

Minutes of a meeting of Council on Monday 27 January 2025

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Council members present:

Councillor Qayyum	Councillor Azad
Councillor Jupp	Councillor Max Morris
Councillor Regisford	Councillor Stares
Councillor Yeatman	Councillor Harley
Councillor Henwood	Councillor Robinson
Councillor Altaf-Khan	Councillor Arshad
Councillor Brown	Councillor Chapman
Councillor Clarkson	Councillor Corais (Deputy Lord Mayor)
Councillor Coyne	Councillor Diggins
Councillor Djafari-Marbini	Councillor Fouweather
Councillor Fry (Sheriff)	Councillor Gant
Councillor Hollingsworth	Councillor Hunt
Councillor Jarvis	Councillor Kerr
Councillor Latif	Councillor Lygo
Councillor Malik	Councillor Miles
Councillor Muddiman	Councillor Munkonge
Councillor Pressel	Councillor Railton
Councillor Rawle	Councillor Rehman
Councillor Sandelson	Councillor Linda Smith
Councillor Roz Smith	Councillor Smowton
Councillor Turner	Councillor Upton
Councillor Waite	

Also present for all or part of the meeting:

Emma Jackman, Director of Law, Governance and Strategy

Tom Hook, Deputy Chief Executive, Citizen and City Service

Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy

Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services

Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager

Uswah Khan, Committee and Member Services Officer

Amber Khaloon, Trainee Solicitor

Tanaka Merralls, Trainee Solicitor

Apologies:

Councillor(s) Mundy sent apologies.

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

53. Apologies for absence

Councillor Edward Mundy sent apologies.

54. Declarations of interest

Councillor Gant declared interest in items 16a and 16b, due to his role as the Cabinet Member for Transport Management for Oxfordshire County Council. He agreed that he would leave the room for these items.

55. Minutes

Council agreed to **approve** the minutes of the ordinary meeting of Council held on 25 November 2024 as a true and accurate record.

56. Appointment to Committees

Council received a report from the Head of Law and Governance which notified Council of the amendments made to the membership of Committees since the initial appointments made at Council on 16 May 2024, and further changes made in 7 October 2024.

Council resolved to **agree** the appointments to Committees:

- Audit and Governance Committee – Councillor Alex Powell to replace Councillor Lois Muddiman.

- Planning Review Committee – Councillor Lois Muddiman to replace Councillor Alex Powell.

57. Announcements

The Lord Mayor noted that today was Holocaust Memorial Day, recognising the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. He announced that he had attended a ceremony in the Town Hall today, with five students from Cheney School, whose projects memorialising the Holocaust received royal recognition. He extended his congratulations to the students and thanked them for their meaningful participation in the ceremony. He proposed that the Council rise for a minute of silence.

The Leader of the Council announced the civic office holders for next year: Councillor Upton will serve as Lord Mayor, Councillor Rowley will be Deputy Lord Mayor, and Councillor Gant will take on the role of the Sheriff.

City Rector shared that it was his privilege to be alongside the Lord Mayor and others at lunchtime today, preparing for the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. In his address, he turned to Genocide Watch, an organisation he leads, and shared a letter from an American High School Principal:

“I am a survivor of a concentration camp, and I have seen things no one should ever have to witness. I have seen gas chambers built by engineers, children poisoned by educated physicians and infants killed by trained nurses. I have seen women and babies shot by those with high school and college degrees. This is why I am suspicious of education. My request to you is this: help your children become human. Education should never produce monsters and skilled psychopaths. Reading, writing and arithmetic are important, but only if they serve to make our children more human”.

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

There were no addresses or questions.

59. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Rent Setting Report 2025/26

Council received a report from the Head of Financial Services relating to the HRA Rent Setting Report 2025/26.

Councillor Linda Smith introduced the report and proposed the recommendations.

On being seconded by Councillor Turner, the recommendations were put to the vote and agreed.

Council resolved to:

1. **Approve** an increase of 2.7% for 2025/26 (subject to any subsequent cap on increases imposed by central government) in social dwelling rents from 1st April 2025 giving an average weekly increase of £3.51 per week, and a revised weekly average social rent of £133.68 as set out in the Financial Implications section of this report;
2. **Approve** an increase to rents for shared ownership dwellings as outlined in paragraph 21 of the Financial Implications;
3. **Approve** an increase to service charges by 2.7% (CPI + 1%) to enable the HRA to recover the associated cost of supply;
4. **Approve** an increase to the charge for a garage of 4.1%, equating to an increase of £0.78 per week for a standard garage within a curtilage with a revised charge of £20.00 per week.

60. Withdrawal of Oxford Local Plan 2040 from Examination

Council received a report from the Head of Planning and Regulatory Service to seek approval for the withdrawal of the Oxford Local Plan 2040 from Examination

Councillor Upton introduced the report and proposed the recommendations.

On being seconded by Councillor Brown, the recommendations were put to the vote and agreed.

The Council resolved to:

1. **Approve** the withdrawal of the Oxford Local Plan 2040 and the publication of the withdrawal statement;
2. **Note** the Cabinet decision to approve the Local Development Scheme 2025-2030;
3. **Authorise** the Head of Planning and Regulatory Services to make any necessary minor corrections not materially affecting the document prior to publication.

61. Urgent Key Decisions Taken Since November 2024

The Head of Law and Governance submitted a report which updated Council on key decisions taken in cases of special urgency since November 2024.

Councillor Brown presented the report.

Council resolved to **note** the urgent key decision taken in cases of special urgency as set out in the report.

62. Council and Committee meetings programme for May 2025 to May 2027

Councillor Brown presented the report and moved for it to be voted upon. Upon being seconded by Councillor Snowton, the recommendations were put to a vote and agreed.

The Council resolved to

1. **Approve** the programme of Council, committee and other meetings from 1 May 2025 to 31 May 2027 attached at Appendix A;
2. **Delegate** authority to the Head of Law and Governance, in consultation with Group Leaders, to make changes to this programme in the event that there is any decision by Council to change the committee structure or committee remit which impacts on the programme of meetings; and
3. **Delegate** authority to the Head of Law and Governance to set dates for additional training and briefing sessions for Members.

63. Polling Place Review

Councillor Brown presented the report, formally moving the report to a vote. Upon being seconded by Councillor Jarvis, the recommendations were put to a vote and agreed.

The Council resolved to

1. **Approve** the schedule of polling districts and polling places (shown at Appendix 1) for the administrative area of the City Council.

64. Questions on Cabinet minutes

a) Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting held on 11 December 2024

Councillor Snowton raised a question regarding the HRA business plan. He referred to the report, which mentioned selling 100 dwellings over the next 10 years to generate a capital receipt and improve the position of the HRA. He asked whether this option was being pursued and if so, how the number of new builds it enabled compared to the 100 units potentially lost.

Councillor Linda Smith responded that it was not being actively pursued at present. Instead, it was considered one of several potential actions that could be taken to mitigate the situation, if necessary.

Councillor Henwood stated that CPZ's should not be a responsibility of the City Council, particularly when it came to funding reports related to them.

Councillor Brown responded that it was beneficial to allocate funds for infrastructure improvements, such as reviewing the transport systems, on behalf of the County Council, as it helped to improve conditions for local residents and local businesses.

Councillor Rehman expressed concern that LTNs have been a disaster and requested whether they could be surveyed and reviewed.

