

Remote meeting
Minutes of a meeting of
Council
on Monday 20 July 2020

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Council members present:

Councillor Simmons (Lord Mayor)

Councillor Goddard (Sheriff)

Councillor Azad

Councillor Bely-Summers

Councillor Chapman

Councillor Cook

Councillor Curran

Councillor Fry

Councillor Garden

Councillor Haines

Councillor Hayes

Councillor Hollingsworth

Councillor Iley-Williamson

Councillor Landell Mills

Councillor Lygo

Councillor McManners

Councillor Pressel

Councillor Rush

Councillor Linda Smith

Councillor Tanner

Councillor Taylor

Councillor Turner

Councillor Wade

Councillor Altaf-Khan (Deputy Lord Mayor)

Councillor Arshad

Councillor Aziz

Councillor Brown

Councillor Clarkson

Councillor Corais

Councillor Donnelly

Councillor Gant

Councillor Gotch

Councillor Harris

Councillor Henwood

Councillor Howlett

Councillor Kennedy

Councillor Lloyd-Shogbesan

Councillor Malik

Councillor Munkonge

Councillor Rowley

Councillor Simm

Councillor Roz Smith

Councillor Tarver

Councillor Tidball

Councillor Upton

Councillor Wolff

Apologies:

Councillors Djafari-Marbini and Humberstone sent apologies.

The minutes show when Councillors who were absent for part of the meeting arrived and left.

14. Declarations of interest

Cllr Roz Smith declared an interest in the motion at 14f (fossil fuel divestment) as she had a decision making role as a member of the Oxfordshire County Council Pension Fund Committee.

15. Minutes of previous meetings

Council agreed to approve the minutes of the ordinary meeting held on 27 January 2020; 13 February 2020 (subject to checking the accuracy of the recorded vote at Minute 89d); 24 February 2020; 20 May 2020; and 8 June 2020 as true and correct records of those meetings.

The Lord Mayor shall sign these at a suitable time.

16. Appointment to Committees

Council agreed to make changes with immediate effect to:

West Area Planning Committee

- Cllr Wade to replace Cllr Harris
- Cllr Tarver to replace Cllr Tidball

17. Announcements

The Lord Mayor reported on his civic appointments:

While there were far fewer engagements, he had taken part in online engagements and making videos including

- Taking part with Perm, Oxford's twin town, on Perm Day;
- Remembering and commemorating Srebrenica Memorial day on 11 July 2020;
- Taking part in a global Eid event;
- Meeting the new High Sheriff of Oxfordshire Mrs Amanda Ponsonby;
- Taking part in online multi-faith meetings.

The Sheriff reported on his civic appointments including a virtual Freeman's admission ceremony.

He recorded his thanks to the council's countryside team for their extraordinary work in keeping Port Meadow useable and wildlife friendly in the current very challenging circumstances of greatly increased use and huge volumes of litter left.

The Leader of the Council reported the re-appointments and new appointments of Champions for specific parts of the Council's work, and thanked them for their work in their roles:

Cllr Shaista Aziz - Race and equalities

Cllr Colin Cook - Heritage

Cllr Hosnieh Djafari-Marbini - Migrants

Cllr Richard Howlett - Co-operatives

Cllr Pat Kennedy - Older People
Cllr Mark Lygo - Sports
Cllr Chewe Munkonge - Small Business
Cllr Martyn Rush - Living Wage

18. Public addresses and questions that relate to matters for decision at this meeting

There were no addresses or questions.

19. Polling Places Review - Effects of Covid-19 and the postponement of the ward boundaries

Council considered the report of the Head of Law and Governance seeking approval of a draft schedule of polling districts and polling for the administrative area of the City Council in order to enable any by-elections to take place before May 2021 on the old ward boundaries.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Brown, presented the report and moved the recommendations which were agreed on being seconded and put to the vote.

Council resolved to:

1. **approve** the draft schedule of polling places and polling districts as detailed in Appendix 1 to this report;
2. **agree** that the changes should not be formally published unless required;
3. **agree** that the scheme approved by Council on 13 February 2020 will apply again from 1 December 2020.

20. Decisions taken under Parts 9.3(b) and (c) of the Constitution

Council considered the report of the Head of Law and Governance setting out the decisions taken by the Head of Paid Service (Chief Executive) using the urgency and emergency powers delegated in Parts 9.3(b) and (c) of the Constitution.

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Brown, presented the report and she and other Cabinet members answered questions:

- Expenditure on ICT covered the costs of introducing remote working for the majority of staff to allow the council to continue to deliver services (hardware, software, licences, remote meetings, and peripheral devices). This was separate from the previously planned replacement programme. There were no immediate plans to return to office based working or to recoup any investment.
- Topping up furlough payments to all furloughed staff accorded with good employment practices and the council's commitment to paying the Oxford Living Wage.
- Decisions were taken with Cabinet's input and knowledge and after informing opposition group leaders.

The recommendation, moved and seconded, was put to the vote.

Council resolved to note the decisions taken as set out in the report.

21. Questions on Cabinet minutes

Questions asked on:

12 February - Minute 137 Scrutiny Committee Reports - plans for the Zero Emissions Zone

Cllr Gant asked a question and Cllr Hayes answered

15 July - Minute 31 Oxfordshire Growth Board Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding

Cllr Gant asked a question and Cllr Brown answered.

a) Minutes of meeting Wednesday 12 February 2020 of Cabinet

Minute 137 Scrutiny Committee Reports - plans for the Zero Emissions Zone

Cllr Gant asked if the proposal was going ahead for two or three handheld APNR (automatic number plate recognition cameras) to enforce the planned Zero Emission Zone.

Cllr Hayes answered that this was still the case but both the final consultation on and introduction of the Zero Emission Zone had been postponed due to the impact of the Covid19 pandemic.

b) Minutes of meeting Wednesday 11 March 2020 of Cabinet

There were no questions.

c) Minutes of meeting Monday 8 June 2020 of Cabinet

There were no questions.

d) Minutes of meeting Wednesday 24 June 2020 of Cabinet

There were no questions.

e) Minutes of the meeting on Wednesday 15 July of Cabinet (to follow)

Minute 31 - Oxfordshire Growth Board Terms of Reference and Memorandum of Understanding

Cllr Gant noted the changes were in the context of wider changes in regional structures to promote growth, and asked the Leader to comment on the process for agreement whereby all councils had to agree identical documents in a short time, severely restricting the opportunity to change these.

Cllr Brown replied that the converse was also true: it was not possible to impose a decision on councils without their individual agreement. Documents were discussed and then broadly agreed by all six Leaders in advance so that each council should be able to sign up to the final decision.

22. Questions on Notice from Members of Council

23 written questions were asked of the Cabinet members and Leader, and these and written responses were published before the meeting.

These along with summaries of the 15 supplementary questions and responses asked and given at the meeting are set out in the printed pack of these minutes.

23. Public addresses and questions that do not relate to matters for decision at this Council meeting

The Lord Mayor proposed and Council did not dissent that this item be taken at around 6.00pm instead of the 7.00pm set out in the Council meeting procedures.

There were five addresses to Council:

1. Colin Aldridge asked the Council to consider introducing drug consumption rooms
2. Peter Thompson, Director Oxford School of English, asked the Council to
3. Tanagra Jabu Nala-Hartley asked the Council to Oxford Living Wage
4. Hsin-Yung Yen gave a speech in support of the motion on twinning with a Taiwanese city
5. David Madden gave a speech setting out his concerns at the accumulating impact of development in the north of the city.

The full text of these speeches as submitted and summaries of verbal responses from the Cabinet members given at the meeting are set out in the printed pack of these minutes.

24. Outside organisation/Committee Chair reports and questions

Council had before it the report on behalf of the Leader of the Council on the work of the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP).

Councillor Brown introduced the report and drew Council's attention to the work relating specifically to the areas in the city; to the local industrial strategy; continuing to set out the council's ambitions to create an inclusive and sustainable economy; and to the addendum setting out the current work to help the local economy recover from the impact of the Covid19 pandemic restrictions and prepare for a contraction in the economy.

Councillor Wolff asked if careers guidance looked ahead to estimate what would be needed in the future: for example to address skills shortages in the building industry; digitisation of the economy; and the climate emergency?

Councillor Brown responded that work on improving skills locally is constrained by the lack of ability to do this effectively at a local level. She had lobbied government ministers, and OxLEP was seeking means to develop tools to work with local businesses and people so that the right skills training was available.

Councillor Gant asked:

- In relation to funding provided from European funds which generated match funding locally, whether this showed the damage the Brexit project was already doing to our local economy.
- The factsheet stated the last two board meetings were held in public but there is no opportunity for members of the public to address or engage with the board. Could such opportunities be created?
- Was there a workstream to look at improvements to digital infrastructure and broadband provision across the county?

Councillor Brown responded that it was not open to the Board to make opportunities for direct engagement available, but the council leaders could raise relevant issues in their

capacity as members of the Board. OxLEP, having local council leaders on the Board, could be more responsive than a more remote body. This council's key issues around sustainability and inclusivity were taken into account in OxLEP's work: she would ask for these to be stated more clearly on the factsheet.

Council noted the report.

25. Scrutiny Committee update report

Council had before it the report of the Scrutiny Committee Chair.

Councillor Gant introduced the report and gave an update on the work of the Scrutiny Committee.

Council noted the report and the appendices.

26. Motions on notice

Council had before it eight motions on notice submitted in accordance with Council procedure rules and reached decisions as set out below.

- a) Twinning with a locality on the island of Taiwan
- b) Adopting the C40 Mayors COVID-19 Recovery Task Force principles
- c) Disproportionate deaths from Covid-19 of Health and care workers from Black, Asian and ethnic minorities

The following motions were not taken as the time allocated for debate had finished:

- d) Celebrating Oxford's Diversity
- e) Against postponing County Council elections
- f) Fossil fuel divestment
- g) Against postponing County Council elections (2)
- h) Liveable Streets initiative

a) Twinning with a locality on the island of Taiwan

Due to other engagements Councillors Harris and Simm left the meeting at the start of this debate; and Councillor Aziz left the meeting before the vote was taken.

