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| To: | Council |
| Date: | 27 November 2017 |
| Title of Report:  | Questions on Notice from members of Council and responses from the Board Members and Leader |

# Introduction

1. Questions submitted by members of Council to the Board members and Leader of the Council, by the deadline in the Constitution are listed below in the order they will be taken at the meeting.
2. Responses are included where available.
3. Questioners can ask one supplementary question of the councillor answering the original question.
4. This report is republished after the Council meeting to include supplementary questions and responses as part of the minutes pack.

# Questions and responses

# Board member for A Clean and Green Oxford

# From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Tanner – Single-use plastics

Will Cllr Tanner join me in welcoming the fact that Brighton and Hove Council has voted to ban its own purchase of single-use plastics and seeking to work with businesses in the area to do the same? Would he back similar measures in Oxford?

## **Response**

Yes. I am happy to examine the City Council’s use of single-use plastics and to work with business to reduce the wasteful and damaging discarding of plastic items. The City Council has an effective policy of recycling waste plastic but our guiding hierarchy is reduce, re-use and only then recycle.

# From Councillor Wade to Councillor Tanner – Pony and Ofo Bikes

Blue 'Pony' bikes and Yellow 'Ofo' bikes - two new commercial 'dockless' bike schemes in Oxford - have been found abandoned as far out as the A34. In theory the companies collects abandoned bikes but in practice Council staff end up with the job. Can the Board Member advise the staff time and cost to the Council of collecting these bikes, and whether there has been a discussion about a way to manage this problem with the Council in Leiden, which has experienced similar difficulties?

## **Response**

No costs have been incurred by the Council as Council Staff do not collect dockless bikes. Our involvement is to pass on reports of abandoned bikes to the appropriate company. All bikes have GPS trackers on them so those outside of the geo-fenced area are picked up as quickly as possible. Most of the time the company will call the person who hired the bike to give them opportunity to return the bike to a parking ‘hub’. Most of the companies work on a reward / penalty system, so bikes left parked badly, or bikes that end up outside of the geo-fenced area will mean the user is deducted penalty points. All of the companies have dedicated local staff to pick up issues and redistribute bikes as necessary.

**Supplementary Question**

Was there any truth in a reported claim that the council had a large heap of damaged dockless bikes waiting for recovery and repair?

**Response**

Councillor Upton, as the Council’s cycling champion, responded that the council was not collecting dockless bikes. This was the responsibility of the operators under the agreed code of conduct: contact details had to be on each bike and their own teams had to deal with any reports. Complaints to the council were passed to the operators to deal with and the Council neither collected nor stored any dockless bikes.

# From Councillor Wade to Councillor Tanner – Dockless Bikes Code of Conduct

Can the Board Member advise whether the Code of Conduct for dockless bikes, reported in the press in August, and to be devised between the City Council, County Council and University, has now reached draft stage?

## **Response**

The Code of Conduct for dockless bikes is already in place and all four operating companies have signed up to this (OFO, Mobike, Obike and Ponybike). You can find the code of conduct on the City Council website at: <https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/3893/oxford_code_of_conduct_for_dockless_bike_sharing_operators>

# From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Tanner – Air quality/traffic levels effect from Westgate

When will data be available to allow an assessment to be made of the impact the Westgate centre has had on air quality and traffic levels in the city?

## **Written response**

We require 12 months of data to be able to estimate the annual mean measurement for NO2 in order to undertake a full assessment. However judging by the first few weeks traffic has been flowing freely and it is unlikely that there will be an increase in pollution from the roads around the new Westgate Shopping Centre.

# From Councillor Wade to Councillor Tanner – Air Quality Levels in Carfax and Cornmaket

Can the Board Member advise whether diffusion tubes have been put up at the south end of Cornmarket and at the Carfax end of the High to measure air quality levels now that the experimental taxi rank and bus stops are in place?

## **Written response**

As part of our city-wide air quality monitoring scheme we monitor air quality at the following places around Carfax and Cornmarket:

• Queen Street at Halifax Bank (diffusion tube)

• Queen Street at M&S (diffusion tube)

• St. Aldates at Town Hall (Automatic monitor and diffusion tube)

• Cornmarket Street at Starbucks (diffusion tube)

**Supplementary Question**

It would be good to also have a diffusion tube at the end of the High Street were the buses stopped. Could one be installed there?

**Response**

There may be an existing tube in the area as we do have figures on pollution on the High Street but I will check.

# From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Tanner – Council Vehicles and Zero Emission Zone

## The City Council are said to own 322 vehicles, ranging from cars to vans to trucks. How many of them are electrically powered, so would meet the Zero Emission Zone criterion? How many are diesel-powered?

## **Written response**

We have 17 pure Electric Vehicles (plus 6 electric bicycles and 3 conventional pool bicycles). There are 268 diesel powered vehicles. For completeness there are 23 hybrid and 14 petrol vehicles. The Zero Emission Zone from 2020 will apply to City Council vehicles as well as everyone else’s cars, vans, lorries and buses.

**Supplementary Question**

What are we doing about replacing all our diesel vehicles?

**Response**

We are committed to replacing these with suitable electric vehicles as they come to the end of their operational life. The Zero Emission Zone will modify this planned replacement programme: for instance one of the first things we need is refuse lorries which can come into the Zone from 2020.

