

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF COUNCIL

(1) Question to the Board Member, City Development (Councillor Colin Cook) from Councillor Ruth Wilkinson

External wall insulation planning permission

Residents have asked whether planning permission is required for external wall insulation and under what conditions, as they wish to reduce energy and save money in their solid wall houses, but feel the responses they have been given by the City Council have been inconsistent. Please can Councillor Cook supply the number of applications that have been made for each of the last four years and indicate how many have been given permission?

Response: Where a property is already rendered (or partially so), the replacement of the existing render with external insulation will **NOT** normally require planning permission, being “permitted development” afforded by Class A Part 1 Schedule 2 of the GPDO.

Where a property is not already rendered, planning permission **WILL BE** required in view of condition A.3(a) of Class A which requires that “*the materials used in any exterior work (other than materials used in the construction of a conservatory) shall be of a similar appearance to those used in the construction of the exterior of the existing dwellinghouse*”.

Dwelling houses located within a Conservation Area are also covered by the restriction in A.2(a) which states that development is **NOT** permitted by Class A if it consists of or includes “*the cladding of any part of the exterior of the dwelling house with stone, artificial stone, pebble dash, render, timber, plastic or tiles*”

Although, again, if such a property’s exterior is **already rendered** planning permission for its replacement, provided that the new render’s appearance was similar to that being replaced, would not be required.

Number of applications received:

2013: 8 applications (one refused). Insulation of 36 properties approved (27 Council owned, 4 Housing Association owned).

2012: 3 applications (one to vary a condition to allow external insulation). All approved (5 properties including 3 x flats).

2011: No applications.

2010: 1 application (approved). 1 property.

Additionally, there were several “Permitted Development checks” submitted over this 4 year period, some of which led to applications for planning permission being submitted. The advice given in these has been consistent.

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

Freight Consolidation Scheme

Would the Board Member please brief Council on progress towards a Freight Consolidation?

Response: The City Council is jointly progressing the commissioning of a freight consolidation study with the County Council to ensure the most appropriate option for consolidation is developed for Oxford. The brief for this study is currently being finalised and subject to approval by the County and City Council prior to release. Additional work streams to address freight related emissions are being progressed through work on Air Quality, in line with the recently adopted Air Quality Action Plan.

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

Renewables in new buildings

Is the Board Member content with the current minimum requirement for renewables in new buildings in Oxford?

Response: The adopted Oxford Local Plan 2001-2016 first introduced the Natural Resource Impact Analysis (NRIA) in November 2005. This was introduced to push forward development standards in terms of energy efficiency, water use, and the use of recycled materials, given that building regulations, at that stage, were not very challenging. Given that Oxford does not have the land available for large scale renewable energy schemes such as wind farms, the City Council also placed a requirement on small scale developments to generate an element of on-site renewable energy.

This holistic approach to the use of natural resources was quite ground breaking at the time, and the requirement for 20% renewable energy, both of the regulated and unregulated variety, is still the highest in the UK.

The adopted NRIA Supplementary Planning Document provides more guidance on the implementation of these policies.

The requirements of the Local Plan in relation to the NRIA were reviewed and brought forward into the Oxford Core Strategy 2026 adopted by Council in March 2011.

The City Council has committed to reviewing the implementation of these policies, as it does to all of our Development Plan policies, to see if they are still fit for purpose and delivering the desired outcomes.

In relation to residential development, the NRIA was reviewed in the

Sites and Housing Plan, adopted in February 2013. As part of this review we considered how the various government standards were affecting the need for the NRIA. With the move to zero carbon, and improving building control standards, we concluded the key element to take forward was the renewable energy element. The policy sets out transitional arrangements until zero carbon homes are introduced. The Plan also requires energy statements to be submitted for small residential developments which had not previously been caught by the NRIA.

The ambition nationally is that by 2016 all new residential developments will be zero carbon and all new non-domestic buildings will be zero carbon by 2019.

Officers are conscious that there are wider aspects to sustainability than those covered by the NRIA and that there may be a case for a review of that document, particularly in relation to non-residential development.

However, the position has been complicated by the Government's intention to deregulate various environmental standards, (announced by the Prime Minister in a speech on January 27th this year). There has been some suggestion that the Government intends to relax planning targets and/or Building Regulation controls in relation to renewable energy, but at the current time there has been no official confirmation of what the Government proposes.