Councillor Goddard, seconded by Councillor Wade proposed the submitted motion as set out in the agenda and briefing note.

Councillor Clarkson, seconded by Councillor Tanner proposed the amendment as set out in the report in the briefing note.

After debate and on being put to the vote the amendment was agreed.

After debate and on being put to the vote the motion as amended was agreed.

Council resolved to adopt the following motion:

Council notes:

1. That Oxford currently has twin towns and cities in Europe, the Middle East and the Americas. However, at present it has no such links with anywhere in East Asia.

2. That [no town or city in the UK is currently twinned with any town or city on the island of Taiwan](#).
3. That amongst the achievements of the inhabitants of Taiwan are:
 - A. Building what [Freedom House](#) describes as a “*vibrant and competitive democratic system has allowed three peaceful transfers of power between rival parties since 2000*” with “*generally robust protections*” for civil liberties. The organisation gives Taiwan a higher on their Global Freedom Index than the USA, France or Spain.
 - B. Creating an “[economic miracle](#)” by which real GDP per capita on the island has increased more than 30 times since 1950. This make it one of the five fastest growing economies in the whole world during that period.
 - C. Becoming the first jurisdiction in Asia to legalise same-sex marriage.
 - D. A World beating response to Coronavirus. At the time of writing, there have been just seven confirmed fatalities from COVID-19 on the island, despite it having a population of 24 million and being in close proximity to the initial outbreak in Wuhan.
 - E. In April 2020, donating [7 million face masks](#) to European countries, including the UK, dealing with a shortage due to COVID-19.
4. That [Taiwan is the UK’s second fastest growing export market](#) and that the UK government is undertaking [free trade talks](#) with the Taiwan authorities.
5. Cities in numerous countries which take the same diplomatic stance towards Taiwan have ‘sister cities’ on the island.

Council believes that:

1. It should reaffirm [the view](#) that: “*Twin city links give citizens the chance to engage with other cultures and ways of life, and make these experiences more accessible through established contacts and networks in the linked cities. They also bring benefit to cities through knowledge-sharing activities, where people can learn from how problems are tackled in other countries, exchange ideas and understand different viewpoints.*”
2. That it would be worthwhile for Oxford to explore the possibility of establishing friendship links with a locality in Taiwan with a view to expanding its international links to encompass East Asia in the long term.
3. That a municipality-to-municipality relationship is separate from the UK’s official diplomatic position of recognising the People’s Republic of China and avoiding dealing with the Taiwan authorities on a government to government basis. Oxford is grateful for the friendship of people from throughout the People’s Republic of China and the contribution its citizens make to the city as visitors, students and residents.

Council resolves that Oxford City Council hereby encourages those interested to explore the possibility of establishing grassroots friendship links, in a similar way to those developed with Ramallah, with a longer term view of a twinning agreement with an appropriate municipality in Taiwan.

b) Adopting the C40 Mayors COVID-19 Recovery Task Force principles

Councillor Wolff, seconded by Councillor Howlett proposed the submitted motion as set out in the agenda and briefing note.

Councillor Howlett in his speech announced that the Leader of the Council has on behalf of the Council recently signed up to the principles set out in the motion. The Council will apply them internally; publically states that these are our principles; and is proud to be part of the global network of cities adopting these.

After debate and on being put to the vote the motion as amended was agreed.

Council resolved to adopt the following motion:

This Council welcomes the findings of the C40 Mayors COVID-19 Recovery Task Force that has published a set of principles aimed at rebuilding cities & economies in a way that 'improves public health, reduces inequality and addresses the climate crisis'.

This Council notes the principles:

1. The recovery should not be a return to 'business as usual' - because that is a world on track for 3°C or more of over-heating;
2. The recovery, above all, must be guided by an adherence to public health and scientific expertise, in order to assure the safety of those who live in our cities;
3. Excellent public services, public investment and increased community resilience will form the most effective basis for the recovery;
4. The recovery must address issues of equity that have been laid bare by the impact of the crisis – for example, workers who are now recognised as essential should be celebrated and compensated accordingly and policies must support people living in informal settlements;
5. The recovery must improve the resilience of our city and communities. Therefore, investments should be made to protect against future threats – including the climate crisis – and to support those people impacted by climate and health risks;
6. Climate action can help accelerate economic recovery and enhance social equity, through the use of new technologies and the creation of new industries and new jobs. These will drive wider benefits for our residents, workers, students, businesses and visitors;
7. We commit to doing everything in our power to ensure that the recovery from COVID-19 is healthy, equitable and sustainable;
8. We commit to using our collective voices and individual actions to ensure that our national government supports both cities and the investments needed in cities, to deliver an economic recovery that is healthy, equitable and sustainable;
9. We commit to using our collective voices and individual actions to ensure that international and regional institutions invest directly in cities to support a healthy, equitable and sustainable recovery

This Council agrees to monitor the on-going work of the Task Force and adopt the C40 Mayors principles in planning its own 'build back better' efforts.

Source: <https://www.c40.org/other/covid-task-force>

c) Disproportionate deaths from Covid-19 of Health and care workers from Black, Asian and ethnic minorities

Councillor Bely Summers, seconded by Councillor Azad proposed the submitted motion as set out in the agenda and briefing note.

After debate and on being put to the vote the motion as amended was agreed.

Council resolved to adopt the following motion:

People from Black, Asian and ethnic minority backgrounds are twice as likely to die of Covid-19 in the UK as white British people. This is the conclusion of the Public Health Report (PHE) Beyond the data: understanding the impact of Covid-19 on BAME groups.

44% of NHS doctors are from ethnic minority backgrounds but they accounted for 90% of the deaths of doctors. Black, Asians and ethnic minority nurses are 20% of the workforce but accounted for 75% of deaths.

Ethnic minority healthcare workers and care workers believe systemic racism and discrimination in the NHS and in the Social Care sector is one of the reasons many of their colleagues died.

The report highlights

- Lack of representation in senior roles
- Being less likely to seek care due to poorer experience with the NHS.
- Being less likely to speak up when they had concerns about PPE and risks
- A higher proportion of healthcare workers from ethnic minority working on Covid wards and care homes.

The Covid-19 pandemic has simply shone a light on a widespread entrenched problem. From the ongoing hostile environment and the Windrush scandal to the health surcharges for migrants. Local health unions have testimonies of ethnic minority healthcare workers and care workers not protected at work.

Some have left the profession, others have had to make life or death decisions. In modern Britain this is unacceptable.

The first PHE report commissioned by ministers explained why some populations groups are more affected than others but did not publish the recommendations which would have helped to reduce the disparities.

The chapter on community engagement was missing silencing again the voices of those who have been the most affected in spite of a very extensive consultation.

We have clapped for our NHS staff who have risked their lives to save us as well as our care workers. Far too many have made the ultimate sacrifice. Now it is time to address systemic racism, injustice and discriminations in our institutions and communities.

Oxford City Council therefore

1. **supports calls** for extensive research to be funded on the disproportionate number of deaths of ethnic minority workers and care workers with clear recommendations; **and**

2. **asks the Leader** to write to Matt Hancock, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, to request as a priority that PHE and the government implement in full and within a clear timeline all the seven recommendations set out in '*Beyond the data : understanding the impact of Covid-19 on BAME groups*':
- comprehensive and quality ethnicity data collection and recording
 - support community participatory research
 - improve access, experiences and outcomes of NHS
 - accelerate the development of culturally competent occupational risk assessment tools
 - culturally competent Covid-19 education and prevention campaign
 - target culturally competent health promotion and disease prevention programmes
 - reduce inequalities caused by the wider determinants of health.

d) Celebrating Oxford's Diversity

This motion was not taken as the time allocated for debate had finished.

e) Against Postponing County Council Elections

This motion was not taken as the time allocated for debate had finished.

f) Fossil fuel divestment

This motion was not taken as the time allocated for debate had finished.

g) Against Postponing County Council Elections (2)

This motion was not taken as the time allocated for debate had finished.

h) Liveable Streets initiative

This motion was not taken as the time allocated for debate had finished.

The meeting started at 5.00 pm and ended at 8.15 pm

Lord Mayor
2020

Date: Monday 5 October

*Decisions on items of business take effect immediately:
Motions may be implemented immediately or may require further budget provision
and/or reports to Cabinet before implementation.
Details are in the Council's Constitution.*

To: Council
Date: 20 July 2020
Title of Report: Questions on Notice from members of Council and responses from the Cabinet Members and Leader republished to include supplementary questions and answers given at the meeting

Introduction

1. Questions submitted by members of Council to the Cabinet members and Leader of the Council, by the deadline in the Constitution are listed below in the order they were 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.
5. Unfamiliar terms may be briefly explained in footnotes.

Questions and responses

Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing

No questions

Cabinet Member for City Centre, Covered Market and Culture

1. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Clarkson – Street traders

Question	Written Response
Council made the decision to ban street traders from operating in the	The Council has not banned street trading in the city centre. As part of the suite of

1. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Clarkson – Street traders

City Centre due to concerns over social distancing. That is despite outdoor markets being allowed to trade from 1st June.

I have received a complaint from one such pedlar who claims she was forced by Council officers on 26 June to move on and challenges the Council's right to discriminate against pedlars in this way.

Can the Portfolio Holder please clarify the situation regarding street traders, the Council's legal powers to discriminate against them and can she assure Council that, should lock down be re-imposed, pedlars will be treated the same as outdoor markets?

measures to make the city centre safe we have not issued any daytime consents for street traders on Cornmarket Street and Queen Street to prevent them causing an obstruction and ensure social distancing is possible for the public.