# From Councillor Brandt to Councillor Tanner – New Cleaning Regime costs

Can the portfolio holder let us know how much does the enhanced cleaning regime in the city centre (started when the new Westgate opened) costs? And who is paying for it, is it coming out of the city budget, or is the Westgate Alliance contributing towards it?

## **Written response**

One additional Full Time Equivalent (1FTE) was included for 2017/8 and a second for 2018/19 was included in the budget and is in place. The total cost is around £65k pa from the agreed Council budget. There have been no further costs and there is no contribution from the Westgate Alliance (WGA) and WGA have their own cleaning regimes for areas under their control. In response to the additional cleaning demands in the city we introduced an extended-day service in October 2017 and have managed the increased costs within existing budgets.

**Supplementary Question**

Is the additional FTE just absorbed within the existing budget or is this a new cost?

**Response**

We are introducing extra staff for the new Barton development. In the town centre the staff are working to a new shift pattern at no extra cost, apart from those for additional cleaning staff for the toilets. Staff now started at 5am, and were scheduled in a more efficient pattern at no extra cost. We commend them for their willingness to change working patterns: these were popular with some, less so with others. Those who found the new arrangements unmanageable have been transferred to suburban areas still on the old shift patterns.

# From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Tanner – Street Scene Staff/reorganization

## Can the Board Member please indicate how many staff have left Street scene after its recent reorganization, and for what reasons?

## **Written response**

Four staff have left out of a total of 180 involved in the restructure. This is in line with normal staff turnover. Reasons have included the revised shift patterns, dissatisfaction with a revised role and other unstated personal reasons.

**Supplementary Question**

Please could the new organisation chart be sent to councillors?

**Response**

I will arrange for this to be done.

# From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Tanner – Spotless Oxford Scheme

Is the Council embarrassed by Jeremy Mogford’s description of Oxford as filthy?

## **Written response**

In the article referred to Mr Mogford states that ‘the Streetscene Team did a great job but others should do more…’ There is a clear implication that the term ‘filthy’ is being applies to the behaviours and habits of people as demonstrated by the BBC TV focus on Oxford’s city centre two weeks ago. Everyone is entitled to their own opinion. But my view is that standards of cleanliness in the city centre are improving and are higher than they have ever been.

**Supplementary Question**

What role does the Oxford Civic Society’s scheme have to play in keeping the city clean?

**Response**

I will discuss this outside the meeting once I have more information.

# From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Tanner - Glyphosate

Can the Board Member provide details of use of glyphosate by the City Council or its contractors in Wolvercote ward?

## **Written response**

We apply glyphosate in accordance with manufacturers and industry standards to all street pavements and associated hard surface areas three times annually throughout the city which includes all streets in Wolvercote (excluding, on the most recent treatment, Meadow Prospect). This is carried out as a pedestrian operation and is a spot treatment only, meaning only visible weeds are targeted. We do this using controlled droplet applicators (CDA), and so very little visible residue is left behind on the street surface. This helps to minimise the volume of pesticide being applied, and is the safest method of application available for our operators and for the public. In addition to this, in recent years we have also applied glyphosate around the bases of all trees, so that the need for strimming throughout the season is minimised. This was brought in due to concerns surrounding the stimming causing damage to the trees across Oxford, and is usually a one off treatment in April, or in line with the first cut of the season. We are aware that there is a debate about the future licencing of this product which we are watching closely and we will only continue to use it whilst it is a licenced product.

**Supplementary Question**

What would be the mechanism for streets opting out of the weedkiller programme if there was public support on the street to do so?

**Response**

It is unclear how this opt-out could work. Any threat would be to our own staff not the public or to animals, and we are keeping up with research and guidance on safety and appropriate use.

# Board member for Community Safety

# From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Hayes – Enforcement Action on Cyclists in Cornmarket

Please can the Board Member give details of any regular enforcement action of the ‘no cycling’ in Cornmarket St. between the hours of 10 and 6 has taken place in the last 12 months?

## **Written response**

The Community Response Team and City Centre Ambassadors are the teams that predominantly address this issue. They engage and provide education as to why a person has been stopped. A PSPO Faq slip is issued in most cases which explains what a PSPO means, some answers to general questions; this also contains the full set of conditions.

There have been 308 recorded incidents where a person has been stopped. Some people dismount and move away before an officer can speak to them. Street Scenes staff also ask people to dismount approximately 40 times a week which is not reflected in the figures provided.

We deal with this through day to day monitoring. No FPNs have been issued nor has anyone been prosecuted.

**Supplementary Question**

Are there any plans to issue FPNs to repeat offenders?

**Response**

One of the purposes of a FPN is that they are issued for continuing anti-social behaviour so are not applicable here. We work with cycling groups and students to improve behaviour and are asking for new signage and for more resources to enforce the rules.

# From Councillor Wade to Councillor Hayes – Taxi rank in Cornmarket

## On a Monday night two weeks ago I counted 10 taxis pulled up in Cornmarket. The taxis stretched along the east side from Carfax to Market Street, with a further taxi waiting on the west side to join the rank. Cyclists and pedestrians were weaving through them. Can the Board Member advise when and why the decision to extend the rank from Golden Cross Yard to Market Street was made?

## **Written response**

The initial Oxfordshire County Council experimental Traffic Management Order came to force on 24th October 2017 to enable taxis to enter Cornmarket Street from Carfax, turn in the 50 meters before the Clarendon Centre and wait in the taxi bays between 18:00 hrs – 10:00 hrs the following day.

