

## **QUESTIONS AND ADDRESSES TO COUNCIL FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 11.11 TAKEN UNDER AGENDA ITEM 14 (NOT RELATING TO MATTERS FOR DECISION)**

### **Addresses**

1. Richard Carpenter, Club Secretary, Oxford City Stars Ice Hockey Club (text attached)
2. Nigel Gibson representing Save Temple Cowley Pools - A successful social enterprise in East Oxford (text attached)
3. Jane Alexander - The Community Interest Company Bid Proposal offers BEST VALUE TO OXFORD PEOPLE! (text attached)

### **Questions (responses will be given at the meeting)**

4. Question to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Price) from Sistke Boeles

Per Nov 1 2014, how many properties were exempt from paying council tax due to being occupied by full time students (N properties), in addition how many students qualified for single person council tax exemption.

#### **Response (given in writing after the meeting)**

There are 1972 properties exempt from paying council tax due to being occupied by full time students (N properties)

We do not readily keep information on the number of students claiming for single person council tax discounts since generally a student would apply for the full reduction of council tax through a student exemption as referred to above. The council have currently granted 17,306 single person discounts which the council does review on a regular basis.

5. Question to the Leader of the Council (Councillor Bob Price) from James Rowland

Annual Monitoring Report housing trajectory figures indicate that over the last five years Oxford City Council has failed to build sufficient houses to meet the Oxford Core Strategy targets of an average of 400 new houses per year. As a result, the house building programme for market and affordable housing has been falling substantially behind required levels.

Can the Leader of the Council explain why house building in Oxford has been falling behind, for both market and affordable housing and how can the City Council justify requesting a strategic Green Belt review in order to meet Oxford's excess housing needs outside its administrative boundaries, whilst it cannot deliver the Oxford Core Strategy target of building 8000 houses by 2026 .

#### **Response (given in writing after the meeting)**

Since the start of Core Strategy period (2006) Oxford City has seen 2,983 dwellings completed. This provides an annual average of 372 dwellings per year which is only slightly under the 400 per year required to meet the Core Strategy target. There has over the last five years been a dip in the rate of housing delivery, thought to be due to the effect of the subdued economic climate. As elsewhere across the country, this has had a severe impact on the ability of the housebuilding industry to deliver new homes.

However the City Council is confident that the improving market will see delivery of housing picking up again. This is illustrated by the fact that planning permission was granted in the 2013/14 financial year for 1,350 dwellings in Oxford. This has been achieved because the City Council is proactively seeking to maximise the sustainable delivery of housing in Oxford to meet identified needs.

Even with the rate of housebuilding increasing in Oxford, there is nowhere near enough suitable land in Oxford for providing new homes to meet the objectively assessed need set out in the Oxfordshire SHMA 2014 of 1,400 homes per year over a 20 year period. This is why a review of the Oxford Green Belt is now urgently required.

## **Address by Richard Carpenter**

Thank you, my name is Richard Carpenter and I am the Club Secretary of the Oxford City Stars. I'd like to thank you for allowing me to speak this evening and to Cllr Jean Fooks in particular for her kind invitation to allow me to tell the story of our club, our successes and our current issues.

Oxford has had University Ice Hockey since the 19th century and with the building of the Oxpens Road Ice Rink in 1984 the City Ice Hockey has taken off and the Stars are now in their 30th Anniversary season. We've had our ups and downs over the years including the senior team folding on New Years Day 2012 however I am delighted to report to you that we have rebuilt our club successfully, winning three major competitions in two years and have this season taken promotion to the semi-professional National Ice Hockey League Division 1.

Furthermore, we were awarded the title of Oxfordshire Sports Team of the Year at the 2013 Oxfordshire Sports Awards and last Friday night at the 2014 awards we were nominated in the Team of the Year Category and Head Coach Darren Elliott received a Coach of the Year nomination as well. With all the exposure that this gives us, we have been able to further grow the club, attracting supporters, and new commercial and media partnerships.

Oxford City Stars are the most 'Oxford' team in the City. In our title-winning season last year, 20 of the 22 players lived in Oxfordshire, and 16 of those were born and bred here. We believe in our ice hockey talent in the County, a decision that has paid off again and again. None of this would of course be possible without a thriving junior system providing us with more talent for the future. Our Junior Club consists of both boys and girls with players as young as six years of age competing against teams from across the South.

I'm here today to talk about Parking. We understand and agree with the Transport policy of the City, however the practical realities on the ground mean that it simply doesn't work for us for two main reasons.

The first is equipment. For a senior ice hockey game between the two teams, we use heavy, bulky equipment, from the players kit to all of the ancillary equipment such as tool boxes, water bottles, skate grinders, etc. etc. This comes to over half a metric ton of weight per game. Oxford Ice Rink, does not offer us any storage space. All of this equipment must be carted to and from the rink, for every single training session and every single game.

