

**To:** Council

**Date:** 29 September 2016

**Title of Report:** Public addresses and questions that do not relate to matters for decision – as submitted by the speakers and with written responses

## **Introduction**

1. Addresses made by members of the public to the Council, and questions put to the Board members or Leader, registered by the deadline in the Constitution, are below. Any written responses available are also below.
2. This report will be republished after the Council meeting as part of the minutes pack. This will list the full text of speeches delivered as submitted, summaries of speeches delivered which differ significantly from those submitted, and any further responses.

## **Addresses and questions to be taken in Part 2 of the agenda.**

### Addresses in part 2

1. Address by Fran Ryan, Homes for Oxford, [www.homesforoxford.org](http://www.homesforoxford.org)
2. Address by Dr Ruvi Ziegler - Unaccompanied Refugee Children: Oxford's Role

### Questions in part 2

1. Question from Mr Artwell – Community Centre Management
2. Question from Dr Stefan Piechnik: OCC Tower Block refurbishment

## Addresses in part 2

### 1. Address by Fran Ryan, Homes for Oxford, [www.homesforoxford.org](http://www.homesforoxford.org)



Homes for Oxford (HfO) is a new umbrella organisation for community groups who want to create genuinely and permanently affordable homes in the city either as new-build or through refurbishment. Thus far it includes Oxfordshire Community Land Trust Ltd, Oxford Cohousing Ltd, Kindling Coop, and four smaller housing coops.

We are seeking sites to create at least 80 homes. We have a business plan and a funding model to support this. We recently submitted a bid for £16m for the Wolvercote Paper Mill site. Had we been successful we would have sought full planning permission to build 260 homes, two thirds of which were to remain permanently affordable via the land trust and coop lease mechanisms. The homes would have been almost passivhaus standard and the total number of cars would have been 240 or less. Full details of the bid can be seen here:

[https://www.dropbox.com/sh/kdjto3xgikklh/AADBQ0Ps0sD7gbRVfpyCJ\\_Tka?dl=0](https://www.dropbox.com/sh/kdjto3xgikklh/AADBQ0Ps0sD7gbRVfpyCJ_Tka?dl=0)

We are now turning our attention to the few remaining sites within the city, and aim to increase the political support we have gained for this difficult challenge. I am speaking to you today to seek in-principle all-party support for our work.

#### **1. ENSURE ALL-PARTY SUPPORT FOR CUSTOM BUILD AND GROUP BUILD IN NEW LOCAL PLAN**

First we would like to ask for all-party councillor support for the Local Plan to be drafted so as to promote custom-build and group custom-build. I have sent examples of possible policies to the planners.

Examples of possible wording can be found in the SPDs used in East Cambs and Teignbridge. The East Cambs model is for community-led development including housing, and could be used.<sup>1</sup> However, Teignbridge has been more specific and introduced an SPD on Self Build<sup>2</sup>. HfO would particularly welcome a policy that requires a percentage of community-led housing on large sites (say 10% to 20%), to include affordable self-build.

There is a significant need for self-build in Oxford. Homes for Oxford itself would count for about 80 and we're currently completing the forms to demonstrate that.

This is not yet reflected in the City's self-build register largely because those interested have only just become aware (August 2016) that this register has become available. There was no register in the city a year ago and as a consequence people have been using the on-line register hosted by Ecomotive (some of the initiators of the Ashley Vale Self Build in Bristol) at <http://www.ecomotive.org/>. In February 2016 there were over 190 people on this register who want to build inside the Oxford city boundary.)

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<sup>1</sup>

<http://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Com%20Led%20Dev%20SPD%20as%20adopted%2025%20Feb%202016.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.teignbridge.gov.uk/selfbuild>

## **2. USE COMMUNITY-LED HOUSING INITIATIVES TO AVOID RTB**

Second we would like the City Council to use community-led initiatives to protect homes from Right to Buy (RTB). A recent Demos report <http://www.demos.co.uk/project/community-builders-report/> suggests this is perhaps the only way to avoid RTB in current climate.