Due to a public safety concerns expressed within the first week of the operations of the taxi rank, Oxfordshire County Council extended the area to 98 meters from Carfax to just north of the junction with Market Street. The Taxi rank will be confined to an area on the east side for 15 taxis. Under County Council powers this variation came into force on 10 November 2017 (variation order attached).

**Supplementary Question**

How is the use of the new rank managed and the rules enforced?

**Response**

We are meeting the County Council to discuss how this is working. We are currently paying for additional stewards to manage the rank and ensure public safety but it is not in our interest to keep doing this.

# Board Member for Finance and Asset Management

# From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Turner – Temporary Cycle racks Westgate

## Can the portfolio holder let us know who paid for the temporary cycle parking racks which the city has installed near the Westgate on opening week? If it came out of the city budget, how much was it?

## **Written response**

These were paid for by the County Council and there was no cost incurred by the City Council.

**Supplementary Question**

Given that City Council staff carried out the installation of the cycle stands on behalf of the County Council, could it be confirmed that the County Council paid us for this?

**Response**

Councillor Price responded on behalf of Councillor Turner and confirmed that to say that the City Council was indeed paid.

# From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Turner – Business rate income from Westgate

## What is the earliest expected date the council will start to see business rate income from the Westgate Centre, and if there is a delay due to a failure in having carried out the necessary rating evaluations, will the Council be seeking the payment of interest on the outstanding amount?

## **Written response**

Around 70% of the properties opened in October 2017 and business rates income will be due on these properties from this date. The Valuation Office are charged with surveying and valuing all properties and adding them to the valuation list for billing to be undertaken by the Council. The Council is still awaiting this information and following a number of meetings with the Valuation Office and the developers, Land Securities, understands that information for 5 of the largest properties will be given to the Council before Christmas. Rating information on the remainder of the properties should be given to the authority by 31st March 2018. The authority is not able to claim interest on any accrued income. It would be fair to say the City Council has been extremely robust and highly proactive in its dealings with the Valuation Office in this matter, and will escalate matters if information is not received in line with appropriate timescales.

**Supplementary Question**

Could you clarify exactly when the first business rate income will come in and on what units? The interest due on backdated rates will mount up so are there measures to stop this happening and collect this?

**Response**

Councillor Price passed the question to the Head of Finance who responded.

We are still waiting for the valuation office to make their assessments on units at Westgate, and while we are expecting the top 5 units to be assessed by April 2018, we do not have anything yet. We are meeting regularly with the valuation office. We can’t bill until the assessment is made and we can’t charge interest on backdated rates. Our experience is that of many other areas: valuation offices are understaffed and have a huge backlog.

# From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Turner – Loss of Business Rate on Council owned properties from relocation of Westgate

Roughly how many Council owned properties will be vacated as a result of relocation to the Westgate (and the loss of rental income association with this) and, more broadly, what is the expected loss in business rates from the relocation of businesses to the Westgate?

And how does this combined financial loss compare with the additional income that is to be expected from the expanded Westgate (excluding the business rates that would have been expected from the original Westgate)?

## **Written response**

At present there are 28 properties vacant in the City Centre, two of which are owned by the City Council. The gross total value of business rates on these empty properties is £1.6 million per annum although some may be given rate reliefs. Empty properties will benefit from no charge for the first 3 months but this will revert to full rates after this period. The two properties owned by the Council would pay rent of £227k per annum. It is not always possible to know the reasons for tenants vacating properties and some of the properties were vacated before the Westgate opened, and of course there will always be some properties that are not occupied at any given time.

It is anticipated that the current empty properties will be re-occupied or reconfigured and the expectation is that they will be brought back into use. Consequently, the loss of rates income and rental income for those properties owned by the Council is anticipated to be mitigated. The estimated amount of income from the Westgate once all properties are fully occupied will be around £11 million per annum. This has been arrived at based on other similar sized shopping centres in the absence of accurate information from the Valuation Office. In comparison to the previous rates income on Westgate this would represent an increase of £7 million per annum in gross rates.

Proactive work is being undertaken by the City Centre Manager and the Councils own property team to not only ensure the re-occupation of our properties but improving the window displays and frontages of unoccupied buildings in the meantime.

**Supplementary Question**

What action is being taken to re-let vacant shop units and what is the current market for units?

**Response**

The majority of vacant units are our properties or within our control. We understand all but one unit is either being re-let or has potential occupiers. The owner of the vacant Next unit is considering different options for redeveloping this.

# From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Turner – Covered Market

Please can the Board Member provide the following information with reference to the Covered Market:

• How many vacant units are there?

• When did those units become vacant?

## **Written response**

On 24th November there were 3 vacant units .The fishmonger vacated in November. Helen and Douglas House vacated in September but in fact this is still let to them until December, a pop up has been agreed subject to an early surrender of the lease. CH Brown vacated at the end of September and there is interest from a pop up . In the long term we have interest in all vacant units from permanent occupiers. We want to work hard to bring any vacant units back into use, but of course to do so in such a way that supports the unique and distinctive character of the market in the long term, including, so far as possible, supporting the food-led emphasis of the leasing strategy.

**Supplementary Question**

Have the previous leaseholders given reasons for vacating their units?

**Response**

Councillor Clarkson responded as the Covered Market champion. The fishmonger wished to consolidate its business elsewhere; Helen and Douglas House were reducing their activities because of more general problems. It was disappointing but we were confident of getting suitable tenants shortly. The market was still busy and anecdotal evidence was that footfall rose and fell with visitors to the city centre and the Westgate.

