

## 20. QUESTIONS ON NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF COUNCIL

### (1) **Question to the Board Member, Youth and Communities (Councillor Bev Clack) from Councillor David Williams**

#### Local Child Poverty Commission

Given that the number of children living in poverty in Oxford has increased and is predicted to continue rising, and that we in Oxford are lucky to be well-placed for people and organisations both able and keen to help, does the Portfolio holder consider that the Council would be willing to join forces with a cross-party, cross-community commission to enquire into local child poverty and to suggest positive actions ?

**Response:** The levels of child poverty in the United Kingdom and in Oxford are indeed shocking, and have of course been increasing steadily since the election of the Coalition Government and their successive reductions in social security spending. Addressing poverty lies at the heart of Labour's mission, as was highlighted in Ed Miliband's conference speech, and I am glad that other parties share our commitment to the creation of a more equal society in which no child is condemned to suffer the indignities of poor housing, clothing and nutrition. A very large programme of work has been undertaken since 2007 in the city to tackle child poverty under the auspices of the OSP's Tackling the Cycle of Deprivation programme, and substantial funding from the Labour Government's LAA allocations. A large amount of information is already available and can be accessed through data bank held by Mark Fransham. I think that this would be a good moment for the Scrutiny Committee to undertake an enquiry into the causes and consequences of child poverty as it is experienced in Oxford, using the data and the evidence from the many colleagues in the City, County and NHS, who have been involved in the Tackling the Cycle programme.

### (2) **Question to the Board Member, City Development (Councillor Colin Cook) from Dick Wolff**

#### Discontinuance Notice – Roger Dudman Way

In the light of the past 12 months of revelations regarding the planning process for the Roger Dudman Way buildings which are intrusively blocking heritage and 'protected' views from Port Meadow, including:

- The lack of an Environmental Impact Assessment (which would have included light pollution, heritage views and soil contamination)
- The impossibility of meaningful 'mitigation' of the damage caused

- The unresolved soil contamination issues
- The inaccurate and misleading wording of the Oxford University proposal 'will not be visible from the majority of Port Meadow'
- The ignoring of the City Council Heritage Officer's report stating 'There is no justification for this harm'.
- The plans that were amended by officers taking the small pinnacle off the top point of the roofs, as an unofficial response to this so that the report above could be left out of papers seen by Councillors -The intrusion of the buildings into the 'protected' view cone
- The lack of proper informing and meaningful consultation for this major development
- The fact that no other developer has been allowed to build thus intrusively next Port Meadow even though Berkeley Homes would have liked to (but was prevented quite rightly by this same City Council)

Can Council confirm if and when they will issue a discontinuance notice on the buildings?

**Response:** No. The Council has taken expert legal opinion and is advised that there should be no consideration given to discontinuance until it has received the University's voluntary Environmental Impact Assessment. To consider discontinuance now would be prejudicial to a fair consideration of that Assessment

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

Gloucester Green Market - consultation

How were the Gloucester Green traders consulted about the proposed change of management?

**Response:** A verbal response will provided at the Council meeting.

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

Diamond Place Car Park – Electric Car Line marking

When will the promised white lines marking the electric car charging point in Diamond Place car park be painted?

**Response:** The white lines marking in this car park will be completed by 11<sup>th</sup> October 2013.

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

15 St Clements Street

What is the present state of discussions regarding the painting of the ground-floor frontage of 15 St Clements Street?

**Response:** A Planning Enforcement Officer met with the owner last week and his artist. It was agreed that he would paint all the pillars and surrounds a cream colour by Fri 27<sup>th</sup>. He will then come up with a new design which he will show to the officer before proceeding. He is looking at an Oxford architectural theme but that may change. We will need to determine whether the new design is an advert or just painting.

**(6) Question to the Board Member, Parks and Sports  
(Councillor Mark Lygo) from Councillor David Williams**

Fighting Ash Tree Disease

Last year a commitment was given that the Council would stage a series of briefings regarding their operational policy to local conservation and wildlife groups with regard to 'Ash Tree Die Back' (Chalara Fraxinea) prior to the disease entering Oxfordshire. Now the disease is here in the County could the portfolio holder give an indication how many of these consultative briefings have been held with the numerous nature conservation and protection groups that exist in the City?

**Response:** We said that the Council would follow national guidance and promote the relevant information and guidance on our website. This was done and we are continuing to do this. See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/chalara-management-plan>

We have also established a Green Spaces Network with the County Council, Oxford Preservation Trust, Berkshire Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust and the Campaign to Protect Rural England to share information on the control and incidence of Ash Die Back.