I'm also sad to report that there have been incidences where players coming to training on public transport from around the city were refused travel, due to their equipment.

Despite the equipment issues we still looked at Park and Ride as an option. We train between ten and half eleven on a Wednesday evening. The last Park and Ride bus is at eleven thirty seven. Even for our supporters, park and ride is not an option on Gameday, as our games finish after eight pm on a Sunday night, with the last park and ride bus at seven seventeen.

Wednesday night also sees our junior training. Junior Ice Hockey parents already have to pay substantial amounts for equipment and fees just to put their children on the ice. With the current parking situation, Parents are no longer able to escort their children into and out of the rink or to attend training with them, without incurring substantial further expense.

This tax on the Junior Parents, means that the children and a club official has to stand outside, usually in the cold and the wet to wait for their parents to collect them. Furthermore, many are having to pull on the opposite side of the road due to congestion, meaning that children have to cross Oxpens Road, a busy A road, to go to their cars in the dark. It is an accident waiting to happen. Oxford Ice Rink has been provided with two 10 minute bays for a Junior system of eighty ice hockey players. Councillors, we are an amateur club trying to compete in a semi-professional league, and in addition to all of the other disadvantages that we face, the Senior team alone has a estimated parking bill of £6k a year parking in the City Council car parks. We do not receive a single penny from Oxford City Council and today we are not asking for any. What the Ice Rink needs, is a dedicated parking area within the Ice Rink Car Park that is not subject the same fees that apply to the normal traffic, based around the times of ice hockey games and training for pre-approved vehicles the vast majority will be at off-peak times. We also believe that we should be exploring all options for all rink users, including our supporters who currently have to pay over £6 for a game on a Sunday, £12 for a game an early evening Saturday start. Without this measure, the Stars will never, grow and I cannot guarantee that the Stars can stay in this current division, or be viable as an organisation regardless of our results this season. We are not asking for massive changes to policy, just a few small changes that you can make that would make a huge difference to all of us that use the ice rink.

Thank you for your time.

**Address by Nigel Gibson**  
**A successful social enterprise in East Oxford**

My name is Nigel Gibson, and I am Director of the SaveTCP community interest company, the organisation set up to develop a community proposal for a social enterprise to take over and run Temple Cowley Pools and Fitness Centre. To do this, of course, we need not only your permission but also your active support.

Many of you here this evening have taken the time to hear more about what the community is trying to do, to discuss our proposal in detail, and to better understand exactly how it could work to the massive benefit of the community, not just in Cowley or East Oxford, but across the whole of the city.

And there are indeed many benefits that can be delivered at no financial risk to the Council. You of course need no reminding that the new swimming pool in Blackbird Leys is not seen by anyone as a proper replacement for either the existing community pool in Blackbird Leys, which with its constant high temperature addresses specialised needs, or the health and fitness centre (not just a swimming pool) that is Temple Cowley Pools. People often think of Temple Cowley Pools as just a swimming pool that can be replaced with one the same size just outside the ring road. Eight petitions, and over 25,000 signatures, should make everyone wonder why we don't all see things the same way.

Our proposal directly addresses the needs of the community you have decided to ignore; we can provide and continue to deliver services that support health, fitness and independence, enabling most people to walk or cycle to their preferred place of exercise. They simply cannot and will not do that if they have to travel for more than 15 minutes to get there.

It's easy to rely on your experts when they provide you with information you want to hear; and perhaps more challenging when the opposite point of view is also supported by experts who you have also employed. This is the case here; and I would ask you to think whose interests you are in the position to serve – surely it is to ensure the wellbeing of Oxford in the most financially expedient manner.

Risk is ever present, and as a Council you have a remit and a duty to minimise risks, including financial ones. As a council tax payer, I fully support you in your aims; and in addressing risks you must balance the short term, which may be in the interests of a current administration, with those of the longer term that provide for the city as a whole over several, and indeed many, generations. It was this balance that led to those previously occupying this chamber to proceed to build the swimming baths at Temple Cowley in 1938, and again to support a complete rebuild in 1986. There is every reason for you to act again in the interest of the people you are here to serve.

The biggest risk is surely that of the effect of closure, something that has never been alluded to, let alone directly addressed by, any Council discussion over the last five years. You have the evidence yourself in the drop in crime rate from putting play facilities in at Littlemore; independent research clearly shows that you can expect the reverse effect in closing Temple Cowley Pools. Taking facilities away from an area results in an increase in crime, as well as a fall in health and fitness.

There are concerns that keeping Temple Cowley Pools open will seriously affect the viability of the new pool; there is no evidence of this risk – as most people will walk to either centre, they will attract people from different and independent communities. Much independent research backs this up, that even when health and fitness centres are a mile or less from each other they can increase the overall level of exercise. We fervently want this to happen; we are not in competition with council leisure facilities, but want to complement them by successfully operating Temple Cowley Pools when you feel you cannot.

