping	Sun Tanning Beds
Doors - internal or external	Sinks - kitchen or bathroom
Down Pipes	Storage Heaters - only if the heating
	bricks are removed, we will not
	collect the bricks
Electrical Items - Due to WEE	Tiles - wall or floor
regulations we are not able	
dispose of electrical items in landfill. Examples of items	
covered by the WEE regulations -	
Deep Fat fryers, Electric fires,	
Fans & Fan Heaters, Hi-Fi's,	
Hoovers, Irons, Kettles, Lamps,	
Printers, Speakers, Stereos.	
Exercise equipment - depending if	Toilets
it is made of aluminium or	
steel and if can be lifted	
Fencing Panels	Tyres
Gas Bottles	Water Heating Boilers
Garden Waste - more than what	Windows
will fit into a garden bag i.e. trees	
or bushes	
Garages and Garage Doors	Wooden Flooring
Heating Boilers	
Kitchen Work Tops or Units	
Ladders	

We aim to recycle as much of the bulky waste we collect as possible, but if it is not suitable for reuse or recycling then it will go to landfill. Each household is entitled to 2 free collection visits per year of up to 3 items per visit.

17 Question to the Board Member for Corporate Governance and Strategic Partnerships (Councillor Bob Price) from Cllr Jean Fooks

Email messages to Councillors

We have recently discovered that messages sent by officers to all councillors have not been getting through- they have disappeared into the ether. How did this happen and will all 'lost' messages be resent? What measures are being taken to ensure that the new electronic system provides Councillors with all the reports and attachments they need?

Reply

The "Councillor all members e mail address is limited to be used by only certain groups of officers to avoid Councillors being included in group e mails that are only relevant to a smaller group of Councillors.

Officers are being reminded that if they wish to send an "all Councillor" e mail that this needs to be sent via either;

- The Democratic services team
- The Communications team
- Their Service Head

Any other officer that uses this e mail address will receive an automatic e mail advising that their e mail has not been sent as they do not have the authorisation to do this.

The officer that sent an e mail to all Councillors which raised the concern that e mails to Councillors were not getting through the e mail system did not spot the automatic e mail he received after sending the e mail advising him that his e mail had not got though as he was not authorised to send e mails to this e mail address.

Officers attaching a copy of an earlier e mail within any message to a Councillor has been advised that they must attach this as a word document or PDF so that this can be read on an iPad.