**(7) Question to the Board Member, Parks and Sports  
(Councillor Mark Lygo) from Councillor Sam Hollick**

Events in Bonn Square

The Bonn Square Events Protocol clearly states that the first step of the events application process is as follows:

*Step 1=WHAT (What Events are Permitted in Bonn Square)*

- *The event should be beneficial to the community and help promote the city through the creative use of public space*
- *The event must fall into at least one of the following categories:*
  - 1) *Arts and Cultural –an event that incorporates at least one of the following: music, dance, visual art, theatre, film, concert, educational display, educational workshop, pantomime*
  - 2) *Historic –an event that has some reference to heritage or historic significance in terms of people, space or place*
  - 3) *Charitable- an event that involves increasing awareness or fundraising for an authorised charity organisation*

However, there has recently been a large number of applications for commercial events that do not meet these criteria, yet have been given approval.

Could the board member:

- (i) justify why decisions have been made against the publicly available protocol?
- (ii) guarantee that future decisions will be made in line with the protocol?
- (iii) any changes to the protocol will go through full public consultation?

**Response:** The current protocol does state temporary commercial events will be allowed but unfortunately the previous protocol remains online.

I have asked Officers to update the website to reflect current practice which is that we will trial occasional commercial events in agreement with the New Road Baptist Church with whom we have a joint agreement.

The extant protocol states the following:

- 4) *Temporary commercial activities - will only be permitted where deemed appropriate for the space such as e.g. small funfair rides and specialist trade activities taking place as part of a larger city centre festivals or events. Each temporary commercial activity will be considered on an individual basis. No long-term commercial activity will be allowed under any circumstances*

These events bring in additional revenue both for the Church and the City Council which the Church reinvests in the fabric of its building and the City Council reinvests in the provision of other events in the City.

**(8) Question to the Board Member, Parks and Sports (Councillor Mark Lygo) from Councillor Jean Fooks.**

Cotteslowe Community Association – Outdoor Gym

Cotteslowe Community Association has prepared an application to Wren for an outdoor gym, which is eagerly awaited in the area. Can Councillor Lygo assure them that all subsequent costs of maintenance, repair and insurance will not fall on the Community Association, whose funding is very stretched?

**Response:** The Leisure, Parks and Communities team are working with the community association and have provided a letter of support for the bid. A positive meeting has taken place between Parks Services and the Association to seek a way forward that can be managed effectively within current budgets. The costs of future basic maintenance have been clarified with the community association and the Parks Services are committed to funding this. Any complex or intensive maintenance will be reviewed on a case-by-case bases. However, this is expected to be minimal as there is a low level of anti-social behaviour on the site at the moment.

**(9) Question to the Board Member, Housing (Councillor Scott Seamons) from Councillor David Williams**

Scandinavian Style Shared Co-Housing Scheme

'With a vibrant Cooperative Group willing to fund a Scandinavian style shared Co Housing Scheme. Could the portfolio holder for housing be more helpful than dismissing the project by stating the Council would not make land available for such a project. Would he not be better talking through all the options and identifying possible sites that may become possible locations for such a proposal? Is the portfolio holder a supporter of co-housing projects as one method of meeting the City's housing needs?

**Response:** The Council is supportive of co-housing, and recognises that there is an active local group trying to pursue this housing option. Land is at a premium in the City however. The Council has prepared a Sites and Housing Plan to assist developers and social housing providers with identifying land, but the expectation is that such organisations will secure land themselves. Any site suitable for residential use has the potential to be suitable for co-housing, as long as all other policy requirements are met including affordable housing requirements, balance of dwellings and the efficient use of land. The Council has, and can continue to advise on this, but can be of greater assistance to the group if and when they have a viable proposition to discuss.

**(10) Question to the Board Member, Housing (Councillor Scott Seamons) from Councillor Stuart McCready**

Enforcement of parking restrictions at the rear of flats 410-448 Banbury Road

Tenants of the Council flats at 410-448 Banbury Road are offered permits to park on the service road behind the flats. It is an attractive parking place for those wanting to avoid the restrictions on surrounding roads. For some time there has been no enforcement so that vehicles are parked there without permits, causing problems for those who have permits. When will the Council take responsibility for keeping this road available for those with permits only?

