

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

- (1) **Question to the Leader of the Council, Corporate Strategy, Economic Development and Planning (Councillor Bob Price) from Sarah Wild**

Planning Consultation

At the Full Council Feb 3 2014 I asked the following question:

One of the recommendations following the investigation into what happened over Roger Dudman Way is that consultation methods between the council and members of the public should be improved. This would mean that the public had optimal access to planning documents.

So why have the public been denied access to hard copy planning application documents, except for major developments, when the on-line version is unclear?

Following a discussion a decision was taken, and unanimously agreed in Full Council, that this issue would be referred to West Area Planning Committee for investigation.

This decision, agreed by the Full Council, was excluded from the main body of the minutes - and so far no investigation has taken place.

My request is that the Council act on the decision made in February 2014.

Response: This question was submitted and answered at the Council meeting on February 3rd 2014.

Approximately 80% of all planning applications to the City Council are now submitted electronically. The City Council no longer holds a paper copy of all planning applications in the reception area at St Aldate's Chambers ready to be viewed by the public. It is Council policy to encourage customers to access Council information via its website as far as possible.

However, the City Council does not deny access to hard copies of planning application documents. It has been, and remains, willing to make a hard copy of a planning application available on request in reception if a customer makes an appointment to come and view a particular application because the on-line copy is unavailable or unclear.

Furthermore, the City Council will be reviewing its post-application guidance on planning processes in response to one of the recommendations in the Independent Report on Roger Dudman Way.

The matter was referred to the West Area Planning Committee on March 18th 2014, where the committee agreed to add the question of

how consultation processes are managed as an action on the planning services improvement plan, and that progress on the action plan should be reported to the two Area Planning Committees quarterly.

This matter of consultation will be included as part of the review of the Council's planning Statement of Community Involvement, work upon which has just commenced with a view to reporting to committees (both area Planning Committees and City Executive Board) later this year.

(2) Question to the Board Member, Leisure Contract and Community Partnership Grants (Councillor Mike Rowley) from Jane Alexander

Fusion Lifestyle Contract Performance

Paragraph 37 of the Report to Scrutiny Committee entitled "Fusion Lifestyle – Contract Performance 2013/2014" dated 23rd June 2014 shows the customer satisfaction ratings for a number of categories. Can you please tell me whether any payments (bonus, commission, penalty or similar) to Fusion or any member of council staff or a third party organisation depend on the value of these ratings? If so, can you please explain how this works?

Response: Leisure centre usage has grown by 40% over the past five years to nearly 1.3 million visits and we are confident that with the new pool opening that usage will continue to grow.

With this level of usage it is inevitable that on occasions the service standards will fall below our high expectations. In the nature of the partnership, when this happens the council often work with Fusion Lifestyle to ensure that problems are rectified. Service failings do though also results in points which when they accumulate lead to financial penalties.

No bonus or commission has been paid.

(3) Question to the Leader of the Council, Corporate Strategy, Economic Development and Planning (Councillor Bob Price) from Chaka Artwell

A future for Oxford people by 2020

It was really heartening to hear Bob Price, as Chair of the Finance Committee meeting recently, talking positively about creating a future for Oxford people by 2020, in which the Council would help provide a vision and Services for this wonderful City of Oxford.

With this aim of providing a vision and services for Oxford people it has been reported in the Oxford Mail of July 7th, that the Council is in discussions to buy the Gladiator Club. The Gladiator Club is registered as an Asset of Community value. This is a welcomed visionary act by Bob Price's Council and his Executives. Volunteers, for no financial reward, often administer many of our Community organisations.

Occasionally Council assistance may be needed to help these voluntary community organisations.

I also note that a recent City Executive Board agreed a loan of £2.3m at preferential interest rates to Low Carbon Hub, despite the fact that many people of science dispute the theory that Climate Change is manmade. Nevertheless, this is to be welcomed by Oxford people as a visionary act.