Councillor Upton clarified that LTNs were not a policy of Oxford City but were under the jurisdiction of the County Council, meaning no funding from the City Council would be directed towards the review.

Councillor Miles inquired why North Oxford was not part of the CPZ review.

Councillor Upton responded that she believes the County Council had put North Oxford forward for review.

b) Draft Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting held on 22 January 2025

Councillor Snowton inquired about the fleet item, asking whether the issue of contracts being issued in breach of local government regulations was limited to fleet purchase. He also asked if the money was lost due to the contract termination, and whether services were impacted.

Councillor Chapman responded that training and development had been implemented for staff to ensure this issue did not recur. Regarding the loss of money, he was not aware of any financial impact. He confirmed that there was sufficient flexibility to manage the existing fleet this year and assured that no services had been affected by the contract termination.

65. Questions on Notice from Members of Council

37 written questions were asked of the Cabinet Members and the Leader, and these and written responses were published before the meeting. These along with summaries of the 19 supplementary questions and responses asked and given at the meeting are set out in the minutes pack.

The Lord Mayor moved to item 15a, 15b and 15c ahead of the break.

66. Outside organisation/Committee Chair reports and questions

a) Outside Organisation Report: OxLEP and Skills Board

Councillor Hollingsworth introduced the report, explaining that the organisation was undergoing significant reorganisation, which had caused the delay in bringing forward the report. He stated that there was typically an annual report which was submitted, the last one was in March, and although they wanted to bring it forward earlier, the reorganisation delayed this process. The LEP was transitioning into an upper-tier authority under the Oxford County Council, which took some time to finalise. He

mentioned that the transition will be completed by the end of March this year. This update served to inform Councillors on the progress, and Councillor Hollingsworth opened the floor to questions.

Councillor Miles pointed out the absence of disaggregated data, emphasising the importance of diversity when discussing the economic empowerment of different groups. She noted that the City Council values diversity, and as representatives of Scrutiny, they've raised concerns about the need for better collection and reporting of disaggregated data. She expressed hope that data on economic participation rates, apprenticeships and other relevant factors would be broken down based on key characteristics. She asked whether there were any insights on this but reiterated the importance of having such data to inform future actions.

Councillor Hollingsworth acknowledged the comments and assured that it would be passed along to the relevant leaders and officers for further consideration.

The Council resolved to **note** the report of the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership Ltd.

b) Outside Organisation Report: Oxfordshire Waste and Resources Partnership

Councillor Chapman introduced the report.

The Council resolved to **note** the annual report on the work of the Oxfordshire Resources and Waste Partnership, 2023 to 2024.

c) Scrutiny Committee update report

Councillor Miles, The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee, introduced the report. She outlined that the reporting period was from 1 October 2024 to 14 January 2025. During this time, the Committee held five panel meetings and made 32 recommendations to Cabinet. Of these, Cabinet and the Shareholder Joint Venture Group agreed to 26 recommendations, partially agreed to four and rejected five.

Councillor Miles drew attention to two urgent recommendations. The first was that Cabinet supported the continued implementation and embedding of actions proposed to mitigate the increased number of urgent key decisions taken. The second was that officers ensured an end of year report was submitted to Scrutiny Committee, detailing the number of key decisions taken, including data to track trends and evaluate distinctions between capacity related issues.

The Council resolved to **note** the report.

The meeting broke for 30min at the conclusion of this item.

Councillor Andrew Gant left the meeting and did not return.

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

Council heard 2 addresses and Cabinet Members read or summarised their written responses.

Both addresses and responses are set out in full in the minutes pack.

1. Address from Julian Le Vay – Support for Motion 16e
2. Address from Tom Lewis - Stop Botley West Solar Farm

68. Motions on Notice January 2025

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

Motions taken but lost:

- Zero Emission Zone (Proposed by Cllr. David Henwood, Seconded by Cllr. Ian Yeatman)

Motions agreed as set below:

- Visitor Parking Permits (Proposed by Cllr. Ajaz Rehman, Seconded by Cllr. Dr. Amar Latif) [Amended by Cllr. Simon Ottino, seconded by Cllr. Linda Smith]

Motions not taken as the time allocated for debate had finished:

- Devolution (Proposed by Cllr. Susan Brown, Seconded by Cllr. Anna Railton)
- Protection of Carers from Exploitation (Proposed by Cllr. Jo Sandelson, Seconded by Cllr Theo Jupp)
- Demand compensation from Network Rail for delays in reopening Botley Road (Proposed by Cllr. Lois Muddiman, Seconded by Cllr. Alex Powell)

a) Zero Emission Zone (Proposed by Cllr. David Henwood, Seconded by Cllr. Ian Yeatman)

Councillor Henwood, seconded by Councillor Yeatman, proposed the motion as set out in the briefing note. Following debate and on being put to the vote, the motion was **lost**.

Council believes that it would be useful for Oxford City Council to publish a (non-statutory) supplement to its already-published 2023 AQASR. This supplement would help provide the public with the council's baseline analysis of NO₂ pollution levels in the planned ZEZ expansion zone, reusing existing data. The Council further believes that subsequent AQASRs should also include an in-depth analysis of NO₂ pollution levels in the planned ZEZ expansion zone. Collectively, these analyses collectively assist Oxford City Council in deciding whether – in the council's view – the ZEZ expansion remains objectively justified as a policy that the City Council should continue to endorse.

Council notes that where there are any financial and/or resource implications that the implantation of the report will be subject to a report to Cabinet, Council therefore request that Cabinet ask those officers responsible for producing the Oxford City Council's AQASR to; publish a supplement to 2023 AQASR (within three months of the date of this motion), which includes a detailed data table setting out the verified average NO₂ pollution levels between 2019 and 2023, for each pollution monitoring station within the proposed ZEZ expansion zone; to provide equivalent data in the 2024 AQASR, and in future years; to ensure this data is accompanied by a detailed analysis of recent NO₂ pollution trends within the planned ZEZ expansion zone, where reasonably possible, including an analysis of whether NO₂ pollution within the proposed ZEZ expansion zone have yet fallen to Oxford City Council's 30µg/m³ by 2025 target.

Council further asks Cabinet to consider not taking any decision about revenue and cost sharing arrangements with Oxfordshire County Council beyond the one agreed for the pilot (should they come forward) until the initial ZEZ pollution analysis has been completed.

b) Visitor Parking Permits (Proposed by Cllr. Ajaz Rehman, Seconded by Cllr. Dr. Amar Latif) (Amendment proposed by Cllr Ottino, seconded by Cllr Linda Smith)

Councillor Rehman, seconded by Councillor Latif, proposed the motion as set out in the briefing note.

Councillor Ottino proposed an amendment to the motion, as set out in the briefing note and was seconded by Councillor Liz Smith. Following the debate and on being put to the vote, the amendment was **agreed**.

The motion as amended and on being put to the vote, the amended motion was **agreed**.

The Council notes the recent commitment from Oxfordshire County Council that paper visitor parking permits will still be available for Oxfordshire residents who are genuinely unable to set up digital accounts.

This Council asks the Leader of the Council to write to the relevant officers at Oxfordshire County Council to:

1. Seek clarification as to exactly what the criteria are for which residents this will apply to
2. Seek confirmation that this change will be closely monitored to ensure that discrimination doesn't occur.