**Response:** Where we have parking problems on HRA land on our estates, we have introduced residents' parking permit schemes, subject to consultation with residents. The scheme is managed by the Tenancy Services Team and there are approximately 300 parking spaces covered by the schemes, generally in small residential car parks and courts. Residents are issued with an annual permit plus a number of visitor permits. There is no charge to residents currently.

Up until August, we were using contractors called Conkai to carry out the enforcement on an informal basis however they have just sold their business to new owners. The new owners, in turn, following changes to licensing and standards for parking management agencies, they are unable to undertake any work without a formal contract.

There are many agencies that provide a parking solution for private landlords and public sector organisations. The types of solution include:

- a full car park service similar to that run by the Council's in-house team
- a patrol and 'ticketing' service
- an arms-length administration service where the client is responsible for issuing electronic notices and they initiate the recovery process

We are currently assessing the options as part of our review of parking, parking permits and garages. In the interim, we have agreed a short term contract with Vehicle Control Services Ltd, who purchased Conkai, to carry out the enforcement function. They will be resuming the enforcement activities in the next few weeks.

**(11) Question to the Board Member, Housing (Councillor Scott Seamons) from Councillor Stuart McCready**

Replacement of paving slabs with tarmac

Why were tenants not informed, let alone consulted, on the recent decision to replace paving stones round their front doors with plain black tarmac?

Response: Officers have asked the member for more information regarding the location. Once the location has been identified and the problem investigated, officers will work with tenants and the local member to find an acceptable solution.

**(12) Question to the Board Member, Cleaner Greener Oxford (Councillor John Tanner) from Councillor Graham Jones.**

Air Quality Action Plan - Responses

How many responses were received in the consultation on the Air Quality Action Plan, and how many in each week of the consultation?

The consultation for the Air Quality Action Plan ended on 17 September 2013. The total number of responses was 220.

The breakdown by weeks is as follows:

Week 1	16
Week 2	89
Week 3	12
Week 4	10
Week 5	7
Week 6	7
Week 7	27
Week 8	31
Week 9	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>220</b>

**(13) Question to the Deputy Leader of the Council (Councillor Ed Turner) from Councillor Graham Jones.**

Business Tenants and rent reviews

Is it normal for the city's business tenants to bear the responsibility for initiating negotiations over upcoming rent reviews, rather than receiving prior notice?

**Response:** Both landlord and tenant have responsibility for agreeing a rent review and the process (if any) will be set out in the lease. Our current form of lease, based on best modern

practice, avoids formal processes, with joint onus on the parties to reach an agreement, with mechanisms for dealing if that does not occur. Notwithstanding that, it is more usual for the landlord to initiate negotiations by the service of a rent proposal, and this is generally what tends to happen, but there may be circumstances where the landlord delays instigating a review e.g. because it is awaiting the completion of other transactions which will provide rental evidence. The Council does not deal any differently in this regard to any other private landlord and there is no reason why a tenant should not initiate discussions if it is concerned about delay.

**(14) Question to the Deputy Leader of the Council (Councillor Ed Turner) from Councillor Jim Campbell**

Temporary parking for the Westgate development

Why have we still not had the promised report on how much of the £3,300k underspend will be spent on temporary parking for the Westgate development, and what it will be spent on?

**Response:** We anticipate a report going to City Executive Board in October on this matter - it is obviously a complex issue and it is important to get it right

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

Opening of private mail

I have recently found a letter personally addressed to me at the Town Hall had been opened and stamped by the City Council. I am told that this dates back to a security alert many years ago. Could Councillor Price tell Council when the opening of private letters was sanctioned, who was told and why all councillors were not informed?

**Response:** Private mail (i.e. mail marked private and confidential) is not opened by the post room. All other incoming post is opened (with one or two exceptions such as mail for the Fraud Team). The letter in question was not marked private & confidential. The Head of HR & Facilities will ensure that with immediate effect, all Councillor's mail is left unopened regardless of how it is marked.

**(16) Question to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Price)  
from Councillor Ruth Wilkinson**

Disabled transport

Has the Council yet decided how to use the £50,000 set aside for disabled transport in the city?

There have been discussions with the County Council about their future plans for special transport provision, and members will be kept in touch with developments.

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

Municipal Bonds

Would the Leader of the Council join me in welcoming the positive noises coming from government concerning municipal bonds?

**Response:** A municipal bond is a bond issued by local government to raise funds directly from the market, creating an alternative source of funding to the Public Works Loans Board.