Will the Elected Councillors discuss options for similar financial arrangements with Mr Nigel Gibson, as Director of the Community Interest Company (CIC), currently preparing a proposal to take over and operate another Asset of Community Value: Temple Cowley Pools and Gym?

The people of Cowley have seen their Community Centre destroyed and they do not want to see their Pool and Fitness centre destroyed also. Please include Temple Cowley Pools and Gym in your vision for the people of Oxford Mr Price and the Elected Councillors.

Response: The Council's approved Corporate Strategy sets out its vision for Oxford, under the key themes of economic development, housing, leisure, reduction of carbon usage, community development and efficient and effective provision of services. Providing a top class leisure service at an affordable cost to customers and Council Tax payers is one of the key objectives in that Strategy. The decision to replace the old Temple Cowley and Blackbird Leys pools with a new pool linked to, and jointly managed with, the Blackbird Leys Leisure Centre on Pegasus Rd was taken in support of that objective. It will contribute to the reduction in the level of subsidy per visit to indoor leisure facilities to zero, as well as providing a modern, regional competition standard pool that better meets the needs of swimmers.

The Council's financial policies allow investment in externally owned assets that provide a sound commercial rate of return; the examples of the Low Carbon Hub loan to support solar power installations, and the possible purchase of the Gladiators Club are two recent examples. Any future proposals of that type will be assessed against the Council's policy and statutory financial regulations.

(4) Question to the Leader of the Council, Corporate Strategy, Economic Development and Planning (Councillor Bob Price) from Helen Marshall

Housing and scrutiny issues

Given that:

- The Oxford & Oxfordshire City Deal was passed without any public consultation,
- The Spatial Planning & Infrastructure Partnership, whose Executive Board meetings are not subject to public scrutiny,

appears to have agreed a vision for Oxfordshire based on economic growth at all costs,

- And that the unelected Local Enterprise Partnership is now responsible for delivering the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan which, in contrast to previous County Structure Plans, has not gone through Full Council let alone public consultation,

what is the role of democratically elected Oxford City councillors?’

Response: The Oxford and Oxfordshire City Deal was reported to Council earlier this year and the Strategic Economic Plan will come to Council in the autumn as planned.

The City Council adopted an economic development framework in 2012 in the Oxford Strategic Partnership Economic Growth Strategy. This sets out the city’s economic development needs and plans. The City Deal and the Oxfordshire Strategic Economic Plan both reflect the City Council’s policies, and were consequently endorsed by the Council’s representative on the LEP.

The Spatial Planning and Infrastructure Partnership Board, not the Executive, has been responsible for determining the policies of the Partnership, and the minutes of that Board are published. The SPIP Board was comprised of councillor representatives from all the districts and the county, plus the chair of the LEP, with representatives of Government agencies as observers. It was chaired in rotation by one of the Councillors. The functions of the SPIP Board have now been subsumed into the Oxfordshire Growth Board with effect from this month.

The City Council is seeking to ensure that Oxford is a world city class for all its citizens and can realise its potential as a national economic asset. The city contains one of the greatest concentrations of research and knowledge based employment in the world, as well as an outstanding environment. The city is successful in many ways, with a third of all employment in the county, great economic vitality and with a global reputation.

It is also clear from a range of independent studies that for a number of years the city has not been realising its full potential and that there are continuing major issues of low incomes and poor housing. In particular:

- the universities, big science facilities and successful business need space to grow and develop, or investment and economic activity will locate elsewhere in the UK or to other countries.
- The city is the least affordable location for housing in the country; the impacts of the lack of housing and, particularly, of affordable housing are clear at every level. The universities, hospitals and businesses have difficulties attracting and retaining the staff that they require, the exceptional turnover of teaching staff in schools undermines children’s education and

attainment levels, and the pressures of overcrowding and homelessness are increasingly evident.

- According to the University's 'Innovation Engine' report, the lack of effective strategic planning for the wider city economy and housing to support growth has already cost the local economy over £0.5bn in economic activity, as well as contributing to inequalities and social injustice.

This page is intentionally left blank