An only digital scheme would discriminate against residents who do not have access or struggle with digital technology.

c) Devolution (Proposed by Cllr. Susan Brown, Seconded by Cllr. Anna Railton)

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

d) Protection of Carers from Exploitation (Proposed by Cllr. Jo Sandelson, Seconded by Cllr Theo Jupp)

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

e) Demand compensation from Network Rail for delays in reopening Botley Road (Proposed by Cllr. Lois Muddiman, Seconded by Cllr. Alex Powell)

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

The meeting started at 5.00pm and ended at 8.20pm.

Lord Mayor

Date: Thursday 13 February 2025

*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: 27 January 2025
Report of: Head of Law and Governance
Title of Report: Questions on Notice from members of Council and responses from the Cabinet Members and Leader

→ Introduction

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 will be taken at the meeting.

Responses are included where available.

Questioners can ask one supplementary question of the Cllr answering the original question.

This report will be republished after the Council meeting to include supplementary questions and responses as part of the minutes pack.

Unfamiliar terms may be briefly explained in footnotes.

Questions and responses

Cabinet Member for Partnership Working; Leader of the Council

SB1: From Cllr Smowton to Cllr Brown – Community Councils

Question

Can you update Council regarding the expected consequences of local government reorganisation for Parish and Community Councils? Considering that any reorganisation is likely to result in less-local representation in a larger council, ought we to look again at whether, like Swindon and Milton Keynes, Oxford ought to have Community Councils to bolster neighbourhood-level democracy?

Written Response

The White Paper specifically mentions positively the role of parish and community councils in the government's devolution proposals. It is open to any area of the city to put forward proposals for a parish or community council.

Supplementary question

Would the Council leader agree that taking a uniform approach will ensure all areas gain equal benefit?

Verbal response

The Councillor said it is something that can be considered when looking at the proposals for a unitary Oxford.

SB2: From Cllr Sandelson to Cllr Brown – Cash Payments

Question

Would the leader support my campaign to require businesses providing vital local services to continue to accept cash payments, in order to ensure people unable or unwilling to use electronic payment means are able to purchase basic provisions?

Written Response

I welcome Cllr Sandelson's support for the digitally excluded. I urge her to support the representations we have made to the County Council over the new system for residents' parking permits.

No Supplementary Question.

SB3: From Cllr Gant to Cllr Brown – Elections

Question

Cllr Brown's recent letter to Jim McMahon MP states that the County Council has requested a postponement of the county council elections in May 2025. This is a misrepresentation. Will she withdraw and correct her statement and apologise?

Written Response

I refer Cllr Gant to the statement by the Local Government Minister on 15 January which states: "*We have received letters from the leaders of the following county and unitary councils with requests that involve postponing their election from 2025 to 2026.*" The list of councils includes Oxfordshire County Council. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-government-reorganisation-letter-to-two-tier-areas>

Supplementary question

Who does the Councillor believe should speak for the leader of the County Council?

Verbal response

The Councillor said that there there was no need to send the letter if they were not seeking to postpone elections and emphasised that she stood by her initial statement.

SB4: From Cllr Gant to Cllr Brown – Timing of Devolution

Question

Cllr Brown has said it is "too early" to talk about local government reorganisation. Her letter to Jim McMahon MP does exactly that. Is it the right time to talk about reorganisation or not?

Written Response

The county council's letter asking for the county council elections to be postponed was on the basis that there could be a quick solution to local government reorganisation in Oxfordshire. Considering that there had been no discussion at all between local authorities in Oxfordshire on what is bound to be a complex subject I thought it was premature and that is what my letter indicated.

Supplementary question

Verbal response

Is this the right time to talk about re-organisation?	The Councillor stated that the County Cabinet’s letter prioritised local government reorganisation over devolution decisions, which went against the agreement of District and County leaders to resolve devolution boundaries first. She added that the letter also came prematurely, before any discussions on government reorganisation had taken place, making the County Council’s bid for an early approach on local government reorganisation inappropriate.
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SB5: From Cllr Gant to Cllr Brown – Consultation on Oxford’s expansion

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<p>Question In making the case for an expanded Oxford unitary council, what evidence does the leader have that town and parish councils and residents around the city want to be part of such a council run from Oxford?</p>	<p>Written Response As per my previous response, there has been no discussion at all on reorganisation as yet, but you can rest assured that discussions with parish councils and engagement with the wider public will be important to us and will happen.</p>
<p>Supplementary question Should the Councillor have spoken to representative areas around Oxford before announcing her plan to include them in the proposal?</p>	<p>Verbal response The Councillor said there had been no discussions on local government reorganisation, but as County Council, South and Vale had all been talking about their proposals on having a joint unitary with one another, the Councillor set out the ambitions of this Council to be a unitary Oxford.</p>

SB6: From Cllr Yeatman to Cllr Brown – Child Grooming

<p>Question Given the recent comments from Simon Morton, (former senior investigating officer for Thames Valley Police), that child grooming is still happening in Oxford, can this Council, alongside Oxfordshire County</p>	<p>Written Response The grooming of children for sexual abuse is a vile and horrific crime. In 2011, Oxfordshire County Council and Thames Valley Police launched Operation Bullfinch—a joint investigation into reports of child sexual exploitation in Oxford. By 2013, seven individuals were convicted of 59</p>
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Council, assure our communities that the lessons from Operation Bullfinch & the serious case review have been fully learnt, implemented and enhanced over time, so that children across Oxfordshire are receiving the best possible safeguarding.

counts of rape and child prostitution, resulting in custodial sentences totalling 95 years.

The courage of the victims to come forward, disclose their abuse, and seek justice through the courts is paramount in our thoughts when reflecting on these events.

In 2015, the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (OSCB) published a Serious Case Review (SCR) examining child sexual exploitation in Oxfordshire.

Oxfordshire County Council is responsible for children's services. The Review's findings highlighted numerous failings by the County Council's Children's Services, Thames Valley Police, and other agencies.

Significant changes to child safeguarding arose from the SCR, including:

- the Kingfisher Team, a dedicated multi-agency unit, was formed to support victims and has ensured the prosecution of offenders.
- a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub established a unified referral pathway to children's social care.
- a Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) screening tool was implemented across all partner agencies.
- over 7,500 professionals received CSE training.
- educational plays raised awareness in schools, and a new approach to addressing missing children was developed.

The tragedy of Operation Bullfinch profoundly shaped safeguarding practices in Oxfordshire. By learning from past failures and implementing robust, multi-agency approaches, we are steadfast in our commitment to play our role in protecting children from harm.

Supplementary question

Will this Council alongside the County colleagues be seeking to be part of local inquiries?

Verbal response

The Councillor said that while the decision would ultimately be for the County, they would support Oxfordshire being considered for review, if the County chose to put it forward. She clarified that this was not a City Council decision.

SB7: From Cllr Muddiman to Cllr Brown – Botley Road**Question**

The prolonged closure of the Botley Road is causing serious financial pressure on businesses in West Oxford and across the whole city. Elderly and vulnerable residents, and those with limited mobility, are cut off from essential services and social opportunities and are incurring increased costs for taxis to attend medical appointments. Urgent plans to reduce carbon emissions and pollution have been delayed. The social, economic and environmental costs to the City as a whole are enormous. Will the Leader consider taking legal action against Network Rail in order to gain compensation for those affected?