The Council has also been discouraging pedlars from operating in Cornmarket Street and Queen Street for the same reason. There are no powers to ban pedlars so no discrimination has taken place.

The pedlar concerned was operating in breach of the Coronavirus Restrictions Regulations by painting henna tattoos on people, which was not a permitted activity.

The Council will treat pedlars in accordance with government legislation.

2. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Clarkson – Noise nuisance and Environmental Health team responses

Question

Will the Portfolio Holder consider an early review of the cuts to the noise service, which are leading to a reduction in quality of life for residents living in affected neighbourhoods

How many times has The Noise App been used?

Written Response

It is too early to consider a review of the impact of the small changes made to the out of hours service.

In the first quarter of this year the Noise App has been used 3309 times.

Supplementary Question

Weekends are not necessarily the noisiest times.

When the review is conducted will this look at the times the Noise App is used? If data from the app shows a need will the portfolio holder consider reinstating a midweek service?

Verbal Response

It would be sensible to look at the times we get reports on the app, not just focus on weekends. The current pandemic restrictions were generating more complaints, more use of the app, and different patterns of noise nuisance.

Cabinet Member for Customer Focused Services

3. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Chapman – Cutting grass verges

Question	Written Response
<p>Will the Portfolio Holder agree to change the regime for the cutting of grass verges to protect biodiversity?</p>	<p>We are currently undertaking a review of grass cutting regimes to verges in the City. This review is being undertaken with stakeholders including Oxford Direct Services (ODS). The purpose is to identify areas of grassland suitable for a regime that increases biodiversity. This review will feed in to the next budget cycle identifying and costs and/or savings.</p>

4. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Chapman – Council Tax correspondence

Question	Written Response
<p>I recently received a worrying piece of casework from a constituent who continued to receive (at her new address) Council Tax settlement letters from the City Council jointly addressed to her and her previous partner.</p> <p>Despite her separation being amicable, this caused considerable and understandable distress. One can only imagine how someone fleeing an abusive relationship would have reacted.</p> <p>Can this practice please end?</p>	<p>I am grateful to Cllr. Simmons for giving me plenty of notice he was going to raise this matter in a formal question. I do have sympathy with his request as we want to avoid causing distress especially to people who have split up from their partners, which can itself be a traumatic event.</p> <p>However, the Council is hamstrung by regulatory requirements.</p> <p>That is because in a number of circumstances more than one person may be liable to pay the Council Tax on a property. This is known as having ‘joint and several liability’ and applies in a number of instances which include where more than one person has the same interest in the property in terms of the hierarchy of liability and for residents who are married or live together as husband and wife or are civil partners. Exceptions to this can apply if for instance one of the liable persons is disregarded for Council Tax purposes.</p> <p>Joint and several liability derives from the provisions of the law (Local Government Finance Act 1992) and is not determined by who is named on the Council Tax bill. If the bill is issued in a single name, recovery proceedings can be taken against that one person. However if there is a joint liability the appropriate notices must be issued in the names of anyone against whom enforcement action is to be taken before such action can take place.</p> <p>The Council will always issue Council Tax bills in joint names where there is a joint liability, as should the tax remain unpaid, the recovery process can be undertaken against all</p>

4. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Chapman – Council Tax correspondence	
	<p>those who are liable to pay.</p> <p>In this particular instance the Council Tax bill was issued in joint names, and therefore when this was closed, the closing bill was issued in joint names, one to each party at their respective addresses, as is legally required. At no point was the complainant’s address divulged to the ex-partner.</p> <p>Whilst the Council acknowledges that the process can cause distress, and has indeed apologised to the taxpayer for such distress, it cannot change its process, as this is clearly defined in regulations.</p> <p>We will continue to explore how we can reduce to a legal minimum references to former partners in our council tax settlement correspondence</p>
<p>Supplementary Question</p> <p>Given the distress that naming former partners can cause, is this something we should make representations to change and can we further reduce the references to both partners in correspondence?</p>	<p>Verbal Response</p> <p>Yes –we understand how upsetting this can be and we will seek to reduce references to previous partners and soften these as far as possible.</p> <p>But to be able to pursue defaults on council tax, we must have named the person(s) as liable in correspondence. So if we do not reference the absent partner we cannot pursue them for their share of the debt.</p>

Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management; statutory Deputy Leader

5. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Turner – Exposure to a downturn in the city’s retail sector	
<p>Question</p> <p>As a result of the lockdown, many retail businesses are vulnerable and it is possible that some may have to cease trading completely.</p> <p>What is the level of the Council’s budgetary exposure (in terms of both</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>The Council has budgeted income from commercial property of approximately £12.6 million per annum. The council collected approximately 60% of the first quarter’s rents on these properties by the end of June, although the collection rate for the June quarter is not likely to be as favourable. In respect of business rates, we have undertaken a risk assessment of each ratepayer (as we have for our tenants) and it is</p>

5. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Turner – Exposure to a downturn in the city’s retail sector

rent and rates)?
 What strategies for protecting businesses and keeping vitality in the city are being considered?

estimated that the total exposure to failing business in the city centre for the rest of the year would be around £26 million with the city council’s share of this under business rates retention being 40% i.e. £10.6 million (which, after the application of the business rates safety net of £5.8 million would be a loss to the Council against its 2020/21 budget of £3.3 million).

Many businesses benefit from the Expanded Retail Relief Discount and consequently pay no business rates this year, but should any business go into administration then the discount is removed. We continue to work with businesses that do not qualify for relief and make arrangements to defer business rates charges. We are also working with our tenants to understand what further relief can be agreed over and above the various relief packages offered by Central Government. When a business has difficulty making a payment, we are treating each case separately in line with recent Government guidelines, the principles of which had already been adopted.

We are pursuing various strategies to keep vitality in the city as follows:

- A re-opening the ‘high street’ programme, including one-way pedestrian flow guidance in the city centre and on Cowley Road, alongside social distancing signage, and visitor and business engagement and information. We are evolving this to now include a marketing and promotion campaign to instil confidence to encourage people back to the city centre and local centres, safely. Officers are also now working to push the Visit England “We’re good to go” guidance and promotion for visitor economy businesses.
- Working with the County Council to fund two city centre bus gates to reduce congestion, reduce bus journey times and provide the platform for re-prioritising road space to cyclists and pedestrians to get into our city centre more safely
- Made available details of unclaimed grants to ward members so they can assist in disseminating information and increasing uptake
- Also, working with County Council, to push for more tables and chairs for food and beverage businesses in the city and local centres, including where there is a

5. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Turner – Exposure to a downturn in the city’s retail sector

lack of pavement space and there is a need to use roads

- Working with landlords, agents and would-be new city centre occupiers to develop the interest there is from national and local businesses in vacant city centre units, including building our meanwhile programme, to link businesses, community groups, social enterprises, and cultural organisations with empty space, both our own and others, in the city centre and localities
- Allocated regeneration officers to local centres to work with ward members and others to identify issues and opportunities in relation to economic recovery to feed into our planning
- Working to repurpose the closed Boswell’s department store as a hotel, restaurant and workspace
- Pushing forward with the development of city centre workspace projects at George St and Cave Street
- Developing a City Centre Vision and Action Plan to guide us through recovery, as well as a wider Economic Development Strategy for the city, that will provide a framework for building on our economic and sector strengths (e.g. green economy, science and technology, visitor economy)
- Working with OxLEP, the universities, County Council and other districts on a county-wide Economic Recovery Plan to submit to central Government, including around the areas of business support and funding, skills, sectors and inward investment.

Supplementary Question

Would the portfolio holder be willing to set up a briefing session on these matters and how we can help?

Verbal Response

Councillors were informed of business which had not claimed mandatory relief and I understand many proactively spoke to businesses to make them aware of the scheme. I will volunteer officers to distribute information to councillors by email and to offer an optional briefing/ Q&A on other strands of support.

6. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Turner – Business rates relief for language schools

Question

There has been considerable discussion recently on whether the council's discretionary powers to grant business rates relief during the current crisis extend to language schools.

Cabinet has said it does not, and has written to government asking that it should.

However, members of our community in the sector have pointed out that other cities have interpreted the available powers differently, and have granted relief to businesses of this kind, which clearly have a vital role within our city.

Could the portfolio holder please explain why this Council appears to be interpreting the same guidance differently from councils elsewhere?

Written Response

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, in the Budget on 11 March the Chancellor announced that he would increase the Extended Retail Discount to 100% and extend it to include the leisure and hospitality sectors for 2020/21, with no rateable value limit on the relief. The Council has followed the list of eligible premises in the MHCLG guidance for its own scheme, and excluded those which the guidance states should not receive relief. The Council is clear that language schools are not wholly or mainly for the provision of a service to visiting members of the public, nor do they fall into the hospitality or leisure sectors.

We have made enquiries as to how some Councils have arrived at a decision to award the discount (most we have contacted have not responded). Unfortunately the LGA initially issued some guidance, which was later withdrawn, which erroneously suggested that language schools were in scope. It is a matter for each authority to decide and to be accountable for under their discretion. There are equally Councils, including others locally that have not awarded the discount in line with their own interpretation of the guidance. If the Council made payments erroneously, these might have to be paid back to government.

The Council Leader has written to ministers asking them to extend the guidance to cover language schools. Regrettably no response has been received so far to this letter.

There are a number of other business support measures that Language Schools are able to access and details are on both our website and Gov.uk.

7. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Hayes – Access to electric car charging points

Question

Many residents in my part of East Oxford are keen to switch to electric cars but struggle to find public charging points. Most don't have access to off-street parking for a home charger and what public chargers there are are run by a range of companies that use different access methods. ZAPMAP shows that there are less than 10 public chargers serving a catchment of more than 10,000 people. This includes charging points at the Council-owned Union Street Car Park, where the spaces are not dedicated to EVs and where residents have to pay to park.