# Board member for Housing

# From Councillor Wade to Councillor Rowley – Trailblazer Initiative

Oxford, together with several other UK cities, has received a grant (in our case: £790,000) as part of the Government's Homelessness Trailblazer initiative.

Will the Board member look at the possibility of combining with these other cities to press the Government to: (a) increase Trailblazer resources, and (b) provide emergency payments to Universal Credit Claimants during the six week 'waiting period' and a long 'claw-back' period for such payments - without which there will be a dramatic increase in homelessness?

## **Written response**

1. The Trailblazer is a two-year programme to develop new initiatives and interventions that will prevent homelessness earlier. The funding allocated to Oxford is to fund the Trailblazer Team and to commission a number of initiatives that will lead to systemic change in the future, when the Trailblazer programme ends. There is no suggestion from the Government that there could be on-going Trailblazer funding, as their intention is that learning from the programme should be absorbed by the Council and its partners as new ways of working, especially in the delivery of HRA17.
2. Funding for the Trailblazer programme has been allocated to carry out certain activities as presented in our bid and cannot be used to mitigate the impact of universal credit. However, Oxford City Council has set up an emergency fund to support UC claimants who are waiting for their first payment. This fund might be available if someone:-
* lives within Oxford City Council boundaries or are one of our tenants
* have made a claim for Universal Credit and applied for an advance payment
* are working with our Springboard Money service or an advice service to help manage your money
* need help because you cannot afford to pay for food, household necessities or utilities before you get your first Universal Credit payment.

**Supplementary Question**

Has the Universal Credit emergency fund been well enough publicised and will we be told in advance if there is enough money in it to meet the need?

**Response**

There has been some movement and compromise on this by government, having been persuaded by robust representations from charities.

The council is determined to make sure people don’t lose their homes while waiting for their first payment.

# Board member for Leisure, Parks and Sport

# From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Smith – Tree work to Council owned Trees

Residents have written to complain about lengthy delays in works to council-owned trees that were assessed and assigned “routine priority” status. Please can the Board Member confirm the total number of tree works interventions for each priority category between April-October 2017 and April-October 2017?

## **Written response**

These are the timeframe definitions for each priority rating for carrying out tree works:

No Work Required No works were specified at the time of inspection

Routine Up to 3 Years

Advisable Up to 18 Months

Essential Up to 6 Months

Urgent – Public Safety Up to 1 Week

Critical As soon as possible

Urgent – Tree Health Up to 2 Months

The following is a breakdown for Oct 16 – Oct 17 of both:

* + our trees routinely surveyed
	+ our trees inspected due to enquiries

It is essential to note that we survey some trees as individual trees and some trees as groups. Our database captures these as assets (an asset can be either an individual tree specimen or groups of trees - where up to 200 trees could be present).

According to our database for the period Oct 16 – Oct 17.

No. of enquiries logged 768

No. assets surveyed 8608

No. of assets rated under priority headings:

Urgent 33

Essential 414

Advisable 1492

Routine 1980

No Works Required 4689

**Supplementary Question**

Do you think the way assets are captured on the database is helpful in assessing workload given that these can capture a single tree or a group of trees?

**Response**

I think this is the most efficient way of capturing the data. It is taking longer than we’d like to complete the work and we are looking at proposals in the budget for funds to help speed this up.

# From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Smith – Wolvercote Play Areas

When were the children's play areas in Lower Wolvercote and on Wolvercote Green last refurbished or improved?

## **Written response**

The playground equipment in Lower Wolvercote and Wolvercote Green play areas was installed in 2011 and as with all our play areas we undertake regular safety check and there are no current issues.

**Supplementary Question**

What is the rough replacement schedule for playground equipment?

**Response**

That will need to be given as a written answer. All equipment is surveyed regularly to make sure it is safe. We are coming to the end of the full city-wide refurbishment programme.

# From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Smith – Five Mile Drive Pavilion

Will the Councillor agree with me that the lack of pavilion facilities at Five Mile Drive is unacceptable?

Will she also join me in thanking officers for their hard work both in managing the situation on a temporary basis, and in working on a longer-term proposal involving Summertown Stars taking over the existing brick building and refurbishing it at their own expense?

However, would she also agree with me that in practice this option has turned out to be unsatisfactory for the club and other stakeholders?

Will she therefore commit the council to honouring its commitment made in 2013 that Five Mile Drive, along with other facilities, will be "improved" (the other facilities on the list have all been delivered)?

Will she also agree to meet representatives of Summertown Stars, local councillors and other stakeholders at an early date to agree a long-term solution to this issue?

## **Written response**

As part of the pavilion modernisation programme the Council has invested over £1.2m and a lot of officer time into improving both the pavilions at Cutteslowe Park which now provide excellent provision for Summertown Stars and the local area. As part of this development we obtained £650,000 of external funding from Sport England and the Football Foundation which makes obtaining further funding for the area very difficult.

While the Council supports the clubs aspiration to continue to grow and to further enhance their ancillary provision there is no further funding remaining within the pavilions budget to build a new changing facility at Five Mile Drive.

As such, we are providing a temporary toilet and had hoped that the solution of converting a garage next to the park into a toilet would have been suitable. Through discussion with the football club we understand that they no longer feel that this option would fit their ambitions for the site, however they still wish to explore the building as a potential storage solution for the site. We will continue to work with local members and the key site stakeholders to manage the existing provision at the site and to further explore options to provide long term facilities if external funding were to be found.