Written Response

We can all see the impacts on local communities and businesses and sympathise with their frustration. As I understand it, the delays in the delivery of the much-needed enhancements to Oxford Station, have been caused by a number of issues, most significantly delays linked to agreements needed with Thames Water. However, the City Council is not able to take legal action against Network Rail on behalf of third parties as it has no right to do so. Third parties would need to seek legal advice on their own position.

Supplementary question

Given the lengthy delay to the re-opening of Botley Road announced last week, will the leader of Council consider taking legal action against the Network Rail in the Council's own right?

Verbal response

The Councillor said to reiterate, this is not something the Council can do.

SB8: From Cllr Powell to Cllr Brown – Devolution 1**Question**

In light of the Government's proposals for devolution and local government re-organisation, can the portfolio holder please confirm what actions she will be taking to ensure the views and needs of Oxford City residents are properly represented within any re-organisation of

Written Response

We will want to ensure that the views and needs of Oxford City residents, businesses and other stakeholders are taken into account in any proposals and as we start the process of considering local government reorganisation we will make sure that this is part of our plans.

local government.	
Supplementary question What capacity will there be for cross party working to ensure that the City is properly represented?	Verbal response The Councillor said that she is keen to do cross-party working and wants there to be a cross party approach from this city. The Councillor said she will be looking to further engage with opposition groups on the proposals.

SB9: From Cllr Powell to Cllr Brown – Devolution 2	
Question The letter sent by the Leader of the Council to the Minister of State for Local Government and Devolution makes reference to an expanded City authority. Can the Leader provide any further details about what these expanded boundaries might look like?	Written Response We have not yet had any formal discussions about boundaries. However, it should be clear to everyone that Oxford is tightly bounded with our administrative geography constraining our population size and having ceased to reflect the character of our city decades ago.
No Supplementary Question.	

SB10: From Cllr Powell to Cllr Brown – Oxford Literacy Festival	
Question Oxford plays host to the Oxford Literary Festival. Recently a number of speakers have pulled out of this event citing concerns that there are multiple panels which involve discussion of the rights of transgender and non-binary people but no speakers with lived experience. Given this council's stated support for diversity, inclusion, and the rights of Oxford's trans and non-binary citizens, does the leader have a view on the importance of including trans and non-binary voices in discussions around the rights of trans and non-binary people?	Written Response In my view people's lived experience is always an important factor to take into account in any discussion and anyone putting together panels should be thinking about that.

<p>Supplementary question Does the Councillor share the same view that there is a particular importance that people speak with caution and don't treat real lives as a mere debate?</p>	<p>Verbal response The Councillor said yes.</p>
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Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management; Deputy Leader of the Council

<p>ET1: From Cllr Coyne to Cllr Turner - Ethical Investment Policy</p>	
<p>Question On February 7th, 2024, Cabinet agreed to the Scrutiny Committee's recommendation (concerning the Treasury Management Strategy 2024-25) to review Council investments "in light of the conflict in Israel and Palestine and any associated human rights abuses with a view to assessing alignment with the Council's current Ethical Investment Policy".</p> <p>Cabinet commented: "The Council reviews its investments in line with its Environmental, Social and Governance Policy at the time of making the investment as well as our Ethical Investment Policy. This is updated and subject to review and in the light of the current situation we are happy to confirm that it will be included in our review arrangements."</p> <p>How have these review arrangements progressed, and what specific actions has Council taken to heed the Scrutiny Committee's recommendation regarding the Treasury Management Strategy?</p>	<p>Written Response We have indeed looked at our ESG policy in the light of the awful developments highlighted. In fact, circumstances have changed: Due to the policy of using internal funds to finance capital before taking out more expensive external borrowing, the Council has now reduced the funds available for investment to a level that only allows short term cash-type investments. Investments now held are limited to the pooled funds (property and multi-asset) and money market cash deposits. There is not therefore investment capacity to enter into fixed term investments.</p> <p>We think our current ESG policy and the current circumstances mean local people can be assured that their council tax is not being used in a problematic way</p>

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No Supplementary Question.

ET2: From Cllr Miles to Cllr Turner – Flood Response Costs

Question

What was the cost to the city council of its emergency flood efforts in late November 2024 which resulted in the South site of the Cherwell school being closed to pupils among other impacts. What was the source of council funds used to cover these costs and had they been allocated in the budget for emergency flood response?

Written Response

The cost of flooding in November is estimated at around £30k. This was charged to an earmarked reserve of the Council's which is held for flood related expenses.

Supplementary question

Does the Councillor think that there are sufficient reserves set aside for future unpredictable incidents of flooding and have other financial approaches been explored for this loss and damage?

Verbal response

The Councillor mentioned that they have been advised by the Section 151 Officer regarding the adequacy of reserves, and that this will be included in the officer's one-on-one report. As for alternatives, the type of insurance and the specific product are not cost-effective.

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ET3: From Cllr Smowton to Cllr Turner – Reorganisation and Council Budgets

Question

Can you update the Council regarding the expected budgetary consequences of local government reorganisation? I would hope that since reorganisation is touted as a money-saver, councils would be rewarded with increased budget security; is there any sign from ministers that this will happen?

Written Response

It is too early to say what the financial impact of local government reorganisation will be, as proposals for alternative structures across the country have yet to be tabled. It is my personal view that grand assumptions about cost savings are likely to be misplaced, and that inefficiency can result from having organisations, including councils, that are too big as well as too small. More generally, ministers have told us to expect a multi-year settlement next year – I am not clear about the interface of that with changes to local government structures.

<p>Supplementary question Will this Council make it clear to ministers that any reorganisation will likely cause short-term difficulties that are not quick or inexpensive to resolve, and that an injection of funds will be necessary to ensure the success of any re-organisation?</p>	<p>Verbal response The Councillor stated that the white paper discussed research on this topic, though it was commissioned by the County Council. The Councillor expressed agreement with the concerns raised in the question</p>

ET4: From Cllr Smowton to Cllr Turner – Employers’ National Insurance

<p>Question Can you update Council regarding whether the City expects to be fully compensated for increased employers’ National Insurance costs resulting from the increased rate announced in the 2024 Budget?</p>	<p>The Government have yet to announce the allocations of compensation grant for local authorities in respect of national insurance and do not intend to do so until the Final Local Government Finance Settlement is made sometime between now and the end of January. It is estimated that the council’s share of the £515 million grant announced by the Government in the Provisional Finance Settlement for local authorities to cover this issue, would be around £250k. The Councils estimated cost of increased national insurance is £800k per annum with an additional £600k for ODS. The budget presented to Cabinet in February will be updated to build in the financial impact of this change.</p>
<p>Supplementary question Indication from other Councils suggest that the government have failed to fully cover costs of a national insurance increase. Are we in a position to say it has failed to do so for Oxford?</p>	<p>Verbal response The Councillor stated that he is not aware of the final allocations and that they haven’t been received yet. He said based on current calculations, it is likely that funding will not be sufficient and full funding may not be provided.</p>

ET5: From Cllr Rehman to Cllr Turner – Grandpoint Bridge 1

<p>Question Following from last council, I am seeking clarification</p>	<p>Written Response Discussions have taken place to secure the grant funding that has been</p>
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<p>the original grant funding has expired/lost due to time restrictions as set out previously. With that in mind can you confirm this £10 million bridge will not be funded by council finances subject to the Judicial Review?</p>	<p>allocated for the proposed bridge following the delays resulting from the judicial review process. Once the outcome of the judicial review is known it will be possible to accurately review the costs position on the bridge. Clearly the bridge needs external funding, it is not a cost we would be able to fund from City Council resources.</p>
<p>No Supplementary Question.</p>	