‘With the Government’s right to buy scheme due to be extended to housing associations, community-led developments may become one of the last ways to ensure the provision of new homes that will stay available for rent in the long term’. HfO actively supports OCC’s current affordable housing policy and would wish to have it secured and strengthened. We’d welcome more explicit support from OCC towards Land Trusts and Coops as mechanisms not just for delivering genuinely affordable homes, but also for protecting the affordability in perpetuity.

Avoiding RTB as you all know is key to permanent affordability. In connection with that, we suggest that particular attention is focused on ensuring permanent affordability for self-build. This is always a problem with self-builds once they are sold on (as in Ashley Vale in Bristol: they are no longer affordable).

Overall we’d like to ask all councillors to do all they can to ensure that the new Local Plan actively endorses and privileges community-led development in all its forms. We would suggest that at the very least there are no policies that stand in the way of future collaboration between the city and the various community-led housing organisations.

## **3. OFFER FLEXIBILITY FOR AFFORDABLE MIX TO COMMUNITY-LED GROUPS**

Third we would also ask that flexibility is given to community-led groups about the mix of affordable homes. This is particularly important when such groups are ensuring permanent affordability with no RTB. In HfO’s recent Wolvercote Paper Mill bid, two thirds would have been permanently affordable. To make this viable there were 35% social rented homes – slightly less than the current 40% policy requirement. The reality is that there are many, including key workers, in housing need in the intermediate (shared ownership) market: we believe it is important to make provision for them.

A further point on the subject of affordable homes is that we ask that the Council is more robust in defending your own policy for affordable homes when developers seek to avoid policy requirements on viability grounds. For example had Homes for Oxford’s bid for the Wolvercote Paper Mill been made on the assumptions that national policy would apply (starter homes and affordable rents) we could have pushed our offer up to £20m but our offer was made, on the assumption that all bids would be compliant with local policy. We will be watching closely if and when this site comes back for planning

## **4. OFFER BEST VALUE TO COMMUNITY-LED HOUSING GROUPS WHEN DISPOSING OF PUBLICLY OWNED LAND AND BUILDINGS**

Fourth and final point, there are a few publicly owned sites in the city. We ask that you use the powers you have to consider disposal to community-led housing groups at best value. And in particular to take social value into account. We would like a specific policy to ensure that longer term social value is taken into account not merely the highest price that can be achieved.

This would enable community groups to compete more effectively with commercial developers who bid very highly for a site and then use viability arguments to reduce the quota of affordable homes.

## 2. Address by Dr Ruvi Ziegler - Unaccompanied Refugee Children: Oxford's Role

My name is Dr. Ruvi Ziegler, and I am a lecturer in law at the University of Reading and a Research Fellow of the Refugee Studies Centre here at Oxford.

I have asked to address you regarding the global refugee crisis and Oxford's role.

The world is in the grip of a growing global refugee crisis, with 65.3 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide, 21.3 million of whom outside their countries. A key reason for the worsening situation is too many countries – often the richest – refusing to share responsibility. Last week, the Prime Minister spoke at the UN summit in New York City, encouraging countries to control their borders and arguing that 'we must help ensure that refugees claim asylum in the first safe country they reach'. The Prime Minister's approach reeks of NIMBYism, and we should not stand for it. The reality is that the vast majority of the world's refugees already only get as far as the country neighbouring their own, one is that often anything but safe: the UN's Refugee Agency estimates 86% of the world's refugees live in developing countries.

Meanwhile, the EU's Dublin Regulations, which the UK is all too happy to follow, mean that EU member states such as Greece and Italy, face a disproportionate responsibility for processing and protecting refugees who arrive on the continent. In September 2015, in acknowledgement that such a system was unfair and unsustainable, the EU agreed a relocation scheme of 160,000 refugees away from Italy and Greece to other member states. However, implementation has been painfully slow; in the last year, only around 4,000 refugees have been relocated, and Hungary is holding a referendum on 2<sup>nd</sup> October to reify Viktor Orbán's defiance. The UK, to our shame, has refused to take any part in the relocation scheme.