**Supplementary Question**

Is the lack of facilities which were promised in 2013 unacceptable; is the current provision unsatisfactory (eg I understand toilets are not working); and will the council honour the commitment made in 2013?

**Response**

The toilet and storage situation are not adequate and officers are working with the club to find a satisfactory solution.

# Board member for Planning and Regulatory Services

# From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Hollingsworth – Highways and Parking

Can the Board Member please set out a list of the projects on which there is collaborative working with the County Council on highways and parking issues for the benefit of members?

## **Written response**

The City and County Councils work closely together on a range of highways and parking issues.

Maintenance and minor schemes are carried out by the City Council on behalf of the Highways Authority, using powers under Section 42 of the Highways Act 1980. This includes winter maintenance work, emergency responses, signs and lines maintenance, some drainage investigation and repairs, vegetation and hedge works and adverse weather response. To assist with this several officers undertake joint roles, working for both the City and County Councils. Where the City Council carries out a maintenance scheme on behalf of the County Council, the scheme is managed and delivered by a City Council officer.

In addition the City and County Councils have recently agreed to appoint a Joint Parking Manager; the primary focus of this role is identify ways in which the two authorities’ parking operations can be streamlined and brought into line with another, to improve the customer experience and to generate efficiency savings in back office functions and by sharing technology and resources. This project began a few weeks ago, and so far has been about scoping the work and initiating research; early signs are promising, and positive results should be apparent for both authorities during 2018.

The two authorities also increasingly collaborate on cycling measures, and I am pleased to see that the County Council has now appointed a member cycling champion to mirror our own long-standing role, ably carried out by Cllr Upton. The last couple of years have seen increased collaboration on cycling policy and priorities, and while there is still some further refinements to be made, the direction of travel in terms of bringing the approach of the two authorities into line with one another is the right one.

Finally, there is significant collaboration between the two councils over strategic and infrastructure planning. The Growth Deal announced in the Budget this week stems in a very large part from the successful – and very intensive – work by highways and planning officers of both authorities to identify infrastructure needs for Oxford and Oxfordshire. The two authorities recently commissioned consultants to carry out work on movement and public space in the city centre, which will form both part of the evidence base for the City Council’s Local Plan and the County Council’s update of their LTP. By using the same evidence base, and working closely on the policies that derive from that evidence, the two authorities can and will bring their respective policy documents into line with one another – something that will also form the basis for the Joint Statutory Plan that will be developed between all the councils of Oxfordshire as part of the work to implement the Growth Deal.

**Supplementary Question**

Could you explain if the proposed joint parking manager post’s remit will cover the revision of existing but outdated controlled parking zones?

**Response**

The post is intended to work on integrating the back office functions of the County and City Councils’ parking operations - for instance new parking machines, technical approaches to non-payment, and reducing duplicated administration costs. It is not proposed that it will change the existing functions. However parking and controlled parking zones are among the matters we discuss this with County Council colleagues.

# From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Hollingsworth - Westgate Cycle Parking

When will the promised 1000+ bicycles parking spaces at the Westgate be installed and the cycle hub opened?

## **Written response**

I think it would be helpful to spell out exactly how many cycle parking spaces are to be provided by the Westgate development. The original planning permission that was approved included 1034 spaces, of which 118 were for the residential units, 184 were in the secure cycle hub, and 732 were in the public realm.

As part of the development 88 spaces were removed from at the northern end of the site in Bonn Square. As the committee report made clear this was taken into account, so the net increase in the number of spaces was 944 spaces in total. Other spaces temporarily removed during the construction phase, such as those in St Ebbe’s, will be replaced and are NOT therefore part of the calculation.

The cycle hub, which now contains 186 spaces, is fully fitted out and (at the time of writing) is planned to open in a week to ten days’ time when the electronic fob operating system has been tested and becomes operational. The residential cycle parking, of 118 spaces, is due for completion soon and will be open when residents start to move into the flats.

The remaining spaces are provided on street, in 25 locations around the Westgate centre. Many of these spaces have been installed, and were installed before the centre was opened – for example in Faulkner Street. Others, such as those on Old Greyfriars Street, can only be installed once the paving works are completed over the next couple of weeks. As of Thursday morning (23rd November) 410 of these spaces have been installed, with 384 currently available for use and 26 about to be when resurfacing work near them is completed. This does NOT include spaces currently installed in St Ebbe’s and Pennyfarthing Place, as these are replacements of temporarily removed parking spaces, as noted above.

In order to comply with the total figure in the planning permission a further 320 spaces need to be installed (322 if the public realm figure is treated as a separate target). Westgate believe that they have identified sites for 350 spaces, and these sites have been or are being discussed with planning officers and where appropriate the County Council to ensure that they do not obstruct access for pedestrians or emergency vehicles. It is believed that there is scope for an increase in the number of spaces in St Ebbes for example.

These remaining spaces will be installed as soon as the areas in question are paved and clear of any remaining construction works, so there will be a rolling programme of cycle parking installation over the next few weeks. However because cycle parking can only be installed once there is pavement on which to install it, it is likely that the final few spaces will only be operational near the end of the final construction works, in the few weeks after Christmas.