ET6: From Cllr Rehman to Cllr Turner – Grandpoint Bridge 2

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<p>Question Can you clarify the cost of grant funding bids in relation to future bids and can they be justified in light public concern and financial costs already incurred?</p>	<p>Written Response Future funding bids are only likely to involve staff time and we would consider this a good use of our staffing resource. Any other costs would be dependent on the funding and the requirements of the bidding process.</p>
<p>No Supplementary Question.</p>	

Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford; Deputy Leader of the Council

AR1: From Cllr Miles to Cllr Railton – Fines for Vehicles Idling

<p>Question What is the council's approach to managing the enforcement of idling and issuing of fixed penalty notices for such behaviour? How many fixed penalty notices have been issued by the city council for vehicle idling?</p>	<p>Written Response OCC is not the primary enforcer for idling engines. It normally falls to County Council who as has widely been publicised in local press have sent Civil Parking Enforcement Officers to locations where this is highlighted as a concern. A prime example being the coaches parked at St Giles. Even then if they are loading or unloading, they will idle engines as they are actually controlling the climate for the passengers. The City Council does</p>
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	<p>not have any dedicated resources to police traffic or consistently patrol for this.</p> <p>Whilst the City Council may issue an FPN, it has not issued any FPNs. On the few occasions we have assisted due to complaints the drivers have turned their engines off or moved on. They must be warned first and simply turn the engine off. The FPN is currently set at £20 rising to £40 if unpaid in 28 days.</p> <p>It is considered that educational campaigns such as the ones promoted over recent years by the Air Quality Team are more effective in delivering the anti-idling message</p>
No Supplementary Question.	

AR2: From Cllr Miles to Cllr Railton – Grazing on Meadows

22

<p>Question Has the city council considered adopting a similar approach to Port Meadow allowing residents grazing rights (for a small fee or free) for specific types of graziers on other council owned meadows during the spring and summer, rather than paying a contractor for grass cutting of these land assets?</p>	<p>Written Response In addition to Port Meadow, we also use grazing to manage habitats at Chilswell Valley and Raleigh Park, but these are the only obvious sites where it is viable to install the appropriate fencing and take other measures needed to control stock.</p>
No Supplementary Question.	

AR3: From Cllr Rehman to Cllr Railton – Grandpont Bridge 1

<p>Question Trees felled prior to planning permission granted, you</p>	<p>Written Response</p>
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<p>have stated the trees were in a poor condition. Can you share a report on the condition of the trees?</p>	<p>All the trees impacted by the construction of the proposed bridge were subject to a tree survey. This was completed prior to any works to the trees taking place. The survey was submitted with the planning application and can be viewed on the planning application reference 23/02506/CT3, Arboricultural Impact Statement, Appendix B.</p>
<p>No Supplementary Question.</p>	

AR4: From Cllr Rehman to Cllr Railton – Grandpont Bridge 2

23

<p>Question Would you agree any tree is better than no tree and planning decisions should not be pre-empted and when were you aware of the tree felling?</p>	<p>Written Response Trees were removed for the Oxpens bridge before the planning determination to avoid disturbance to nesting birds and to enable the delivery of the bridge within the original programme required by the funding envelope. The bridge has subsequently been delayed by the judicial review process. There is a commitment to replant trees. The biodiversity value of the trees has been assessed as well as the impact on the canopy cover of the trees and proposals included in the development, secured through the planning permission, to ensure biodiversity and tree canopy are increased through the proposals for the bridge. Details can be viewed on the planning application.</p>
<p>Supplementary question With the judicial review ongoing, what happens if the bridge isn't built? Will there be a commitment to restore the trees?</p>	<p>Verbal response The Councillor confirmed that there were commitments made to re-plant regardless of the outcome of the planning decision.</p>

AR5: From Cllr Morris to Cllr Railton – Making Oxford a Truly Walkable City motion

<p>Question</p> <p>At the previous full council meeting we passed the 'Making Oxford a Truly Walkable City' motion, where Council resolved to 1) discuss with officers the designing of a plan for improving walking in Oxford; 2) work with the Cabinet Members for Zero Carbon and Culture and officers to create a walkable map of Oxford; 3) write to the new Transport Minister to urge rapid release of the 2020 pavement parking consultation; and 4) propose the idea of a 'Kerbside Strategy for Oxford' to the County Council. What steps have been taken towards these actions, so far, and is there a timeline for them to be resolved?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>The first two elements of the original motion would require a budget allocation by full council. Until a budget allocation is made progress is likely to be slow on these elements. The council has no dedicated officer resource for transport except where there is project specific funding so even bringing forward a cabinet report exploring the detail of what would be needed to fulfil this motion will be challenging to deliver quickly.</p> <p>I have spoken with the Head of Regeneration and Economy since the motion and she will confirm a timetable to me for bringing forward a short paper about what would be required during 2025. I will also raise with the county council, as highway authority, to see what their role could be in delivering this as part of future phases of the Central Oxfordshire Movement and Place Framework that sites as part of the Central Oxfordshire Travel Plan.</p> <p>In the meantime, we will progress the letter to the Transport Minister regarding the 2020 pavement parking consultation. I will raise the Kerbside Strategy with the County Council at the next regular meeting where we discuss issues affecting the city relating to Transport, Planning and Placemaking. There has not been a meeting of this group yet since the motion was agreed at November Council.</p> <p>In the meantime, I have sought to get some information from the county council relating to the use of Dutch kerbs in new developments but also when dropping existing kerbs, which are important when considering progress to a more walkable city. I will follow this up with the county at the same meeting.</p>
<p>Supplementary question</p> <p>Could the Councillor include Councillor Morris and Councillor Kerr in any responses received from the transport minister and any plans going forward?</p>	<p>Verbal response</p> <p>The Councillor confirmed that she will do that.</p>

Cabinet Member for a Safer Oxford

LA1: From Cllr Powell to Cllr Arshad – Pavement Parking

Question

Pavement Parking continues to cause considerable accessibility issues for residents across our city. Can the portfolio holder undertake to raise this ongoing issue with relevant individuals in both the County Council and the police as a part of her role as Cabinet Member for a Safer Oxford?

Written Response

Thank you for raising this important issue. I will contact the Highways Authority at Oxfordshire County Council regarding this matter. Concerns relating to a specific area can reported to the Highway Authority via the FixMyStreet website.

Supplementary question

Will the Councillor write to Anneliese Dodds and encourage her to ask the Government to take action so there is more power given to address pavement parking issues in Oxford?

Verbal response

The Councillor said that she is happy to do this.