Our proposal has full support from the community, as we have incorporated ideas from the public, and listened to what people want. As the social enterprise that can take this forward, we are merely asking you to do the same.

The housing aspect is interesting; there is much new housing becoming available very close to Temple Cowley, with the conversion of the Macmillan offices, the Barns Road development and the plans for the redevelopment of the Conservative Club in Between Towns Road. Your DPD mandates a maximum of 26 dwellings on the Temple Cowley site if it is redeveloped; we don't think our proposal, for at least 17 and possibly many more, falls too short of that maximum, particularly as these will be in addition to the health and fitness centre.

Finances are always a concern. Our plans are already considerably detailed, developed with professionals in the leisure industry, experienced at taking over and operating facilities like Temple Cowley Pools. We would very much like to provide more detail than we have, but we still don't have the information we've asked for from you. In particular, we have no idea if there is a minimum value that is acceptable. We are suggesting a community asset transfer, as this offers long-term benefit – we successfully operate a facility you feel you cannot, it provides a long-term source of income for you (as we are a not-for-profit organisation any surplus would come back to the Council), delivers much needed social housing, and remains an asset in Council ownership. This is surely far more preferable to selling it off to a private venture. However, if you feel you need to generate revenue for some purpose, then work with us and give us the opportunity to find that money rather than simply dismissing our proposal as unworkable.

So in conclusion, I would ask you all to take the time to consider what the communities across the city of Oxford want, the communities who elected you and expect you to work on their behalf to deliver the services they want and need, where they want and need them.

We need you all to engage with us and those making the decision at the City Executive Board next week; tell us if you can see any reason why this social enterprise should not succeed; work with us as we address any concerns, so that the outcome can be seen by everyone as delivering the outcome we all surely want – the ability for people to improve their fitness, and maintain their health and independence in the heart of a thriving community.

**Address by Jane Alexander**

**The Community Interest Company Bid Proposal offers BEST VALUE TO OXFORD PEOPLE!**

'Best Value' is the National legal requirement for a sale of a public asset, not the financial amount!

The following might also be useful to people still uncertain about how to vote at CEB and those other councillors who would like to support public need for facilities in Oxford.

1. Council do not need the money from the sale of Temple Cowley Pools and Fitness Centre – According to a press release from the City Council, 'the new BL pool is now fully funded' so the previous requirement for selling the site no longer stands since the money was returned from the Iceland bank. There is now NO justification for selling the Temple Cowley Pools and Fitness centre site. Some councillors have stated that there must be a constant stream of money coming in to pay for outgoings. I believe there is a constant stream in the form of council tax and government funding. This should suffice so long as it is used wisely and no huge amount of money is spent on projects without full business cases.

2. Finance Officer, Nigel Kennedy, said at meeting to decide how to use/invest public funds, that there is excess revenue of £28m needing better investment than low-interest cash accounts, so selling the site can't be the first port of call as there is NO shortfall in the Council coffers. Some councillors seem to think that because some money is in one account rather than another account that they cannot use this money! The council itself writes (and rewrites) its Constitution so if it wants to use our money to support peoples requirements then it can do this. It is all OUR money after all.

3. The SaveTCP plans do not involve the Council in any financial risk beyond the remote possibility that on the plans not working out and the site therefore reverting to the Council. If the SaveTCP venture were to fail, which it won't, the council could then sell it, probably for higher than it's current value.

4. The SaveTCP plans will house nearly as many people (17 dwellings+ as opposed to 26 dwellings) as the Council have permitted for the commercial developers, so would not amount to a loss of planned housing

5. Circumstances have changed and new information is available and it is to be hoped that the Councillors will, acknowledge this, review the situation and listen to what those who elect them are asking for and suggesting 'their vote will be a critical test of whether they listen to the community'

6. The public are asking "What are the criteria for evaluating the Community Asset Bid Proposal?" as opposed to the very clear ones for the commercial developer's bid. It was initially to be decided by the Council employed Property Team but they then realised that they did not have a process by which they could evaluate the 'peoples' Bid Proposal and decided to let the City Executive Board make the decision. This does seem rather strange to most people as it was CEB who voted to close it in the

first place. Now, however, you have the benefit of this Community Bid Proposal and as a totally Labour member CEB will be able to revert to your own socialist policy of listening to and working for the good of the people.

7. Many are concerned that Andrew Smith has been very quiet about this issue. He has been quoted on numerous occasions as saying "It's a City matter and none of his business" unlike the big noise he made about keeping the Speedway Stadium for the wellbeing of the people of Oxford fighting tooth and nail for it, though of course that was not council owned!!

People have said they will remember this at the next elections.

In summary I would like to ask to all councillors to accept the community proposal as offering best Value for the whole of Oxford into the future.