In addition, the Council is increasing its resources for ensuring that cycle parking is kept clear of abandoned bikes, meaning that more spaces are available for use. Historically racks were inspected approximately on a quarterly basis by the Abandoned Vehicles Officer, with a focus on machines which could be considered unroadworthy - having 2 or more repair issues, for example one flat tyre and a broken chain. This narrow definition did not of course include bikes which were abandoned.

The frequency of inspections has now been increased, with all cycle parking inspected at least monthly. The bikes that appear to be abandoned are tagged 7 days in advance or removal, and then stored for at least six weeks before disposal. In additional each rack will be deep cleaned once a year, allowing a further opportunity to identify and remove abandoned bikes.

In addition all Streetscene staff have been tasked with reporting any seemingly ‘unroadworthy’ bikes during their routine work or inspections, and these will be tagged at the immediately rather than being waiting for the monthly inspections.

**Supplementary Question**

Why is there a perception that the Council appears to allow big businesses to fail to comply with planning conditions whereas small businesses would not be allowed to do so?

**Response**

It is a false assumption. Regardless of size, enforcement of breaches of planning permission goes through a series if stages before going to court. It is quite clear the Westgate is not in compliance with their permissions and there are reasons for this, but the work to rectify this is ongoing. In some cases the installation of cycle racks is dependent on other works - eg to pavements - being completed. If in the end there is non-compliance then appropriate action against the developer will be taken.

# From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Hollingsworth - Seacourt Park & Ride

Can the portfolio holder please update Council on the expansion of Seacourt Park & Ride?

## **Written response**

Council officers and our appointed consultants have been working to finalise the information required by the Environment Agency and others as part of their responses to the planning application, and this has now been completed and submitted. I understand that the application will be considered by the West Area Planning Committee in December.

# From Councillor Wade to Councillor Hollingsworth – ‘Oxford Futures’

Will the Portfolio Holder advise whether all or any of the eight positive steps recommended in the Oxford Civic Society's 'Oxford Futures' report have been taken into account in the development of the Local Plan?

## **Written response**

The report – the full title of which is “Oxford’s Futures: Achieving Smart Growth in Central Oxfordshire” – contains many useful and interesting ideas which have shaped the emerging Local Plan for Oxford, and which chime with the City Council’s – and my own long-held - views on planning for Central Oxfordshire.

The eight specific recommendations in the final section of the report are:

1. Set up an Oxford Futures Commission to further the debate and win support for change

2. Develop a spatial growth plan and a charter for sustainable development

3. Establish a Quality Review Panel to assess important new development proposals

4. Engage the public through a Development Forum

5. Train and develop key decision makers

6. Establish design competitions for key sites

7. Model the impact of development and transport options

8. Mobilise and coordinate investment through appropriate long-term mechanisms.

All of these have been taken on board, and have been enacted to some degree. For example the Growth Deal for Oxfordshire announced in the Budget on Wednesday of last week came about through exactly the kind of collaborative working between the LEP, the Local Authorities and other partners envisaged in the first and eight recommendations. A design competition was held for the railway station site, as suggested in the fourth recommendation. Forums for public interest groups have been set up to allow dialogue over the planning process, as recommended. The impact of development options have been extensively modelled by the planners of all Oxfordshire’s local authorities, working together, work that will now be expanded to include a Joint Spatial Plan for the County that will underlie and co-ordinate the different Local Plans.

The main thrust of the report was, of course, that the city and the region which it forms the centre of should adopt the approach of carefully planned expansion along existing and new public transport corridors. That is why it endorsed growth at sites like Grenoble Road and on the transport corridors to the north and south of the city, a policy that I and the City Council fully support.

**Supplementary Question**

How far has implementation of the Civic Society recommendation to set up the development forum, as it is of interest to other planning forums in the city?

**Response**

The Civic Society is one of a number of development forums we have in the city. The report in 2014 written by and for the Civic Society (one of a number we have for planning) sets out in detail a good vision for the development of the city, including transport corridors which are now proposed in the emerging wider strategic transport policy.

# From Councillor Wade to Councillor Hollingsworth – Pavement and Kerbstones Damage

Could the Portfolio Holder consider whether a standard condition should be attached to planning permissions requiring that pavements and kerbstones damaged in the course of building works should be totally renewed?

## **Written response**

I have sympathy with the question, because damage to paving and pavements during the construction process seems to be a frequent problem. However the law is not helpful here in supporting the suggested course of action.

Guidance on the use of planning conditions is clear that attempting to import control over other legislative areas into planning conditions should be avoided and would fail to meet the legal tests for use of planning conditions. This is because powers and responsibilities for the highway exist under highways legislation and these make clear that in the case of areas like Oxford the County Council is the relevant authority for the use, management and maintenance of the highway, including enforcement of the rectification of any damage incurred during building operations. All councillors faced with problems of damage to paving or pavements need to raise their concerns with the Highway Authority.

**Supplementary Question**

How will the process of all councillors reporting damage work in practice and is there a simpler way if doing this, especially given that many pavements are in very bad condition?

**Response**

We can’t use planning conditions in the way you would like but I will talk to building control and planning colleagues to see if we can carry out a post-development inspection and arrange for repairs to be carried out.

But ward members also have a role to play in reporting damage, and should raise matters with County Council counterparts – raise concerns by as many routes as possible and ask the County Council to use the powers they have to ensure the repairs are made.