Cabinet Member for a Healthy Oxford

CM1: From Cllr Snowton to Cllr Munkonge – Bury-Knowle Storybook Tree

Question

The sculpture was converted into a climbing log and the fencing removed

<p>On 12th Feb 2024 a plan was announced to reuse the Storybook Tree sculpture as a climbing log in the Bury-Knowle play area. However it has now been waiting behind metal fencing for over a year. Can we please get it moved and the fencing removed?</p>	<p>some time ago. Unfortunately, the log has started to fall apart because of the natural decaying process, though this has been accelerated by the constant wet weather over the last year (there was already significant rot in the dragon's head section before it was felled, which is why it was not re-erected).</p>
<p>No Supplementary Question.</p>	

Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities

<p>LS1: From Cllr Miles to Cllr L Smith – Selective Licensed Properties - Overseas Landlords</p>	
<p>Question What proportion of the properties licensed under the council's selective licensing scheme are owned by overseas based individual landlords?</p>	<p>Written Response Our data analysis is by licence holder not "landlord/owner". A licence is not always issued to the owner. Analysis in October 2024 found 0.656% of Selective Licence holders are overseas. At this time, the data was not further analysed to establish the proportion of overseas licence holders held by individuals or organisations.</p>
<p>Supplementary question Could the Councillor elaborate whether there is feasibility to collect information on who is the owner of properties that are being licensed under the HMO licensing scheme?</p>	<p>Verbal response The Councillor said that she is happy to explore with officers when the scheme is renewed.</p>

<p>LS2: From Cllr Miles to Cllr L Smith – Selective Licensed Properties - Beneficial Ownership</p>	
<p>Question What proportion of the selective licensed properties in our city are owned by companies rather than</p>	<p>Written Response Our data analysis is by licence holder not "landlord/owner". A licence is not always issued to the owner.</p>

<p>individuals? Is proof of residency and beneficial ownership information collected during the selective license process for overseas landlords?</p>	<p>Our current reporting categorises licence holders as “individuals” or “organisations”. “Organisations” includes companies, trusts or other types of legal entity. Individual licence holders are likely to be the owner/landlord. Licences issued to organisations include where the managing agent is the licence holder. Analysis in October 2024 found 2.9% of selective licences are issued to an organisation (87.5% to individual; 9.7% unclean data). For HMO licences, 12.8% HMO licences issued to an organisation (87.2% issued to individual; 0.02% unclean data).</p> <p>As part of the application process, the name and address of all interested parties is required as per the Regulations pertaining to applications. Following Legal Advice requested at the start of the Selective Licensing scheme where the proposed licence holder resides overseas, for both HMO and Selective Licensing, we request a statement for how the property will be managed given the person is overseas. A standard form was developed for this purpose, with legal advice. We do not collect further information.</p>
<p>No Supplementary Question.</p>	

LS3: From Cllr Miles to Cllr L Smith – Overcrowded Properties — Children Sharing Bedrooms

<p>Question What proportion of households on the housing waiting list for the city are living in overcrowded properties (i.e. have children sharing rooms of an age where it is recommended they have separate bedrooms based on age and gender)?</p>	<p>Written Response 26.2% of the 3588 current live housing register applications have received priority as a result of being overcrowded in their current occupation. This includes households where there are more children than rooms available (factoring in who can share by age and gender), but also adults and couples who don't have rooms available.</p>
<p>No Supplementary Question.</p>	

LS4: From Cllr Rehman to Cllr L Smith – HRA 40 Year Business Plan

<p>Question Target of reducing operating costs, over the next 5 years. Given the current maintenance record and costs together with energy targets. Can you explain in detail how council propose to reach efficiency targets by a whopping 5%?</p>	<p>Written Response It is imperative that the Housing Revenue Account demonstrates value for money to its tenants and drives sufficient efficiency to enable it to deliver against its statutory and regulatory requirements e.g. Decent Homes. With its new Asset Management Strategy and 5-year capital programmes, investment work will be delivered in a more holistic and efficient way allowing both ODS and OCC to plan its resources over a longer term which will support a more efficient delivery.</p>
<p>No Supplementary Question.</p>	

<p>LS5: From Cllr Rehman to Cllr L Smith – Council Rents</p>	
<p>Question Council rents are already at their highest and continue to rise, currently set at 1% above CPI which does not include council tax rises. Any additional rise will obviously hurt tenants financially. These rises whatever the amount are no more than stealth taxes sugar coated and really impact the most vulnerable in our City. Does this administration believe it to be fair to financially penalise the neediest in our City and if not why are the Council imposing rise upon rise on council tenants?</p>	<p>Written Response The Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) is currently facing significant additional financial cost in a number of areas including meeting the requirements of the New Housing Regulator and the Governments requirements for decent homes as well as meeting carbon net zero by 2040 and Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of level C by 2030. To be able to fund all this additional work as well as continue to meet its housing priorities of providing additional social dwellings then the council must increase rents by the maximum allowable by the Government which is CPI+1%. At an average weekly rent of £133.68 these social rents are still low in comparison to rents charged by other landlords in the city and it should be noted that 67% of tenants are in receipt of housing benefit or the housing cost element of universal credit.</p>
<p>No Supplementary Question.</p>	

<p>LS6: From Cllr Rehman to Cllr L Smith – Disposal of 10 Properties 1</p>

<p>Question Referring to the HRA 40 Year Business Plan Cabinet report from December 2024, it noted: “increasing capital through the sale of poor performing assets, by reviewing underperforming stock that do not work socially for tenants, or are expensive to maintain and maybe beyond maintainable. Initial indication for disposing up to 10 units/yr from 2025/26 for 10 years “How will they be returned to stock after 10 years, or is that was a typing error?”</p>	<p>Written Response The councillor misunderstands. The suggested action involves disposing of 10 units a year, every year for 10 years. Not disposing of 10 units for 10 years. As part of its asset management work, and HRA Business Plan, OCC will need to develop a policy for the disposal of properties where properties demonstrate unsustainable financial performance i.e. requiring high investment presenting inefficient use of capital resource OR poor customer experience. Examples would be excessive repair issues (eg structural), significant cost linked to energy efficiency (based on archetype).</p>
<p>Supplementary question If the properties designated for proposal are not within the budget, how will the Councillor adjust the budget to account for those properties they planned to sell?</p>	<p>Verbal response The Councillor stated that there are various mitigation strategies in place to ensure the budget remains balanced moving forward.</p>

LS7: From Cllr Rehman to Cllr L Smith – Disposal of 10 Properties 2

<p>Question How can a property be beyond maintaining, bringing these properties to a reasonable standard can the cost really be more expensive than purchasing properties on Barton Park?</p>	<p>Written Response Properties can be beyond maintenance where there are significant structural issues, repair issues based on e.g. post-war archetypes or where the required energy efficiency work to bring up to EPC C are beyond the financial performance of the property and often combined with poor customer experience e.g. damp and mould.</p>
<p>Supplementary question How will the budget be balanced in Barton Park?</p>	<p>Verbal response The Councillor explained that any development or acquisition requires a business plan to be put forward. In such cases, the costs are structured so that the development can be paid off over a period of time. She stated that each acquisition and property identified in the survey needs to be assessed on an individual basis to determine its financial impact.</p>

LS8: From Cllr Rawle to Cllr L Smith – Selective Licensing Scheme**Question**

With more than 11,000 properties now registered under the Selective Licensing Scheme, it is understood that enforcement has become a growing focus for the council. Would the Cabinet member therefore be willing to meet with local housing groups, including tenants unions, to discuss progress in this area and to gather feedback on our approach

Written Response

The Selective Licensing Year 2 report is due to be published Spring 2025 following review at Housing and Homelessness Scrutiny Panel in March 2025. The report will include information on enforcement.

The team use advice, encouragement, and enforcement to achieve the schemes' aims as per the Council's Enforcement Policy.