Will the Portfolio Holder consider, at least until a better public charging solution is available, dedicating free car parking spaces at the Union Street Car Park (and indeed other Council car parks that have public chargers) for EVs that are plugged in and charging?

Will the Portfolio Holder update Council on plans for the installation of further EV charging facilities?

Written Response

Oxford is amongst the Office of Low Emission Vehicle's Go Ultra Low Cities, supporting other local authorities by sharing learnings generated from multiple EV projects trialled here, and thus contributing to improving the quality of charging provision across the UK.

We are currently assessing the role of carparks in the EV market together with ODS.

The Go Ultra Low On-street project is trialling on-street charging for households that don't have off-street parking. We are currently upgrading 39 chargers to permanent solutions. In addition, 4 charge points were recently installed in Manzil Way gardens for the primary use of Taxi and Private Hire vehicles, with the option to expand this to other high priority users. The next phase of Go Ultra Low Oxford (GULO) the GULO On-street project will provide up to 100 charge points in new locations across the city. GULO Taxi will deliver an addition 6 chargers for the taxi trade.

We are committed to engaging residents across the city on the question of how we allocate chargers across the city and we hold a database of residents who have expressed an interest to date, including in East Oxford.

To date 43 charge points for Oxford Residents without access to off-street parking has been delivered, with 10 of these in East Oxford.

In addition, by mid-2021, through the Energy Superhub Oxford project there will be the largest public EV charging Hub in the UK at Redbridge P&R. The Hub will have a minimum of 52 chargers, with the option for expansion of both

8. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Hayes – Citizens’ Assembly progress update

Question

Following the Citizens Assembly on Climate Change, the Cabinet set out the next steps it would take. Amongst these, a number will probably have been delayed by the pandemic :

- The holding of a Zero Carbon Summit early in 2020 and the establishing of a (revived) Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership

- The creation of a Climate Change Youth Board

However, other commitments need not have been impacted by the pandemic and it would be good to hear what progress is being made with regard to :

- Procuring of contracts for renewable gas and electricity, with offsetting
- The creation of new carbon budgets within the city’s budget and auditing processes
- Assessment of housing stock for retrofit
- Development of a plan by OCHL for all new building by the Council to be much more thermally efficient, without gas heating.
- Installation of ~400 EV charging points (for which funding had been secured)
- Commencement of a process of mapping natural resources (‘Natural Capital’?)

Can the Portfolio Holder update Council on progress?

Written Response

By passing a motion declaring a climate emergency, this Council confirmed that business as usual cannot continue—we unanimously said exceptional action is needed. In the time since, this administration has moved quickly to develop our strategy for generating a zero-carbon council and city and we have done so by working with our partners and civil society and seeing democracy as part of our response to climate breakdown.

On 28 January 2019, this council approved a motion declaring a climate emergency, with Labour members providing for a Citizens’ Assembly. 244 days later, a Citizens’ Assembly—the first of its scale and complexity in the UK—met for the first time. 34 days after the close of that Citizens’ Assembly, this administration shared a report outlining in detail the findings of the Citizens Assembly. Cabinet agreed 53 actions developed in line with these findings just 28 days later and, on 28 February 2020, a further 41 days later, this Council agreed the funding for some of these actions when it approved the first Budget since the Citizens’ Assembly met. At significant pace and all the while maintaining delivery on existing climate responses, officers have moved quickly and thoughtfully to develop a strategy which is practical and meaningful, and I’m sure Councillor Wolff would like to take this opportunity to show his appreciation.

On 24 March 2020, the Government announced a lockdown of the country. Just 34 days had passed since the approval of the Budget. The City Council, along with so many others, have focused on responding to the public health crisis, with staff and resources being redirected to support the most vulnerable in our communities. The working arrangements of this Council will be familiar to the councillor. Despite this unprecedented emergency response, work has proceeded on a number of areas:

- Plans are being developed for a Zero Carbon Summit later in 2020, which will most likely be held in a virtual format.
- This Council has purchased 10% green gas, with

8. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Hayes – Citizens’ Assembly progress update

an announcement on offsetting to follow shortly;

- This Council is working to ensure all of its council homes are EPC C where this is feasible. We have already implemented large scale fabric insulation (external and cavity insulation) and solar PV programme on 176 properties (including sheltered accommodation). Tower blocks have been upgraded. There are ongoing loft insulation, boiler replacement, and electric heating upgrade programmes. This Council has two energy advice officers assisting with repairs, energy saving advice and energy tariff changes.

- Oxford City Housing Limited (OCHL) is progressing all new build to an aspiration target of 70% carbon reduction from Building Regulations standard and is moving away from gas heating to electric. Other low carbon housing options such as Passiv haus and Zero Carbon are currently being scoped for feasibility. Oxford Direct Services are currently building 8 off site manufacture zero carbon bungalows and the team is trialling a service to help reduce any performance issues as airtight buildings with energy efficient technologies are known to be difficult to get right through the design/construction

- Work is progressing on the installation of over 150 chargers as part of GULO and ESO to provide residents and businesses with EV chargers, with over 30 chargers installed at ODS in the last few weeks.

- Working with partners to explore solutions to natural capital mapping, including close working with district partners.

I recently invited Councillor Wolff to a briefing with myself and officers to discuss his recent public repudiation of the air quality report published by this Council, the data for which had been ratified by the Government's appointed contractor and the findings of which have been approved by DEFRA. I would be happy to broaden that meeting out and discuss these matters in greater detail if the councillor wishes, so that citizens reading local media in the future are able to have trust in the evidence-based arguments made by their democratically elected body.

8. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Hayes – Citizens’ Assembly progress update

Supplementary Question

How is the assessment of our own housing stock for retrofitting proceeding; and what are the results?

Verbal Response

I understand this is ongoing but no doubt has been delayed due to the pandemic restrictions.

Cabinet Member for Leisure and Parks

9. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Linda Smith – Deterring littering

Question

In view of the deaths of two cattle and injuries to several horses on Port Meadow after widespread, serious littering, would the councillor explain why a pre-existing anti-litter poster campaign successfully used in locations as varied as York, Bath, Bradford, Liverpool, Guildford, Northampton, Dorset, Braintree, Cheltenham, Epsom, Australia and New Zealand (using posters headed ‘Don’t be a Tosser’, and aiming to use slightly ribald humour and ridicule to target potential litterers) was rejected, and explain how else the City Council is going to take urgent action to deter further littering in the course of the summer?

Written Response

The death and injury of livestock on Port Meadow through littering is intolerable and it demands action. Council and ODS (Oxford Direct Services) officers have formed a new multi-agency group with TVP (Thames Valley Police) to tackle the problem and there are four work strands in progress.

- Review of bins and litter collection.
- Community Engagement.
- Enforcement
- Communications – including signage.

I share the view of some of your Liberal Democrat colleagues representing wards near the meadow that we in Oxford can do much better than the “Don’t be a tosser” campaign used elsewhere. We will have a strong local campaign. **focused on the harm to animal welfare and the possibility of fines being issued for littering.**

Supplementary Question

Could more and appropriately sited dog mess bins be provided along with an emphasis on combating discarded dog poo (in or out of bags)? Can adjacent ward councillors be kept up to date with the campaigns and improvements?

Verbal Response

Yes – both will be considered. There will be an ongoing campaign to keep Port Meadow clean over the summer.

10. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Linda Smith – Port Meadow littering

Question

I was shocked, as I am sure many other Councillors were, at the state of Port Meadow following the easing of lockdown which coincided with a period of good weather. The litter and rubbish were an eyesore and a hazard to humans and animals alike.

Can the Portfolio Holder tell us what measures have been put in place to both keep Port Meadow clean in the future, what monitoring is in place, and what efforts are being made to identify and fine those responsible?

Written Response

Port Meadow is an attractive and popular destination which has seen an unprecedented number of visitors during lockdown as other venues for recreation have been closed.

Council and ODS officers have formed a new multi-agency group with TVP to tackle the problem and there are four work strands in progress.

1. Bins and litter collection: Capacity of Bins and frequency of collection have been increased and will be kept under review.

2. Community Engagement: litter picking, intelligence sharing, distribution of refuse sacks and education.

3. Enforcement: more joint work with TVP, targeted enforcement patrols.

4. Communications: To focus on threat to animal welfare and our enforcement activity with potential of fines.

Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery

11. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Hollingsworth – Accurately defining zero carbon homes

Question

I welcome the building of eight new highly energy efficient Council homes at Bracegirdle Road/Chillingworth Crescent, Mortimer Drive and Broad Oak. However, a press release issued by the Council incorrectly referred to these as ‘zero carbon homes’ – generally understood to refer to a home meeting Level 6 of the original Code for Sustainable Homes. That is, a home which generates sufficient renewable energy to meet the entire

Written Response

The current definition of Zero Carbon homes was established by the Government in 2011 in its ‘Plan for Growth’ to mean emissions that can be regulated by the Building Regulations, something that was subsequently confirmed in the consultation on the Future Homes Standard consultation run from late 2019 until February this year. This is the definition that the Council has used in the new Local Plan, as is made clear in its glossary. The new homes built by the Council comply with this official definition of Zero Carbon, and the press release was therefore not inaccurate.

11. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Hollingsworth – Accurately defining zero carbon homes	
<p>operational needs of the house thereby being net zero. The UK Green Build Council and others are seeking to take the definition even further, to include the impacts of construction.</p> <p>When our own Local Plan requires all new homes to be ‘zero carbon’ from 2030, would the Portfolio Holder agree that our own use of such term needs to be carefully moderated to ensure that we set a good example?</p>	<p>The 2011 ‘Plan for Growth’ foreword by Secretary of State for Business and Skills Vince Cable and Chancellor George Osborne made clear its disdain for “pointless barriers” to enterprise and “the forces of stagnation” who objected to the removal of these ‘barriers’ ; it was in this political climate that the Code for Sustainable Homes definition was swept away. Speaking personally, I don’t agree that setting the highest possible standards for zero carbon homes was “pointless”, and far from being the forces of stagnation those that objected and still object are the forces of reason and progress.</p> <p>I am therefore sure that the councillor shares my view that the superseded 2006 Code for Sustainable Homes was a better document and that the level 6 definition within it set a better benchmark for a Zero Carbon home, but since there is a now a new and nationally applied standard I am also sure that the councillor will agree with me that it is important that the Council consistently uses that national standard both in its Local Plan and its press releases, rather than any different one that he and I might prefer.</p>
<p>Supplementary Question</p> <p>Given the confusion over the definition of ‘zero carbon’ and the way these terms are used, it’s very helpful to have this clear perspective. There is a significant difference between what central government and anybody else considers zero carbon.</p> <p>Could the cabinet member confirm that the government definition is that a property may be deemed ‘zero carbon’ even though it’s not thermally efficient provided any energy the householder buys is renewable?</p> <p>Would he consider this to be a disincentive to us in taking the fabric first approach to new buildings where the structure itself is aiming to be ‘passive house’</p>	<p>Verbal Response</p> <p>Yes - In simple terms the nationally understood definition of zero carbon is that it encompasses the energy covered by building regulations (referred to as regulated energy): the energy used to heat and ventilate the house. It does not include the energy used for phone chargers, kettles etc.</p> <p>While this is not satisfactory, nonetheless that is the one definition that is set by government.</p> <p>Obviously in in the local plan we've set the government standard because that's what we're required and able to do.</p> <p>When it comes to our own developments the recent developments which were the subject of his question do achieve the government standard. The onus is then on us to look for each of our developments at the viability of going further as soon and where we can and that I think the council has said it will aspire to</p>

11. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Hollingsworth – Accurately defining zero carbon homes

and if it is a disincentive will we be aiming higher or are the government's weaker standards going to be what we apply?

do but it's got to be on a case-by-case basis.

12. From Councillor Roz Smith to Councillor Hollingsworth – Landlord Accreditation Scheme

Question

How many landlords are registered with the City Council's Landlord Accreditation Scheme?

Have any been struck off in the last 12 months?

Written Response

There are 148 landlords and 19 letting agents registered with City Council's Landlord Accreditation Scheme.

In the last 12 months 1 landlord has had their accreditation revoked and 8 applications have been refused.

Supplementary Question

Should reports of a landlord abruptly ending a tenancy agreement early be investigated and if accurate result in the landlord losing accreditation.

Verbal Response

The actions taken by the enforcement team would depend on the specific circumstances of the case.

13. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Hollingsworth – ‘Doughnut’ economics framework for sustainable development

Question

The Cities of Amsterdam and Copenhagen have adopted the ‘Doughnut’ economics framework for sustainable development: a new approach to urban planning and development originated here in Oxford by the economist Kate Raworth.

A recent online talk by Dr. Raworth – looking at how the model could be adapted for Oxford – attracted more than 500 people.

Will the Portfolio Holder consider the Doughnut framework for the next iteration of the Local Plan?

Written Response

Dr Raworth’s ‘Doughnut’ tool is a profoundly useful way of visualising the challenges for urban planning at a local level as well as an economic at a macro-economic level, and is certainly something that can form part of the range of ways of identifying and addressing the challenges facing Oxford now and in the future, not just as a city in isolation, but as part of the wider local, regional, national and global environments.

As Dr Raworth herself noted in launching the model for Amsterdam, “this city portrait is not a report and assessment of Amsterdam: it is a tool and starting point, ideal for using in workshops to open up new insights and bring about

13. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Hollingsworth – ‘Doughnut’ economics framework for sustainable development	
	transformative action”. Planning is a process, and one that has always had to find balances between a wide range of competing and often contradictory pressures – any new tool that helps to bring those pressures out more clearly, and enables the widest range of people to engage with and appreciate those pressures in seeking new and innovative ways of addressing them is to be welcomed.
Supplementary Question Will the Cabinet member consider the ‘donut framework’ for the next iteration of the Local Plan?	Verbal Response Yes. The only reservation is that I would like the council to be able to consult with Dr Raworth first.

14. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Hollingsworth – Policy making in planning	
Question Does the Cabinet member agree with me that, when planning authorities act responsibly and in the interests of residents, policy-making in planning works best when it sits at the most appropriate level in relation to residents, citizens and voters, and that the guiding principle should be to keep decision-making as close as possible to our residents? Does he also therefore agree with me that any moves by central government in the direction of centralised, top-down control over, for example, “zoning”, Permitted Development rights and other matters could potentially weaken that principle, would not be welcome and should	Written Response Yes. To expand, the thesis that ‘planning’ is an obstacle to development, new housing and economic growth is demonstrably false, as has been shown repeatedly by studies commissioned by Governments of all political colours. That the Prime Minister saw fit recently to perpetuate the falsehood that housebuilding is prevented by ‘newts’ is typical of someone whose relationship throughout his career with the truth has been marginal at best. The planning system is designed to strike a balance between individual rights to private property and the responsibility to past, current and future generations to be protected from the wholly unfettered exercise of those rights. In effect the planning system puts the rights of the community and the environment in which that community lives on a par with the rights of the individual. It is a difficult balance, and it is not always easy to get it right, but however imperfectly it can at times operate I think that largely the system works. The recent adoption of the City’s Local Plan was the culmination of a long process of consultation, policy

14. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Hollingsworth – Policy making in planning

be resisted?

development and testing, and finally challenge through the public enquiry process. The Plan sets out a balanced set of policies that address the needs of the whole city and the communities within it, and shows the importance of having different policies set at the right scale – not at such a small scale that the voices of the dispossessed can be ignored, and nor at such a large scale that the interests of whole cities can be lost in a remote bureaucracy governed from afar.

What is being floated as ‘Planning Reform’ (sic) appears to be a massive tipping of the scales away from our collective responsibilities to current and future generations. It has been clear from recent months that within the current Government there is an ideological drive against any set of regulations or behaviours where the interests of the community might take precedence over the rights of the individual. After all, if you believe that ‘rules’ simply don’t apply to you, then it is very short step away from getting rid of those rules entirely.

The Permitted Development regime has already led to the building of homes with no windows, and offers a way for developers to completely evade any responsibilities for social housing, locally set environmental standards and the like. The most recently announced PD right, to allow the building of additional storeys on flats without planning permission, will over-ride this Council’s longstanding and vitally important protections for the world-famous views of the dreaming spires.

In describing what the Government is doing to the planning system, I recently used some robust Anglo-Saxon to a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee. While I won’t commit similar terms to paper in this written answer, I would say in reiterating my agreement with the Councillor’s question that these are profoundly damaging proposals, driven by an ideology that says that ‘rules are for others, not for us’ and backed up by falsehoods from a Prime Minister with a long and dishonourable tradition of lying whenever it suits.

15. From Councillor Roz Smith to Councillor Hollingsworth – Tree protection for a specific tree

Question

A Sandhills parishioner recently wrote to the City Council requesting a prominent tree in Delbush Avenue be given a Tree Preservation Order (TPO). This was unfortunately rejected.

Having received several emails of support for the tree having a TPO, the Risinghurst & Sandhills Parish Council is considering its own letter to the City Council, requesting a reconsideration.

Would the Cabinet member agree that trees are essential assets for local air quality, and that TPOs are an important part of protecting local residents' access to clean air?

Will the Cabinet member also agree to re-consider the request for a TPO on **that** particular tree, and (more generally) to improve tree protection in neighbourhoods facing significant traffic and development pressures?

Written Response

The process for TPOs is set down in law, initially in the 1990 Town and Country Planning Act, and as subsequently amended.

That process involves the quasi-judicial planning regime, and is not one that a Cabinet member could or should interfere with.

The Council values trees as a both local assets and as part of the broader amenity of the city.

Oxford City Council, as Local Planning Authority, has powers to make a TPO where it is expedient in the interests of amenity; both the amenity and expediency (threat) tests must be met before a TPO is made. In this instance while it was considered to have moderate amenity value, the tree – which is managed by Oxford Direct Services on behalf of Oxfordshire County Council – was felt to be under good arboricultural management and not at risk of removal, thus not passing the threshold for the ‘threat’ test to justify a TPO.

Supplementary Question

Would the cabinet member be content for a TPO to be placed on this prominent and much-loved tree if the if the planning inspector for the South Oxfordshire Local Plan gives the go ahead for the development in the field at the bottom of Delbush Avenue immediate adjacent to this tree?

Verbal Response

I think that I made clear in my answer that the decision making process here is not one that relies on individual councillors interfering with what is effectively a quasi-judicial process and one laid out in law. So it's not for me or any other councillor to be deciding on TPOs.

Cabinet Member for a Safer, Healthy Oxford

16. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Upton – Cycling without Age group

Question

Will the Portfolio Holder join me in welcoming the establishment of an Oxfordshire chapter of Cycling Without Age, whose volunteer 'pilots' take local elders and care homes residents out on specially adapted 'trishaw' cycle rides.

Will the Council be exploring ways it can assist CWA in its mission?

Written Response

I was delighted to attend the recent Cyclox meeting which heard from the founder of Cycling without Age - the obvious physical and mental benefits for both volunteer riders and elderly passengers were wonderful to see. I have since been in touch with the local group and I hope we can help them to expand.

<https://cyclingwithoutage.org>

17. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Upton – Active Travel funding Tranche 2

Question

The County bid for so-called Shapps Tranche 1 Active Travel funding, supported by the City, failed to impress Government who claimed it simply wasn't ambitious enough, failing to meaningfully reallocate road space to cyclists and pedestrians. Only half the allocated funding was awarded.

What is the City Council doing to ensure that the application for the second Tranche of funding is more successful?