That having been said, Oxford remains at the forefront of local authority practice in relation to the requirement for renewables in new buildings. Regrettably, it is unlikely that the Government will countenance any increase in these minimum requirements at the current time.

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

Recovery of recyclates from landfill

Would the Board Member say why he did not support the Scrutiny Committee recommendation to appraise the recovery of recyclates from landfill?

Response: We have considered the option of sorting residual waste to recover recyclables prior to disposal in landfill in principle, but have not explored it further because current working arrangements would make this extremely expensive for the Council. It would require the following major items of expenditure:-

- Land and buildings to allow tipping of the waste, sorting and then reloading to take to the appropriate disposal sites.
- Additional labour to undertake the sorting and reloading.
- Plant and vehicles to cope with the additional operation (i.e. sorting).

In view of the fact that these costs are going to be very large, this option has not been pursued further.

The most economic option would be a pre-sort before incineration at the new County Council plant. We have asked the County Council if this will be possible and have been advised that there is no such facility at the new plant. Equally, the County Council advised that they are not aware of pre-sort arrangements operating at any of the incinerating plants operating in this country.

For these reasons, I have decided not to undertake a more detailed appraisal of this operation.

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

Urban Community Energy Fund

Does the Board Member welcome the Climate Change Secretary's announcement of an Urban Community Energy Fund?

Response: DECC has launched a £10m Urban Community Energy Fund. This is a small pot which sits alongside a similar £10m fund launched last year for rural energy projects. It is an element of the Community Energy Strategy announced recently. This is a useful first step.

Councillors will be aware of the £1.2 million European funded project 'OxFutures' which the City Council leads with the aim of leveraging investment into community renewable projects. So I welcome a government initiative that is catching up with what Oxford City Council has pioneered.

(6) Question to the Board Member, Finance, efficiency and Strategic Asset Management (Councillor Ed Turner) from Councillor Graham Jones

Investment in renewables

Can the Board Member tell us what is the Council's current investment in renewables?

Response: Renewable energy is generally defined as energy that comes from resources which are naturally replenished on a human timescale such as sunlight, wind, rain, tides, waves and geothermal heat. Renewable energy replaces conventional fuels in a number of distinct areas: electricity generation, hot water/space heating and motor fuels.

Over the last few years the Council has undertaken a number of key projects around renewables including:

Existing Installations

1. Photo Voltaic Panels (PV) – 2 Leisure Centres: (cost £288k)
2. PV - large systems on Cardinal, Headley and Knights Houses sheltered blocks: (cost £376k)

3. PV tiles – large system on Northbrook House
4. PV- small systems on 38 individual Local Authority houses mainly in Lambourne Road:
5. Air source heat pumps: 30 individual LA houses in Lambourne Rd
6. Solar thermal on Birch Ct sheltered accommodation
7. Solar thermal: approximately 20 small systems on individual Local Authority homes installed several years ago.
8. Solar thermal: small demonstration system on shower at Hinksey Pools
9. Biomass boilers in Cardinal House and Albert Place housing blocks

The Council has also enabled community PV: on Barton NC, on West Oxford Community Centre and on West Oxford Community Primary School.

Council Planning Policy calls for 20% of energy use to be met by on-site renewable energy technology for larger developments and consequently this has resulted in continued and growing investment in renewables across the city. Regrettably this requirement may be challenged by the government's Technical Housing Standards Review.

Council has initiated "Low Carbon Oxford" to deliver progress against corporate 40% carbon reduction target – this initiative helps community groups and businesses invest in renewables (such as Osney micro hydro, Oxford Bus company solar PV roof, with more coming on stream) There are several renewable installations planned or under investigation by the Council.

1. Biomass for Competition Pool:
2. Biomass for Town Hall
3. PV for BBL Leisure Centre
4. PV for new Rose Hill Community Centre
5. PV pilot on 5 LA houses – to inform a wider rollout - will be carried out this financial year.

(7) Question to the Board Member, Finance, efficiency and Strategic Asset Management (Councillor Ed Turner) from Councillor Jean Fooks

Carbon Accounting

The Council agreed to move to carbon accounting some years ago. Progress seems to have stalled. When will the Council live up to its policy and why has it not yet happened?