Yes, I am happy to meet with tenant unions to discuss general matters of policy and operation of our licensing schemes including our approach to enforcement.

No Supplementary Question.

Cabinet Member for Planning

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LU1: From Cllr Goddard to Cllr Upton – Timely Community Infrastructure Levy Payments**Question**

What steps are being taken to ensure that Community Infrastructure Levy payments owed to organisations in Wolvercote ward and elsewhere are in future made promptly in order to avoid months-long waits such as have recently occurred?

Written Response

Payments to neighbourhood groups were unfortunately delayed due to staff turnover. Once this was identified officers reached out to all neighbourhood forums to alert them to the issue and where possible expedite payments. We have recently expanded and recruited into the team, as well as changing our internal processes to ensure there is a centralising of information to avoid this happening again in the future.

Supplementary question

Will one of the changes to the internal process allow local bodies to bypass neighbourhood forums and

Verbal response

The Councillor said that she will talk it over with the Head of Planning.

address this issue more directly with the Council?

LU2: From Cllr Miles to Cllr Upton – Fines for noise nuisance from licensed premises

Question

How many fixed penalty notices have been issued to licensed premises due to noise over the last 12 months?

Written Response

There have been none

No Supplementary Question.

LU3: From Cllr Miles to Cllr Upton – Contractor Parking During Construction

Question

How does the city council ensure that contractors follow the terms of their construction management plan regarding the location of contractor parking around construction sites?

Written Response

This is something that we would expect to be managed by the Local Highways Authority given they are the responsible authority for matters such as contractor parking around construction sites.

Our planning enforcement team would investigate any concerns about a breach of the terms of a construction management plan as and when they were alleged, and we would involve the Local Highways Authority in such investigations.

No Supplementary Question.

LU4: From Cllr Rehman to Cllr Upton – Taxi Extension for Electric Vehicles

Question

After answering a number of queries, it now transpires the decision to extend or not does not lie with the

Written Response

Any decision to remove, retain or amend a licensing policy lies with the

cabinet member thus with the administration. Can you then inform us who is in charge?	General Purposes Licensing Committee.
No Supplementary Question.	

LU5: From Cllr Powell to Cllr Upton – Controlled Parking Zones

Question Several residents in my ward have been in contact to raise concerns about un-permitted cars parking in Controlled Parking Zones during the evenings and early morning, when the chances of coming into contact with enforcement are lower. As a part of her Transport Liaison role, will the responsible member make representations to the County Council regarding the impact of this on Oxford residents?	Written Response As identified in the question, the responsibility for enforcing against unauthorised car parking does sit within the remit of the County Council. I am happy to raise this issue at the next appropriate meeting that I attend. Residents, and city councillors, can also raise their concerns about this directly with County, and I encourage you to do that as well.
No Supplementary Question.	

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LU6: From Cllr Robinson to Cllr Upton – eBikes

Question In light of the recent motion to 'Make Oxford a Truly Walkable City' and the recent BBC Panorama documentary about eBikes, could you detail how you will ensure that Oxfordshire County Council and Thames Valley Police will enforce the safe and legal use of eBikes and eScooters in Oxford City?	Written Response We are a very high performing council, nominated for best council of the year last year, and we do far more than the statutory minimum for our residents, but we cannot perform the jobs of TVP and the County Council too. That said, I have had discussions with the city centre policing team who have devoted a fair bit of resource to this issue - they confiscated more than 40 illegal e-bikes last year and had an education outreach event for delivery riders to explain the law. Many people are not aware that a legal e-bike has a motor that cuts out if you stop pedalling, or if you reach 15mph.
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No Supplementary Question.	
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To: Council

Date: 27 January 2025

Report of: Head of Law and Governance

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 from Julian Le Vay – Support for Motion 16e (Demand compensation from Network Rail for delays in reopening Botley Road)
2. Address from Tom Lewis - Stop Botley West Solar Farm

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

1. Address from Julian Le Vay – Support for Motion 16e (Demand compensation from Network Rail for delays in reopening Botley Road)

I don't need to go into detail, since you've each had my report on the impact on our community of the endless closure of Botley Road. In November 2021 I sat **here** while Network Rail boasted to you that they would close the road only for four days. It's now been closed 625 days [and still no date for reopening].

The report tells our story, at last, through graphic statements by 32 local people. Who are they?

First on those with mobility problems, unable to stagger through the narrow, poorly maintained, overcrowded and often scary *Tunnel of Doom* under the rail bridge. They were suddenly cut off from much their lives, even GPs and hospitals.

Second small businesses, suddenly deprived of most of their customers, pushed into loss or closure or quitting Oxford altogether.

And the local economy, deprived, by my estimate, of around £20m and 100 jobs

And the knock-on impact on Oxford as a whole, with journey times rising by 15-20% according to the managing director of the Oxford Bus Company, as an indirect consequence of the closure of Botley Road

But I want to talk of another loss, the loss of faith in our public institutions. For two years, some of us in West Oxford have suffered exclusion from our own city, unbearable intrusion of works and traffic, including piling work all night 40 metres from peoples' bedrooms, and continuing uncertainty from one week to another, as the institutionally incompetent Network Rail constantly miss their own deadlines and change their plans. And no one has listened to us, no one has cared what is happening to us. Not Network Rail, Kier, Thames Water, British Gas, government, the County Council or, I have to say, this council. No difference whether privatised, or nationalised, or elected. All keen to look the other way and get on with other things. In fact, the only official contact from your council was a guy who came to make quite sure small businesses knew that you would not help them.

You may say your functions as a council are not involved. Certainly, not to the extent that's true of the County Council, which we regard as deeply culpable. But you have had *some* involvement. We asked you, right at the beginning, to set up a joint steering group for the project with Network Rail, the county council and residents, **because** we foresaw how profound the effects would be – no answer.

But the issue is much wider than that. Democracy is in a bad way. In America it may not survive. In this country the Tory party has been ripped up. Labour is in power, but quite extraordinarily unpopular. Scary fringe parties are on the rise. Both this council and the County Council are on the hands of minorities. A recent poll showed one in five young people don't think much of democracy.

And thinking about our experience, why should they? We have been suffering for two years something like an occupation by entities that are both incompetent and arrogant, which are completely unaccountable, yet **we are not heard**. You trumpet great plans for Westgate or Osney Mead - which seem to many of us who live in West Oxford to have nothing to do with us, not to benefit us, we had no real say in them. Your city - not ours. Few voters understand the differences between county and City Council. No one understands how you're funded. Planning is carried on in an occult language and the one thing it *always* excludes is what local people actually want. Now seemingly Oxford will be abolished and wrapped up in a much bigger authority, after hard bargaining between politicians. The only people not to have a voice in this are **the** people.

I tell you, this city hall sometimes feels as remote as Westminster, or Brussels.

So, I think our experience is really a challenge to you, each of you. As our small businesses go under and our disabled and infirm live lives suddenly isolated, I ask you whether it is really acceptable that you do nothing and say nothing in this, our city?

Response from Councillor Susan Brown, Leader and Cabinet Member for Partnership Working

Thank you for your address Mr Le Vay. I too expressed my clear and bitter disappointment to Network Rail on behalf of residents and businesses in West Oxford and Botley who have been so severely impacted by the works. The works have taken too long already, and the further long extension is extremely unwelcome news. A number of us were sceptical about the dates as soon as we knew that they depended on Thames Water's engagement.