# From Councillor Gant to Councillor Hollingsworth – Barton Park

Households in Oxford recently received a flier bearing the logo of Oxford City Council and its partners, advertising the first phase of market homes at Barton Park. Two-bed apartments are advertised as starting at £360K. A recent look at the website shows the cheapest available two-bed apartment at £395,500.

Would the Board member join me in noting that this is a considerable increase even on the starting price of £300K mentioned in the press earlier this year?

Would he also comment on how these market prices fit with the supply-and-demand argument that simply increasing numbers will on its own cause prices to fall?

Will he also explain what the model of development employed at Barton offers families and workers on middle incomes- exactly the people Oxford needs to provide with somewhere to live?

**Written response**

As this is three questions rather than one I will respond to each in turn.

On the first, I cannot comment on the accuracy or otherwise of a figure in the press some months ago.

On the second question no-one has made such a claim about Barton Park, as clearly the building of 854 houses in this development is not going to meet demand for housing in all sectors and of all sizes in the city. What is required - as confirmed by a House of Lords report last year, and back by the Chartered Institute of Housing and other experts - is a comprehensive house-building programme across the country, of at least 300,000 units a year over many years, with a substantial number of those homes being for social rent. What is quite clear, however, is that not building homes will simply make the situation worse.

The third question is the same as one asked at the last Council, and the response is therefore the same: The Barton Area Action Plan is the official planning policy document for Barton Park. The AAP, which was debated and adopted by Council in December 2012, establishes the mix of housing to be built by type, and by tenure. Policy BA9 says that a minimum of 40% of the housing on the entire development at Barton Park will be for social rent. The remainder will be market housing - in other words housing sold on the open market. The market housing is in effect paying for the social housing, and also for the substantial infrastructure investment required to develop the site.

When Council approved the AAP it did so believing that this was the appropriate balance to strike between social housing - which is in drastically short supply in Oxford - other forms of subsidised or sub-market housing, and market housing. The alternative, which the councillor appears to be proposing, would have been to have replace the social housing for those in greatest need with other less affordable forms of housing.

**Supplementary Question**

The response does not entirely answer the question.

**Response**

The Area Action Plan set the policy for 40% social rented housing and the time to propose changes was while developing the plan.

# From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Hollingsworth – Buses in Queen Street

As the buses will stay in Queen Street for at least another 6 months, will some warning signs be provided to remind people emerging from the Westgate to be alert to their presence?

## **Written response**

Signage inside the Westgate is a matter for the Westgate, and signage on the road is the responsibility of the County Council as the highways authority. The County Council will need to balance any beneficial such signage might have in raising awareness against the disbenefits of cluttering the street scene.

**Supplementary Question**

Are you minded to exert your considerable influence with the County Council to try and address this safety issue?

**Response**

I will raise this with County Council when I next meet them. At the moment I am minded to see the disbenefits as outweighing the benefits.

# Leader of the Council, Board Member for Corporate Strategy and Economic Development

# From Councillor Brandt to Councillor Price – Western Conveyance Flood Channel

Can the portfolio holder provide an update on the status of the Western Conveyance flood channel, including any anticipated additional financial contributions from Oxford City Council?

## **Written response**

The Western Conveyance flood channel, now known as the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme (OFAS), is a project being delivered by the Environment Agency (EA) and local partners that will reduce the flood risk to at least 1,200 homes in the city and reduce the disruption flooding causes to two key routes into and out of the city- Abingdon Road and Botley Road as well as the railway line. The outline business case for the OFAS has been approved by HM Treasury which demonstrates the scheme represents value for money for the tax payer. The EA has been undertaking survey and ground investigation work across the footprint of the scheme over the last months including archaeology. The EA hope to submit the planning application for the OFAS in Spring 2018.

The OFAS is a £120m project and there is currently a funding gap of £4.35m. The EA have secured a record £51m in contributions for the scheme, which is the largest amount of partnership contributions for any flood scheme in the UK. Oxford City Council has contributed £1.5m capital so far and has committed to contributing a further in-kind contribution by foregoing land values up to £1m. The EA have a funding contingency plan for the OFAS which includes the action to ask partners for their best and final contribution offer towards the scheme. This could be in the form of an increased capital contribution or through an underwrite, full or part, of the funding gap. The City Council has not yet been asked for their best and final contribution offer towards the scheme. However any likely request is being considered as part of the ongoing budget process.

# From Councillor Brandt to Councillor Price – Impact of Westgate Centre on Level of trade of local businesses

When will data be available to determine the impact the Westgate Centre has had on the level of trade for local businesses?

## **Written response**

Recorded footfall in the city centre has been increasing since mid-September, with the highest figures this year during half-term which coincided with the opening of the Westgate. During the week commencing 23/10 the change in footfall for Oxford over the last 52 weeks was 1.3% up on the previous year and footfall for the year to date was 2.1% up on the previous year. The number of visitors counted for this week was 929,260 and the busiest day was Saturday 28th October with 160,027 visitors. This is about 10,000 more than on an average Saturday.

We are now four weeks further on in the year and footfall for the year to date is now 3.1% up on the previous year. We are still recording visitor numbers of 783,648 per week, compared to an average increase +0.3% in the South East Region, and -0.8% for UK as a whole.

Our footfall counters are located in Queen St, Cornmarket and St George’s Place. They show that Cornmarket is still the busiest location of the three, which confirms that the pedestrian flow is not concentrated in the west of the centre.