And will the Portfolio Holder be consulting other Councillors on the list of ideas to be submitted for Tranche 2?

Written Response

The City Council has been working to influence the submission for Tranche 1 funding. However, the inclusion of items for submission was not the decision of the City Council, but that of the County Council as Transport Authority.

The City Council is keen to progress measures which support active and sustainable travel. This is why we have ourselves funded the installation of 130 additional cycle parking spaces at Park and Rides.

The Department for Transport (DfT) has now provided the County Council with the criteria for Tranche 2 bids, with a deadline for the funding submission set for 7th August 2020. The County Council will again make the final decision on what is included in their Tranche 2 submission. However, the City Council, along with other districts, will be engaged in this process through an established governance framework set up by the County Council.

Please email me directly with suggestions for further consideration. Proposals will need to clearly satisfy the DfT criteria for inclusion in the Tranche 2 application, to add to the City Council's own priorities. Proposals must therefore reallocate road space to cyclists and pedestrians (both groups, rather than one or the other),

17.From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Upton – Active Travel funding Tranche 2	
	<p>meaningfully alter the status quo on the road, include segregation or point closures to through traffic, have a short lead time and demonstrate that the funds can be spent, or fully committed, in this financial year.</p> <p>I will also be listening to cycling groups in the city who have a lot of expertise to share.</p>

18.From Councillor Wade to Councillor Upton – Reducing drug-related deaths	
<p>Question</p> <p>Drug-related deaths are at a record high in England and Oxford has not been immune from this tragic loss of life.</p> <p>Will the Cabinet member commit to lobbying the Government for a pilot study into the effectiveness of a Drug Consumption Room set up in the city where illicit drugs can be safely used under the supervision of trained staff?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>Oxfordshire County Council’s Public Health Service are the lead agency in Oxford for providing services to help people affected by drug problems and so it would be for them to develop such a proposal.</p>
<p>Supplementary Question</p> <p>I take your point about public health needing to be involved here and I've emailed the new public health director for Oxfordshire about drug consumption rooms. What we've learned from the Glasgow experience is that the response of the Home Office is key, not public health locally. That's why as a local authority we need to be lobbying the Home Office</p> <p>Can I ask you again whether you would consider doing this?</p>	<p>Verbal Response</p> <p>I read the report that the speaker later today mentions in his address and will say more then. I can raise this in my role on the Health and Wellbeing Board. If the Board agrees with the proposal this is a more appropriate forum to then go on to lobby government.</p>

19.From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Upton – better local COVID19 data	
<p>Question</p> <p>Will the Portfolio Holder join me in calling for more accurate local COVID data to better inform service provision and protect staff?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>I agree there is an urgent need for more accurate local COVID data. As has been reported in the press, councils and the LGA have been calling for better sharing of COVID data with councils and particularly Directors of Public health who are leading on the Local Outbreak Plans.</p> <p>In response to these calls, government have published data at local authority level and said they will make more granular data available to councils. At the time of writing this depends on them getting the right data sharing agreements with councils in place.</p>

19. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Upton – better local COVID19 data	
	The Test and Trace system is being led and implemented centrally by Public Health England. It is a source of great frustration that we are not able to put to greater use the proven tracing expertise of our environmental health officers
Supplementary Question Does this council now have data about cases at postcode level?	Verbal Response The position on releasing granular data changes frequently: I will ask officers to circulate more information about the specificity of data once we have this ourselves.

20. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Upton – LGBTQ citizens access to health services	
Question Oxford's LGBTQ people should feel safe to be themselves – without shame or stigma – and should have access to healthcare that genuinely safeguards their wellbeing. Does the Cabinet member, agree that so-called “conversion therapy” poses a real danger to LGBTQ people, and that central government is taking too long to ban this discredited and dangerous practice? Are Oxfordshire's health service providers doing enough to ensure that our LGBTQ citizens are able to receive the health services they actually need, free from prejudice (and the fear of prejudice)?	Written Response “Conversion therapy” is a discredited and discriminatory practise that should have no place in our society. I refer the questioner to the answer to Q. 21 which outlines the ways in which the City Council is currently supporting LGBTQIA+ people. I have written to our local NHS Trusts to ask them to confirm that they do not endorse “Conversion therapy” and are committed to treating everyone equally regardless of their sexual orientation. In terms of LGBTQ people's ability to access health services and other services free from prejudice, this was recently discussed at the Children's Board, which heard from the County Council's Children and Family's team that the young LGBT community are reporting that they feel a lack of support from services. There has also been an increase in in mental health referrals for these young people. We will work with the county and health partners to find solutions to these issues and explore what more our Youth Ambition Programme can do to encourage LGBTQIA+ people to access services they need. As Cllr Tidball sets out in the answer to Q21, we will continue to challenge stigmatisation and to support LGBTQIA+ groups.
Supplementary Question It's good to hear about work being done with younger LGBTQ people but does the council recognize there's work to be done to	Verbal Response I don't have information to hand on the specific points raised in the question. I have written to the chief executives of our local NHS trusts as I said above and have also asked that they consider putting a statement to confirm that they do not

20. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Upton – LGBTQ citizens access to health services

improve the relationship between health service providers and LGBTQ adults as well?

Are there any initiatives which aim to support that effort in the same way as the youth ambition program aimed to support such efforts for younger LGBTQ people?

endorse “Conversion therapy” and are committed to treating everyone equally regardless of their sexual orientation onto their websites as well to make it clear what their position is.

Cabinet Member for Supporting Local Communities

21. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Tidball – LGBTQ rights

Question

Oxford’s LGBTQ people should feel safe to be themselves – without shame or stigma – and should feel affirmed by wider society.

Does the Cabinet Member for Local Communities agree that the central government’s ambivalent position on trans rights, and failure to act on previous commitments (such as the commitment to ban “conversion therapy”), send worrying signals, and risk perpetuating trauma for too many people?

What measures will the City Council take (beyond existing measures), to actively challenge stigmatisation and ensure that our city’s LGBTQ people can remain safe in our communities?

Written Response

It is now two years since Theresa May committed to ban conversion therapy and a year since a consultation on the subject was promised. It is, therefore, very concerning that the current Equalities Minister has recently indicated that this government has not decided how to proceed and that they are still trying to understand the problem. Let’s be clear, this is an appalling practice that causes shame and stigma and one which NHS England described as “unethical” and “harmful” back in 2014. The government’s failure to deliver on this promise is mirrored in their failure to deliver on its 2017 commitments to reform the Gender Recognition Act, in order to better protect the rights of trans people, and they now look to be resiling from these promises

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2020/07/12/liz-truss-scrap-self-identification-plans-next-days/>

Trans rights are human rights and the Equality Act 2010 should be upheld in its current form.

So yes, I do agree. The City Council welcomed the statement issued by Instagram on 10 July 2020 that they will block LGBTQIA+ ‘conversion therapy’ services – see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-53339589>

21. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Tidball – LGBTQ rights

	<p>We will continue actively to raise awareness of and challenge stigmatisation and promote the rights of LGBTQIA+ people in Oxford e.g. by continuing our work with LGBTQIA+ people and organisations across the city, including Oxford Pride, to collect, exhibit and tell the stories and histories of LGBTQIA+ people in Oxford. We are delighted that this ‘Queering Spires’ exhibition project has recently been shortlisted for a prestigious national heritage award – see https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/news/six-projects-chosen-sustainable-project-year</p> <p>We provide support to young LGBTQIA+ people through our Youth Ambition programme and will also continue to provide support for LGBTQIA+ groups such as LGBT+ Oxon and the Arc-T Centre who connect people within community and provide services and ‘safe space’ for LGBTQIA+ people.</p> <p>We will also continue to work with the LGBTQIA+ community to support and promote unity initiatives such as Oxford Pride.</p> <p>We are committed to being an inclusive and diverse organisation that challenges discrimination of all forms across the city. Therefore, we are now developing a refreshed equalities action plan that will be influenced by the rich diversity of Oxford, and informed through a range of specific focus groups, including LGBTQIA+/young people so that everyone can fulfil their potential.</p>
<p>Supplementary Question</p> <p>What efforts is the City Council is making, beyond the confines of the town hall and not just with LGBTQ organisations, to engage with its partners across the board to encourage inclusive practice</p>	<p>Verbal Response</p> <p>I have written to the Equalities Minister Liz Truss to raise my concerns about the shocking situation we now find ourselves in: government is indeed one partner who we must engage. We are developing our equality review and in developing the LGBTQ strand we will engage with partners, stakeholders and grassroots organisations across the city. I will continue to raise these issues as part of my work on the Children’s Trust board.</p>

22. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Brown – Pre-determining potential planning matters	
<p>Question</p> <p>A number of councillors recently signed a letter calling for the removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes in the High Street, despite knowing that any move to do so would be the subject of a planning application to this council, and that in publicly supporting one outcome from any such application they were therefore excluding themselves from serving on any committee hearing any such application. Doing so in such large numbers therefore placed considerable extra responsibility and pressure on their council colleagues who chose to behave differently.</p> <p>Does the Leader agree with me that councillors who signed acted irresponsibly in terms of their duties, both in pre-determining their view on any planning application, and in placing an extra burden on their colleagues and on officers?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>Councillors who feel very strongly about an issue will often express views. It is clear that labour colleagues feel strongly about racism and some felt that publically supporting the Rhodes Must Fall campaign was an important demonstration of solidarity with those working for change.</p> <p>This Labour council does not hide from aligning itself with local people who campaign for an anti-racist city. Indeed we want to work to achieve that. Keeping quiet on issues of racism is not something for any political party to be proud of.</p> <p>In respect of planning committee activity, as always it is for individual councillors of any party to judge their eligibility for any particular case that comes forward in the future.</p>
<p>Supplementary Question</p> <p>My question has no bearing on the views expressed in the letter referred to, but relates simply to the wisdom of councillors removing themselves from their proper role in deciding the outcome of any planning application, and in so doing putting an extra burden on colleagues on council. Does the Leader agree with me that was unwise?</p>	<p>Verbal Response</p> <p>Each councillor has to consider and make up their own mind about whether they need to express a view on a particular issue or whether they need to keep their powder dry in case they might need to determine a planning application. Sometimes on important issues it is very important that we speak out.</p> <p>I'm grateful to all those people who have not yet expressed a view and therefore are able to determine any future planning applications that come to us but I think it's perfectly reasonable.</p> <p>I wrote to Oriel College asking them to submit a planning application and made it clear that that would be something that the council would welcome. I think it's understandable that many</p>

22. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Brown – Pre-determining potential planning matters	
	people expressed a view that they thought that the statue ought to be removed. That of course means they cannot determine the planning application but it's not a surprising state of affairs in a council which is many times expressed its view that we must be an anti-racist city and to tackle racism in all its forms.

23. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Brown – Principles for reorganising local government	
Question Does the Leader agree with me that priorities guiding any future re-organisation of local government in our county and region should include: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Simplicity (so residents know who to go to and access services easily)• Efficiency, cost saving and enhanced service delivery• Increased democratic accountability• Truly local decision making and connection with voters (no to additional layers on top of accountable bodies)• Opportunities to collaborate and reach consensus on issues like climate emergency, transport, health, economy that are cross border.• A fair voting system, preferably STV (single transferable vote)• A lower voting age of 16	Written Response <p>The first and over-riding priority for government at all levels right now must be to support our local communities and economies to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic and to recover from it.</p> <p>Local residents in Oxford and local businesses are depending on us to continue delivering services for them and to work with our partners in their interests. Therefore my first principle and priority at the moment is that, and I do not support anything that currently distracts focus from this vital work. This would particularly be true of any sort of reorganisation at this point.</p> <p>I agree that good access to high quality services, efficiency, democratic accountability, local decision making and collaboration are all important priorities for local government and feature strongly in this council. I also believe that democratic institutions should be close to the people that they serve and that the boundaries should be comprehensible and recognisable to local people and based on a shared community. Again, this is to be found in the current City Council boundaries.</p> <p>I don't think that votes for 16 year olds are likely to be included in the package that government may propose, as that would be extending democracy. Everything that I have heard so far suggests that they are seeking to stifle democracy and centralise power away from people.</p>
Supplementary Question Does the Leader agree that we should make representations	Verbal Response As neither of these will form any part of this package of changes, then it isn't for this council to

23. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Brown – Principles for reorganising local government

that reforms ideally should include a different voting system, preferably STV, and a voting age of 16?

have a particular view. There will be different views on STV and while we have agreed here that we are in support of a lower voting age that won't be part of the offer.

My main aim is to ensure the city has a proper voice in any future democratic arrangements.

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To: Council

Date: 20 July 2020

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

Introduction

1. Addresses made by members of the public to the Council, and questions put to the Cabinet members or Leader, registered by the deadline in the Constitution, are below. Any written responses available are also below.
2. The text reproduces that sent in the speakers and represents the views of the speakers. This is not to be taken as statements by or on behalf of the Council
3. 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.

1. Address by Colin Aldridge – Drug consumption rooms
2. Address by Peter Thompson, Director Oxford School of English – Expanded Retail Discount scheme
3. Address by Tanagra Jabu Nala-Hartley – Oxford Living Wage
4. Address by Hsin-Yung Yen – Motion on Twinning with Taiwanese city
5. Address by David Madden – concern at the accumulating impact of development.

1. Address by Colin Aldridge – Drug consumption rooms

I am here today to ask you to consider the concept of Drug consumption rooms (DCR).

Amid a wartime panic, the government imposed the Defence of The Realm Act (DORA) which banned the sale of cocaine, opium and cannabis without prescription to troops. Before this time these drugs were readily available and in the 1800s, Laudanum could be readily available without prescription, its use was famously advocated by Shelley, Byron, Wordsworth and Keats. Queen Victoria was said to have used opium and Britain fought twice with China for control of opium trade during the Opium Wars – the British Empire was in fact the biggest drug dealer around during this time [see [reference](#)]

I do not want you to consider legalising drugs in their entirety but a small change to the present law to allow Drug Consumption Rooms. Drug consumption rooms have the ability to reach and maintain contact with high-risk drug users who are not ready or willing to stop using drugs. The [evidence base](#) contradicts concerns that such facilities encourage drug use, delay treatment entry, or aggravate problems arising from local drug markets – finding instead that both the users and the community stand to benefit.

As frontline, low-threshold services, drug consumption rooms are often among the first to gain insights into new drug use patterns and thus they also have a role to play in the early identification of new and emerging trends among the high-risk populations using their services. The emergence of new forms of injectable stimulants, including new psychoactive substances, have resulted in potentially increased risks for drug users, and this is part of the context for the political discussion in some European countries about the introduction of drug consumption rooms

This clear and concise presentation of the evidence suggests that the benefits of drug consumption rooms “may include improvements in safe, hygienic drug use, especially among regular clients, increased access to health and social services, and reduced public drug use and associated nuisance”.

Previous Home Secretaries, when responding to the advice of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, have all reiterated that the majority of public opinion is against reforming the current stance on prohibition. However, [a poll commissioned on the 10/07/2010](#) by the Liberal Democrats found that when the definitions of three regulatory options were given to members of the public instead of simply asking "Do you think drugs should be legalised?" the majority in fact supported new regulatory control.

As of April 2018, there were 90 Drug Consumption Rooms in Denmark, France, Germany, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Switzerland.

Pragmatic solutions have led to rewarding results in Portugal; after decriminalising possession and consumption of drugs in 2001, the country has since seen drug related deaths reduced to three per million [see [reference](#)]

There were 3,756 deaths relating to drug poisoning in England and Wales in 2017, a rate of 66.1 deaths per 1 million population, and similar to levels seen in 2016. [see [reference](#)]

The public recognise DCR's are not the complete answer to drug use but a step in the right direction.

I would urge you to talk to the residents you represent, listen to what they say and make the decision to talk with all the MP's to talk to their colleagues in Parliament. DCR's will happen it just depends when.

Verbal Response from the Cabinet Member for a Safer Healthy Oxford, Councillor Upton

Thank you very much indeed for coming to us with this sensible and pragmatic balanced address on the idea of drug consumption rooms.

I read the briefing that you mentioned in it from the European Union's drug misuse monitoring centre which was really interesting. As you've mentioned it outlines evidence that contradicts many of the views that people have about introducing them and outlines the benefits, some of which I had not even thought of before. Alongside the obvious ones of fewer overdose deaths and not sharing dirty needles, there are benefits in getting vulnerable people somewhere where they might be much more likely to access health and social services, and reducing the awful problem of discarded needles that our street ambassadors are having to deal with every day.

Speaking as a neuroscientist, I know something about the effects that addictive drugs can have on brain function. Once control of dopamine release at synapses involved in reward circuits of the brain has become dysregulated it is very hard to fix.

Drug addicts need help and I can see that drug consumption rooms are a way of keeping them safe and increasing the likelihood of them getting help. It is beyond the remit of the city council to commission a drug consumption room: however the County Council has the responsibility for public health. I sit on the Health and Well-Being Board for Oxfordshire (all six councils have a representative) and I will raise it there, because I think this is something we really should look at.

Thank you very much for bringing this evidence to our attention.

2. Address by Peter Thompson, Director Oxford School of English – Expanded Retail Discount scheme

As you know, Oxford City Council has decided that English language schools do not meet the eligibility criteria for this Scheme.

The guidance issued by the government sets out broad categories of those businesses that are eligible, and lists examples; however, the guidance also states that this list 'is not intended to be exhaustive... Authorities should determine for themselves whether properties are broadly similar in nature and, if so, to consider them eligible for the relief.'

In contrast to Oxford City Council, at least 17 other local authorities have interpreted the guidance to conclude that English language schools do indeed meet the criteria, and have therefore granted the relief to language schools in their area.

These 17 authorities include Brighton City Council which sought specific advice directly from the government. As a result, in late May the Council announced that they would indeed include their own language schools in the rates relief scheme. The Council explained that they had defined a test of eligibility, saying that 'This test will evidence to government that we have fully considered their requirements before making an award'.

Oxford City Council has said that it considers English language schools 'to be educational and that the tourism element is a benefit derived from their primary function'. With respect, the Council is entirely wrong. It must be evident to all Oxford residents that the prime reason for the majority of students attending courses at English language schools is not to study English, but to engage in a form of tourism. At Easter and in the summer this is an inescapable fact of our city centre, as groups of these teenage tourists throng the streets and public spaces.

These young people are here to experience British life, to participate in British customs, and to live with British people. Most are here for just two or three weeks, but it can be as little as five days. They are, very evidently, tourists.

Oxford School of English provides an income to some 70 staff and 250 host families, and annually contributes almost £3m to the local economy. The annual value to the British economy of our sector as a whole is £1.4bn.

Since March our income has been zero, and is unlikely to recover to any degree until Easter next year. We need help to reach that point. Without that help, we and other schools are in imminent danger of failure.

On behalf of our sector's 200 Oxford staff, and of the thousand or so host families whose income is threatened, and of the many thousands of residents who benefit in other ways, I urge Councillors to look again at this scheme and to follow the lead of your colleagues in Brighton, and to grant us the rates relief we so desperately need.

**Verbal response from the Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management,
Councillor Turner**

Thanks very much for sharing these points. I very much appreciate what you say and feel for everyone working in the sector and as a council we want to do what we can to help. These issues have been raised with me number of times and I've discussed them at length with officers to see if we have any discretion we can apply here so that such relief can be granted. Officers have been clear with me that there isn't any such discretion and that granting reliefs in this way wouldn't be in line with the guidance.