I would take issue with your description of the City Couci involvement. We have on a number of occasions offered support which was taken up by a number of local businesses to support them in a practical way, with promotion and we have written in addition to ask for support for business rate relief. And I know that both of your city councillors have made strong representations on behalf of local residents and businesses.

Last year, I asked for the Minister's active involvement and I'm pleased to see that Lord Hendy's intervention has at least provided clarity over a final end date and very importantly a commitment to improvements in access to the west of the station and better stewarding of the pedestrian tunnel, which we'd requested as well as the completion of the new improved pedestrian walkway by the summer.

We mustn't lose sight of the purpose of all this – which is the redevelopment of Oxford Station, that will bring real long-term benefits to the city. Without it, proposals to reopen the Cowley Branch Line to passengers or increase the capacity on East-West rail services will not be feasible. However, I am only too aware that this is of very cold comfort to the many residents and businesses who have been so badly impacted by the road closure.

Now that we have renewed plans and a revised timeline, it is essential that we see real progress in the months ahead to rebuild public confidence in this important infrastructure development. These are points that I emphasised to Network Rail.

2. Address from Tom Lewis - Stop Botley West Solar Farm

Good evening, I am Tom Lewis a member of the Stop Botley West group of volunteers who are all in favour of renewable energy but critical of the unjustifiably large and damaging proposal to build Botley West Solar Farm. I live in Church Hanborough, one of the 15 villages that will be affected by the project.

Just a few facts

- Botley West Solar Farm (BWSF) stretches from Wootton to Botley, and Hanborough to Kidlington, an area the size of Heathrow airport. It will be the largest solar farm in Europe affecting 11,000 homes within 1.5km of the site.
- 75% of the solar farm is to be constructed on the City of Oxford's Greenbelt, which is described by local authorities as "functioning well".
- 36% of the 1400ha is on Best and Most Versatile agricultural land growing National average yields of cereals. This land will be lost to food production for the 42-year life of the project.
- It will involve installing up to 2,200,000 solar panels, ancillary equipment and at least 30km of cable runs, fences, lights and cameras. It will cross beneath The Thames at Eynsham and connect to a new sub-station near Farmoor, before the electricity generated during daylight hours is uploaded to the national grid network and within seconds used throughout the UK, not just Oxfordshire.
- Because BWSF is a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project the planning process is handled by the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) who send their recommendation to the Secretary of State for Energy and Net Zero for final review. No decision is likely before the middle of 2026.

Surveys by both the Stop Botley West and by the developers themselves find that overwhelmingly residents oppose this project. Oxford City Council themselves have made a clear statement that:

“The DCO application will need to provide a strong and robust case for the development of this scale particularly where it will need to demonstrate exceptional circumstances to justify development within the green belt; justify impacts on the setting of a number of heritage assets including Blenheim Palace...” (Ref 1). The Developer has not taken notice of this comment.

The Non-Technical Summary of the Environmental Statement of the DCO states (Ref 2) that:

“There are no significant adverse effects either temporary [or] permanent [effects] on the local landscape character arising from construction and operation of the Project.”

- this is patently untrue.

With regards to Historic Environment the same document states (Ref 3):

“No significant effects in respect of any aspect of the historic environment have been identified within the Environmental Statement (ES).”

Given the size and scale of the BWSF and its location on the hills which are visible for miles and valley slopes of the rivers Glyme, Evenlode and Cherwell, it is simply inconceivable that the impacts of such a scheme can be anything other than significantly adverse. The proposed development will cause lasting damage to the City of Oxford's Greenbelt, impacting both the openness of the landscape and the spatial integrity due to its unprecedented scale. The setting of Blenheim Palace was cited in their own 2017 Management Plan (Ref 2) as being important to the landscape and to the surrounding historic villages. This too has been ignored.

Pluvial flooding is also a serious issue already particularly for the villages of Cassington, Worton, Yarnton and Kidlington. The developers have consistently ignored peer-reviewed scientific evidence that solar panels increase runoff. All the water flowing of this area ends up in the River Thames increasing the risk of flooding downstream.

The Stop Botley West group would like to ask the City Council to address these four questions:

1. Are the Council not concerned that the Developer, in the DCO, has ignored the City Council's request and provided no justification for the development which would still represents a significant adverse impact on the city's Greenbelt, visually and spatially, including Public Rights of Way, and that the proposed mitigation is inadequate?
2. Are the Council not concerned about this project's impacts on the surroundings of Blenheim Palace a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and other local heritage, including the city of Oxford itself and the gateway to the Cotswolds AONB?
3. Will the Council ask for more detail on why alternatives to the current scheme have not been investigated?
4. Have the council explored the full implications of an increase in the risk of flooding associated with the BWSF and its impact both on the City and villages local to the scheme?

At this Pre-Examination stage the City Council has a chance now to submit a Relevant Representation to PINS raising what are significant concerns for the city and surrounding area and I would urge you to do so before the deadline of 27 February 2025.

References

Botley West Solar Farm (BWSF) Environmental Statement PINS Reference: EN010147
Non-Technical Summary Document Ref: EN010147/APP/6.2

1. BWSF Consultation Report Appendix 5.1.10; Section 42 Applicant Responses.
2. Blenheim Palace World Heritage Site revised Management Plan 2017 Appendix 3
3. Non-Technical Summary 6.3.20

Response from Councillor Anna Railton, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Zero-Carbon Oxford

Thank you Mr Lewis for taking the time to address the chamber, and I am pleased that you too are all in favour of renewable energy. This country is desperately in need of more green energy solutions to limit, and eventually remove, our reliance on fossil fuels. Whilst there are inevitably impacts resulting from major applications for solar farms, wind farms and other green energy applications, this must always be balanced with the ever-more pressing climate emergency and the necessity for immediate action.

The application for Botley West Solar Farm sits entirely outside of our boundary. This means we are a neighbouring authority and not a “host authority”, and so are not engaged in the level of challenge and oversight of the application that you seek.

For example, your concerns regarding potential flooding issues in villages in Oxfordshire should be raised by the relevant Local Planning Authority if there is merit in the argument.

It is also worth clarifying that the greenbelt that surrounds Oxford is not controlled by the City, but is in the hands of our neighbouring Councils. They are therefore the relevant Councils to protect it, or indeed to allow much needed development on it. I, along with many other councillors in this chamber would not describe the greenbelt as “functioning well”. The greenbelt was always meant to be regularly reviewed and not strangle necessary housing growth as it does currently.

I would also like to point out that the upstream grid upgrades built with this project would be of great benefit to Oxford.

In response to your questions;

1 & 2 The purpose of our comment regarding green belt was to ensure that the issue was raised and considered. As a neighbouring authority, with no green belt proposed for development, we will review details relevant to the City and submit comment where we believe there is sufficient reason for the Planning Inspectorate to take it into consideration. Something like the setting of a listed building in another Council’s area is not something that the Council intend to comment upon.

3 As the Council is not a host authority it would not be appropriate for us to seek alternative locations. We need both rooftop and groundmount to be able to reach our net zero targets.

4 As mentioned earlier, the host authorities and in this case the Environment Agency are the relevant bodies to assess flooding. I could not find the peer-reviewed evidence about run-off from PV that was not easily mitigated.

We will be submitting a representation to the planning inspectorate on this application but not to object to this scheme.

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