We do not have access to sales figures for retail outlets as this is commercially sensitive information which is not shared with the Council, but the City Centre Manager has received many anecdotal references to the benefits that the opening of the Westgate has brought for their businesses.

**Supplementary Question**

When might we have a more detailed picture – and is there any way to reconcile the ‘no expected increase in pollution’ with the net increase in footfall and numbers of buses and cars travelling round the centre.

**Response**

We’ve been told that there were 100,000 people in the Westgate but only 6% of car park spaces were occupied. There is a successful campaign to get people to use park and ride, buses and trains so they are not contributing to a significant increase in traffic. It will be interesting to test this over Christmas, and afterwards once the trade settles into a regular pattern.

# From Councillor Gant to Councillor Price – Visual aspect of Cornmarket Street

Does the Board have any plans to improve the visual aspect of Cornmarket Street, and in particular to help ameliorate the immediate impact of business closures linked to the opening of the new Westgate?

## **Written response**

The Council is currently working with the Landlords and Managing Agents who are responsible for units on Cornmarket to ensure that empty units are kept secure and that opportunities for the use of promotional window displays are taken. These could include the promotion of the Covered Market and cultural attractions such as the Ashmolean. Several of the units recently vacated are likely to be re-occupied within the next couple of months.

There are also regular discussions between the City Centre Manager, Streetscene, County Highways and Community Safety and Resilience to ensure the area remains a priority in terms of cleanliness, maintenance of street furniture, signage and the daily management of any anti-social behaviour.

An audit of the void units across the city centre has been carried out, covering ownership, size, rents and business rates and any current options for reletting.

The latest Retail Needs Study, (Carter Jonas, 2017) indicates that Oxford is ranked 42nd in the 2015 Javelin Venue ranking of all town and shopping centres. (3000+). The l Study identifies that there is strong and growing market demand from retail and leisure operators for representation in the city centre and it is performing well in terms of reported Prime Zone A Rents and shopping yields. Several mixed-use schemes are coming forward in Cornmarket and George Street, including the redevelopment of the Council’s own property assets in George St, which was approved by the City Executive Board last month.

# From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Price – Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor

Does the Portfolio Holder agree with CPRE demands that there should be a full statutory public consultation into the Oxford to Cambridge Growth Corridor and Expressway, followed by a Public Inquiry, at which the environmental and social costs of the Growth Corridor should be weighed against the potential economic benefits envisaged, and the routing of any Expressway should be decided.

## **Written response**

The project team for the proposed Expressway consists of officials from Highways England and Jacobs. A Local Authorities stakeholder reference group is to be set up comprising both elected members and senior local authority officers, and this will sit alongside a number of wider stakeholder reference groups that will be open to all relevant interested parties. My understanding is that a major infrastructure project of this type is required to be subject to a public inquiry.

# From Councillor Wilkinson to Councillor Price – Boundary Review

As part of our cross-Party work on the boundary review, members have been considering documents on structure and governance of Preston Council. That Council has a similar committee structure to our own, plus an extra committee which deals with restructure and other employment issues. Would you agree there might be a case for considering the introduction of a similar committee here?

## **Written response**

The cross- party group for the boundary review has dealt effectively with the issues which arise from the review process, but I am not aware of any pressing need to add another committee to the current decision- making structures of this Council.

# From Councillor Gant to Councillor Price – Think-tank

Would the Leader join me in noting the recent report from the respected think-tank ResPublica, which says “The needless confusion that frustrates the ambitions of business and government alike in our county areas must end now?

With Brexit on the horizon and our city-regions already benefiting from devolution, we can’t afford the waste and complication that the current system creates. Single councils at the county scale are the future and we call on the Government to move rapidly to encourage them”.

Would he agree with me that examples of this sort of “confusion…waste and complication” are a regular occurrence in Oxford, ranging from relatively small-scale examples like this council using resources to conduct a consultation into the new taxi rank in Cornmarket only for respondents to be told that their responses have no bearing on the implementation of the scheme; planning conditions imposed by this council not being actioned because they are the responsibility of another authority; to larger-scale issues like housebuilding and infrastructure planning across the county being dependent on alignment between a range of viewpoints which are not always compatible, with the result that Oxford’s housing need does not always get allocated in the best possible place?

Would he join me in urging the Secretary of State to give due consideration to all well-researched contributions to this debate which seek to deliver better services and better value for money, including this report from ResPublica?

## **Written response**

It is interesting to note that the Leader of the Opposition continues to be a cheerleader for the destruction of city government, in order apparently, to bring the designation of taxi ranks and licensing enforcement under a single authority. While I think that there is scope for an intelligent discussion about the appropriate levels and structures for taking decisions about particular strategic and operational issues, the superficial assumption that unitary counties are the panacea to all structural issues is not credible – other than to the commissioners of the report to which this question refers, the County Councils Network.

# From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Price – Oxford and Cambridge University

Does the Leader share the concerns of the Green Group at the recent revelations about Oxford and Cambridge Universities (including nearly half of all Oxbridge colleges), made in the so-called Paradise Papers, that they have secretly invested tens of millions of pounds in offshore funds, including in a joint venture to develop oil exploration and deep-sea drilling? What influence can/will he bring to bear on the University and Colleges involved?

## **Written response**

It seems unlikely that the City Council will be able to exercise much influence on the investment policies of the University of Oxford and the colleges, but I share the unease that many people in Oxford and elsewhere will feel about the rationale of investing funds in offshore tax havens and in tax avoidance investment vehicles.