Response: Carbon accounting refers generally to processes undertaken to "measure" amounts of carbon dioxide equivalents emitted by an entity

We measure our consumption of utilities, and like other Local Authorities we are obliged to report to the Department of Energy and Climate Change on our greenhouse gas emissions (Co2 plus the basket of greenhouse gases). This is derived from meter readings from across the

majority estate gas, electricity and vehicle fuel. This is submitted annually by the end of July.

As per the Corporate Measure linked to the Carbon Management Plan adopted by the city Executive Board and led by Environmental Development, carbon reduction targets are based on estimated emissions from implemented measures, this is the same as The Carbon Trust Carbon Management Standard. This enables the Council to identify opportunities for energy saving measures (insulation etc.) or renewable energy (solar PV).

It is fair to say that the organisations' move towards its own internal carbon monitoring system has not progressed as quickly as we would have liked although in mitigation this is not a process which is truly embedded in many local authorities. We have asked our internal auditors to report back to us on suggested ways forward based on good practice from other sectors, whilst also exploring alternative ways to engage across the organisation to meet carbon targets. We obviously report annually on our carbon usage and purchase of CRC, and also provide updates through the Carbon Natural Resources Board on the usage and spend on utilities.

(8) Question to the Board Member, Finance, efficiency and Strategic Asset Management (Councillor Ed Turner) from Councillor Jim Campbell

Consultation Budget - Responses

In last year's Consultation Budget (2013-14) could you tell us how many comments (individual and group) were received, and could you also let us know what changes were made to the final budget in response to these comments, and to those from *Talk Back*?

Response: There was general agreement from respondents to the Budget Consultation last year on the proposals put forward and some of these were mentioned in the budget report that was presented to Council on 18th February 2013 with summary details shown below.

Table 6 Results of consultation on council tax increase

	Percentage In Favour %
Freeze council tax and make cuts elsewhere	39
Increase council tax by 2%	61

Table 7 Budget Consultation – New Investment

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
	%	%	%	%	%
Dial a ride	43	24	18	10	5
Older peoples	44	34	14	5	3

support grant					
Apprenticeships	42	38	13	4	3
Grants	39	26	18	9	8
Free bulky collection	39	27	13	14	7

The Council also sought views on technical changes to council tax discounts and exemptions and there was an average of 90% agreement to the changes proposed. We have subsequently received some feedback on the operation of these and have therefore amended arrangements this year (supported in the consultation).

Given the constrained nature of the Council's finances, as well as the fact that consultation on our main priorities occurs through means of local elections, we seek to put clearly-defined propositions to the public in the budget consultation.

(9) Question to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Price) from Councillor Jim Campbell

Area Forums and Community Meetings

Could you let us know how many Area Forums and other Council supported Community Meetings took place during 2013, and how many members of the public attended each one?

Response: The Communities and Neighbourhoods team work with Councillors to set up meetings in areas where they wish to hold an Area Forum. The East Area Forum is running and details of meetings are on the website. North Area Councillors have decided that individual wards might consider holding a Forum if a suitable topic arose. None have yet been requested. In the other areas dates are being canvassed and Officers will help members to set up these Forums. Publicity for any Area Forums is via website, social media, production of standard posters, emailing residents on database. Records of public attendance may be kept by the members but are not recorded by Communities and Neighbourhoods.

The Community Partnerships are supported by Communities and Neighbourhoods (CAN) Officers in the regeneration areas. The 7 areas have a range of public attendance/involvement depending on how long the partnerships and local community engagement, have been supported. For example, at Barton, 169 residents took part last year (range from 4-8 at each partnership meeting, sub-group meetings) while in Littlemore or Cutteslowe Partnership meeting, very small numbers attended. Barton has had a CAN Officer dedicated resource for a number of years whereas other areas have not.

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

Universal Suffrage

Can the Leader of the Council tell us on what grounds does he support or not support the principle of universal suffrage in local elections, regardless of nationality?

Response: Under current British law, any British, Irish, EU and Commonwealth citizen can vote in local elections. I am reliably informed that this is the widest restricted franchise in the world. No country in the world allows all residents to vote in all elections. The nearest to that are Uruguay (which requires 15 years' residence), New Zealand (which requires permanent resident status) and Malawi (which requires seven years residence).

My personal view is that the franchise should be linked to citizenship rather than residence. Hence, I would support extending voting rights to EU citizens in national and European elections, but no further.