The Leader wrote to the relevant government minister asking for a change in and clarification of the rules and unfortunately we haven't had a reply to that letter. We put that case to ministers because there is absolutely no rationale for helping one sector of the economy which is gravely affected by the implosion of people coming to this country for serious purposes (which includes language school students) but not another. The logic of government policy in granting the reliefs should surely point to this sector being included.

I'm very happy on the basis of tonight's address to encourage officers to look at the decisions made by Brighton City Council, and if officers are satisfied that that's legally robust I'm sure we'd look to follow that route. But I have to caution it's been looked at carefully and so far officers' opinion is that the government's regulations don't allow those payments to be made. Be assured that we will do what we can, whether it is by lobbying national government for a change or by making a change locally if we can.

3. Address by Tanagra Jabu Nala-Hartley – Oxford Living Wage

As chair of the Oxford Living Wage Campaign, I would like to thank the continued support we have from the Oxford City Council. We would like the council to continue to support the campaign especially as we face economic challenges from Covid-19.

Oxford communities must continue to be supported in their plight. The gig economy has devastated workers through precarious contracts which have eroded decent wages.

We must continue in our efforts to build solidarities and strengthen our resolve especially as the Covid-19 crisis is not over.

As Chair of the campaign I would like to place on record our thanks to Oxford City Council for its work on the Oxford Living Wage, and to use this opportunity to invite the Council to reaffirm its commitment to paying and promoting the Oxford Living Wage.

I would also like to take this opportunity to ask all Councillors present to take up the cause of the Oxford Living Wage, to join the campaign, and argue for the Living Wage in their wards.

Verbal response from the Leader of the Council, Councillor Brown

Thank you for your statement. I would certainly be very happy to make it absolutely clear that the Council remains firmly behind the idea of an Oxford Living Wage for our own employees and also, importantly, for other employees across the city. I think it is an important point: to make it clear that it is really important that workers in our city are paid a decent rate of pay because if our economy locally is going to recover then people need to have some disposable income to invest in it. That is a crucial virtuous circle: paying people properly means that they have money to invest in other local businesses and that is the argument that the city council continues to make.

This relates in many ways to the report I am bringing later on about the work on that we do with the Local Economic Partnership. I've worked very hard as a director of that organisation to get the idea of an inclusive economy across to that partnership and to the Oxfordshire Growth Board. I'm pleased to say that the work that we have done with both of those organisations (to get the idea of an inclusive economy foremost in people's minds) is now very much part of their thinking and is being written into the work that they do. It is very important that we make sure that out of this pandemic we try and tackle some of the inequalities in our city and do not let them become further reinforced.

Thank you very much for raising the issue: it definitely remains one of our priorities to make sure that as many organisations as possible across our city are paying the Oxford Living Wage.

4. Address by Hsin-Yung Yen – Motion on Twinning with Taiwanese city

My name is Hsin-Yung Yen, the founder of a pharmaceutical company based in Oxford. I was born in Taiwan and moved to the UK as a postdoctoral researcher in Oxford University in 2014. It has been a wonderful opportunity for me to work in this world's top University. What I have learn from this greatest environment is its diversity with different culture and perspectives. I have been inspired by interacting with colleagues from different countries and this has in turn driven my research success and led to the formation of our company with £40 million investment. I am very delighted to devote myself, especially with all the training and experience I received from Taiwan, to the growth of high-end industry in the UK. I truly believe in the value of what we call "Taiwanese experiences" and how much it could bring to the UK policy and economy. There have been many examples demonstrating our contributions in human rights, technology, global health, etc. What I can foresee from this motion is to bring more Taiwanese talents to Oxford, to help drive growth of the city and to enhance the understanding of our culture. The decision to twin Oxford with a city in Taiwan will create a channel with bilateral benefits between Taiwanese and British people, and therefore I fully support it.

Verbal response from the Leader of the Council, Councillor Brown

Thank you very much for your address. Our council is really proud of its international links, and the large number of citizens from overseas that we have in our city is something that we've always really welcomed. We are always looking at different ways of cementing those friendships with cities overseas and indeed populations within our own city. We will be debating a motion on twinning links later on the agenda.

One of the things that I would emphasise is the importance of friendship links leading ultimately to a formal twinning link. Certainly our most successful twinning links have been based on long-standing friendship links that have built up over time. The council has limited resources when it comes to actually supporting formal twinning arrangements, and I think it important that people understand that much of the work of maintaining and expanding friendship links is done by citizens within both cities.

This proposal is very much worth exploring and we'd be happy to support it. We will come on to debate it more fully later in the meeting. Thank you very much for coming to address us today

5. Address by David Madden – concern at the accumulating impact of development.

Thank you for agreeing that I can address your meeting today.

My reason for requesting to speak is the growing level of concern at the accumulating impact of developments on the Conservation Area, the environment and the community: now and in the future.

The North Oxford Victorian Suburb Conservation Area is a very important part of the history and heritage of Oxford. It was preserved for a purpose. When it's gone, it's gone. There is no way back. You the Council are the current custodians, or guardians, of the Conservation Area. Please honour that trust. To allow the piecemeal destruction of the Area would be an abuse of authority and process.

Much the same applies to the environment. You have declared a Climate Emergency. So far that is merely words. It needs action to mean something. Again, you are the custodians. We long ago reached the stage when we should stop destruction. We need sustainability and regeneration. We look to you to take a lead. At present, the wide range of climate-related issues is not being addressed.

The community is awaiting signs that you listen and engage; respond to reasoned concerns and criticisms; and act as our champion. And, above all, please do not fall into avoidable mistakes and setting bad precedents. Developers everywhere are looking for signs of weakness and exploitable opportunities.

A number of us have tried to engage with Council officers and Councillors on development issues: but with the exception of some specific Councillors, have not felt listened to.

Oxford is changing. It has a huge pipeline of development projects ahead. These need to be considered holistically and strategically.

Those points may be rather general in tone, but they are important. I have four more detailed suggestions for the meeting today:

- Planning Committees have their role, but that does not absolve the Council of responsibilities or the right of overview and oversight. Might senior Councillors involve themselves more in the work of the Committees, a) to check that nothing is amiss, and b) to sniff out the potential for justified objections?
- There is a widespread view that Planning Officers can become, because of their close long-term association with projects, the mouthpieces of developers. This is bad for local democracy. And the close relationship means that developers can exert pressure. The planners need to maintain independent scrutiny, and be prepared to listen to objections as well: so that they can advise Councillors wisely. Could they balance their apportionment of time and engage with the community as planning goes forward?
- More specifically, an element of good design included in planning rules is acceptability to the local community. At present there is (occasional) engagement with the residents only through the developers, and on their terms. This is surely not acceptable. Is it not possible to build consultation with the community on questions of design directly into the planning process?
- Often there will be competing views eg on difficult and loaded (but absolutely essential) issues like biodiversity. These have to be resolved, not just left hanging in the air. There can quite easily be independent resolution. Could officers engage more with known experts, and not just the developers?

And one final, over-arching point; public confidence in processes of planning and development have to be preserved. This is essential. They affect the lives, health and livelihoods of everyone.

Verbal response from the Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery, Councillor Hollingsworth

I will pick up on a number of the points and then try to provide a more detailed written response.

The first point I wanted to make relates to the second of the four specific suggestions. It's an elegantly worded suggestion, but one that I find quite worrying. I was also asked by Councillor Gant to raise this as he feels very much the same as me.

In effect it is using the opportunity of this public petition to suggest, rather than accuse, the council's planning officers of being biased in favour of developers. In my long experience on this council, and indeed talking to planning officers in other councils, this is almost never true of planning officers and is **certainly not true** of the planning officers of this council. It is an unfortunate slur on their professionalism and one that I regret is made in this way.

More broadly I think what the petition suggests is the struggle that many of us have with the confines of the planning system has laid down in law.

When I do planning training for other councils, one of the first things that one needs to get across to new councillors is that the planning system is essentially like a quasi-judicial process and its starting point is that development should go ahead unless there is a specific reason why it shouldn't. That presumption in favour of development is something that is not widely understood, and nor should it be. It is laid down in the national planning policy framework - and indeed has been laid down in all planning law since 1947 - but the majority of the population do not spend their time engaging with the detail of planning law.

So there is probably a communications issue here, and it is for this council and others to help explain the issues. It is explained at all planning meetings, and those of us who have sat on planning meetings, either now or in the past, will be aware that it is a difficult message to convey because it's one that flies against the expectations that that many people have.

Addressing some of those other concerns:

On the suggestion that senior councillors or the Leader of the Council should interfere with the planning committees: that would leave the council wide open to challenge and judicial review as it would in effect be political interference in the working of the planning committee and entirely inappropriate. That's the consequence of the planning system: councillors must leave their political beliefs behind them when they enter a planning committee

On the issue of consultation, the council does its best to consult with the community, but the rules under which this takes place are those laid down by the government which do not require developers to go beyond the legal minimum. Good developers go beyond the minimum; less good developers do not.

Councillor Gant asked to make a statement as he had been named in the response.

I did indeed correspond with Councillor Hollingsworth this afternoon. I do want to make it clear that I began my message saying how much I admire and value the huge energy and commitment of people like our speaker this afternoon in engaging with the planning process and it's very clear certainly in my part of Oxford the huge benefits that that brings not least in the development of the Local Plan which covers both my ward and the ward which contains the recent planning application that he is thinking of.

The speaker is of course perfectly entitled to expect that councillors on planning committees will read all submissions and I hope that they do so.

But finally I want to make it clear that I was specifically raising the speaker's statement that '*planning officers can become the mouthpiece of developers*'. There's a long-standing and very valuable convention that officers are not able to answer criticism of that kind and that Councillors should essentially defend them; and that was the point I wanted to make. My thanks to Cllr Hollingsworth for his statements in their defence.