But I believe that people in this country, and certainly the people of Oxford, are more generous than the Tory government that speaks for them. May's predecessor committed to the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme (insufficient as it is) as a result of public pressure following the horrific photo of three-year-old Aylan Kurdi lying dead on a Turkish beach last September; and it took Lord Alfred Dubs, a *Kindertransport* survivor, to force the UK government to amend the Immigration Act 2016 and commit to resettle 3,000 unaccompanied refugee children,

I urge you to support the Liberal Democrats' motion, which insists that the UK must welcome its fair share of refugees to ease this crisis and act swiftly to implement the Dubs amendment; and which calls on all councillors to sign Liberty's statement of support, available on their website, pressuring central government to honour its commitment. As and when central government implements the resettlement scheme, our city, as a city of sanctuary should commit to offer resettlement places to unaccompanied refugee children, alongside its existing support for the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme. I recognise that this requires additional resources, especially in relation to housing provision, educational needs, and English language provision, which central government should be pressured to provide. It can hardly be denied that the resettlement of unaccompanied children poses challenges, but the opportunities which successful resettlement offers are great, too; and our city should be leading by example.

## Questions in part 2

### 1. Question from Mr Artwell – Community Centre Management

Question to the Board Member, Councillor Simm

Elected Councillors, Mayor and employees of Oxford City Council, many of the City's Community Centres are no longer managed by committed and representative community minded local residents. This is a retrograde move which further alienates and detaches local people from believing that their ideas for improving local facilities will be heard, supported and implemented.

Moreover, there is good reason to believe that Oxford City Council's management of Community Centre will ultimately benefit Corporations like Green Square and Fusion. For example, Green Square now manage the Cowley Venue and will also manage Northway's "community centre" when construction is completed. There is no place for community involvement or representation within the corporately managed "community" centre. This subtle form of privatisation is a real threat to public space and public facilities in Oxford.

Elected Councillors, please remember that Community Centres have been mostly well managed by local people for decades. Local people can respond best to local needs.

**Can Oxford City Council commit to restoring the management of the Community Centre at Rose Hill, Northway, and East Oxford Community Centre back under the management of committed and representative people from those communities?**

### Written Response from Councillor Simm

Following a period of in-depth consultation the Council's Community Centres Strategy was agreed at September's CEB, the strategy fully explains our approach.

We received just under 200 responses in the consultation and the development of the strategy was supported by a steering group made up of representatives from the voluntary sector, the Federation of Community Associations, councillors and senior council officers.

In relation to the management of Community Centres it states "The Council's preferred option is that robust, sustainable community organisations should manage the community centres."

Where this is not in place the Council will do its utmost to support the Association, or directly manage the centres to ensure they effectively deliver the broad range of community benefits in an inclusive way.

## **2. Question from Dr Stefan Piechnik: OCC Tower Block refurbishment**

Question to the Board Member, Councillor Rowley

QUESTION: Use of wood with masonry in high rise buildings.

The major works in the tower blocks in Blackbirds have started, which allows the public for the first time to inspect the quality of planning. In this question I refer to the appearance of new aluminium windows, installed with the burden of additional scaffolding, unlike the prior PVC windows installed in the past only using internal access. It is now more than obvious that the new windows are much smaller. The balcony doors are much narrower at only 50cm width (i.e. less than my shoulder width!) while the old ones were 70cm wide. This is WORSE not an IMPROVEMENT.

However, most worryingly, the resulting gaps are padded by large wooden beams, a solution that resembles heritage timber-framed dwellings. Something quite out of usual in high rise tower blocks of 21st century.

As this appears so wrong, Can I ask the Councillors to provide, on record, the names of the architects and engineers who signed off this design?

In particular I would like to know how did the designers assure the Council that the thermal, ice or moisture driven expansion of the wood will not affect the function of the aluminium windows or doors.

Most seriously perhaps, what are the guarantees that the possible transverse stress to the walls will not affect the structural soundness, as far as to threat a collapse of the buildings?

Who will pay and how any potential damage to or from the underlying wooden structures will be monitored when they are hidden under the new cladding?

### **Written Response from Councillor Rowley**

Thank you for your enquiry. To provide a full technical response will require input from both our contractor and their architectural advisors which I am afraid cannot be provided in time for the meeting. A written response will be provided to you and copied to all members of the Council within 10 working days of the Council meeting ‘