The Local Government Association (LGA) is encouraging Councils to support the establishment of an agency to issue such bonds. The LGA is seeking a commitment from local authorities to take part in the development of the business case into a practical proposition, and to be in on the ground floor as founding members and shareholders. The project will only proceed if the business case is credible to potential lenders.

However:

- PWLB rates are currently very low. Local authorities can borrow for 5 years at around 2.4% and for up to 50 years at around 4.5%. It is unlikely that bond rates would be as low, and there will be set up costs involved.
- PWLB borrowing is very straight forward; the authority simply phones the Board and the cash is with you in two days. If at any point you wish to repay a loan before it matures, this can be done at a premium or at a discount. It is highly unlikely a Municipal Bond will be as flexible

At this point in time municipal bonds are not a very attractive option. However the current market environment may change over time, and this could happen when the Quantitative Easing programme is reversed, as this will increase gilt yields and therefore PWLB rates. We could reconsider support for the LGA initiative in different conditions if the current low borrowing rate

environment comes to an end.

**(18) Question to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Price) from Councillor Elise Benjamin**

Sale of the Electoral Register

How many times in the last six years has the City Council sold the electoral register to companies and individuals, and can the Leader provide me with a list of dates, recipients, and how much the City received for each sale?

**Response:** Distribution and sales of the electoral register and what it can be used for are strictly controlled by legislation (various regulations in the Representation of the People Regulations 2001)

There are two versions of the register: full and edited. The full register contains the names of all electors. The edited contains the names of those who haven't exercised the right to opt out of it. In Oxford around 40% of electors opt-out of the edited register.

The full register is used for elections and can only be given or sold to specific organisations (i.e. political parties, government bodies [police, HMRC, etc.] and credit reference agencies). They may only use the full register for particular purposes, also defined in the Regulations.

The edited register is available for any person or organisation to buy and they may use it for any lawful purpose. The fees chargeable are set in the Regulations and combine a set transaction charge (£20) plus a per thousand electors fee. The level of the fee depends on whether the person wants the register on paper (£5 per thousand) or in data format (£1.50 per thousand). All the purchases made during the period above were for data versions.

People may buy the whole edited register or parts of it (down to polling district level).

**Sales of Oxford's edited register – 2007-2013**

2007/08

Name	Whole/part	Charge (£)
Mrs Ahmed	Part	25.50
Mr Koenig	Part	20.00

2008/09

Name	Whole/part	Charge (£)
Ms Gilbey-Redfearn	Part	23.00
Fitzgerald Associates	Part	25.00
Mr Jefkins	Whole	177.00
i-CD	Part	180.00

2009/10

Name	Whole/part	Charge (£)
None		

2010/11

Name	Whole/part	Charge (£)
Mr Jefkins	Whole	177.00

2011/12

Name	Whole/part	Charge (£)
Mr Roberts	Part	173.00
White Walls	Part	122.00

2012/13

Name	Whole/part	Charge (£)
Connells	Part	100.00
Mr Koenig	Part	30.00
White Walls	Part	127.50
Mr Comley	Part	125.00

2013/14 (so far)

Name	Whole/part	Charge (£)
Sun Hotels	Part	125.50
Ms Lomas	Whole	177.00

Total sales of the edited register during the period: £1607.50

**(19) Question to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Price) from Councillor Ruth Wilkinson**

Sale of Electoral Register

How many companies over the last five years have City Council sold voter information to, and how much income has it derived from this?

**Response:** See response to question 18

**(20) Question to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Price) from Councillor David Williams**

Badger Cull

Could the Portfolio Holder give the Council any information as to if the City council has been approached by DfRA Officials with regard to conducting a badger cull on Oxford City land?

**Response:** I am not aware of any such request; if one were received it would be refused

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

Broadband coverage

What is the date by which residents and small businesses can expect to have faster Broadband and will coverage extend uniformly to all areas of the City?

**Response:** A full report on the Super Connected Cities project will be submitted to the next meeting of the City Executive Board. In summary, the Government has turned the scheme into a voucher arrangement through which businesses can buy access to super connectivity. A sum of £3.1 million is available and the scheme is planned to run throughout the 2014/15 financial year. In parallel, a wireless concession has been funded at £1.5 million to cover as much of the city as possible, but certainly all the key business centres.

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

Uppsala delegates

Have you been briefed on the outcomes of the visit by delegates from Uppsala?

**Response:** I'm afraid not.