

Public Questions to the City Executive Board – 9 July 2015

Agenda item 4a: Report of the Scrutiny Inequality Panel – Combatting Inequality: Is Oxford City Council doing all it can to make Oxford a fairer. More equal place?

Sarah Lasenby

I am in full agreement with the aim of trying to make Oxford a more equal City to improve outcomes in Health etc.

Please can you tell me what you will do to rectify the situation in Cowley now that the Temple Cowley Leisure Centre is closed? This has made some people discriminated against in terms of access to exercise including swimming.

I know that there will be gym facilities at the Spires School sometime soon but how can they get to swim for their supported exercise when they can't afford the time or the bus fares to get to the Leys Pool? Have you thought of doing a survey?

[OCC response: Access by public transport, cycling and on foot to the four public swimming facilities across the city is good and the geographical spread ensures that all parts of the city are within a reasonable distance of one of these facilities.](#)

Agenda item 7: Diamond Place Development Brief Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) - Adoption

1. Marianne Moxon - NOA member since 1985

I understand the need for improvements in health care provision and availability of housing in Summertown, but is it necessary to demolish a well-used and perfectly serviceable building?

The NOA building was planned with enormous involvement from the local community. The recent improvements to the building also involved the community and the Annexe was built with NOA funds and donations from NOA members. Is it right for the Council to demolish this building when NOA members are opposed?

If the demolition goes ahead, will the Council compensate NOA for loss of income?

2. Marie Jones - Community and Outreach Researcher, NOA

In light of the failure of the Diamond Place Supplementary Planning Document (July 2015) to identify a permanent replacement for North Oxford Association (NOA), which needs to be established and agreed in consultation with NOA and its stakeholders and subsequently provided by Oxford City Council BEFORE demolition of the current NOA building, would the Board please agree to

postpone approving this Planning Document until the aforementioned provisions have been made, to prevent Oxford City Council from breaching its responsibilities to maintain the economic, social and environmental well-being of its Area (in accordance with the Local Government Act 2007).

3. Margaret Shannon

How can the City Council deem it cost-effective or even sensible to demolish the North Oxford Association Building which is in good condition, well used by the community and into which the NOA members themselves have contributed over £40,000.00 to build the Annex and add gardens outside and in the internal courtyard?

How would the NOA members be compensated if demolition were to go ahead?

If the NOA building were demolished, can City Council guarantee that a new building of the same size in as good a location to serve the Summertown/ North Oxford community and of the same or better quality be built and be usable before demolition of the existing building?

4. Sheila Glazebrook, NOA Trustee and member of NOA for more than 35 years

Why is Oxford City Council considering the demolition of the existing North Oxford Association Community Centre building which is in good condition and which is a much valued local asset? The building and annexe with internal courtyard garden, green space around it and parking facilities (including disabled parking) is very suitable for its purpose. It is much used and needed. It serves a wide range of individuals and groups from the neighbourhood and surrounding areas.

Is the City Council aware that members of the North Oxford Association raised nearly £40,000 to build the Annexe alongside the main community association building and over the years has spent further large sums of its own funds on adapting and improving the building as well as creating an internal courtyard garden? If the building is demolished how will the community be recompensed?

5. Beatrice Lucas - Vice Chairman of NOA

I would like to give the City Council Executive Board some context and history regarding the North Oxford Association Community Centre building in Diamond Place, Summertown , Oxford.

Almost fifty years ago a small group of North Oxford residents raised funds for a swimming pool and Community Centre in Summertown. The swimming pool (now Fusion Leisure Centre) and the North Oxford Association Community Centre have flourished beyond their imaginations. A principle reason for success is the excellent situation of the building, with close proximity to Banbury Road and associated bus transport. Other reasons are nearby disabled parking faciities; open green space

surrounding the building; and the excellent building itself, with purpose built rooms and an annexe. The Community Centre itself has had the support of countless voluntary hours put in by the many members.

It would be a disgrace to demolish such a building and the Community Centre in Diamond Place would be very much missed by many throughout North Oxford and surrounding areas.

6. Richard Moxon MA. FRS. FMedSci. FRCPCH - Member of NOA for 20 years

Why demolish a building that is perfectly functional and was costly to build and recently refurbished? The annexe was constructed using charitable & private donations, a testament to the importance of this centre for the local community.

7. Rodney Stableford

Would the City Executive Board of Oxford City Council refrain from adopting the Diamond Place Supplementary Planning Document of July 2015, to be presented to the Board at the meeting on the 9th July, 2015, because it fails to state that before the existing NOA Community Centre is demolished, a permanent replacement for it will be provided and be available for use, bearing in mind that in refraining from adopting the Document, the City Examination Board may be protecting the Oxford City Council from failing to accept its responsibilities to maintain the economic, social and environmental well-being of its Area, in accordance with the Local Government Act 2000?

8. Jesmond Blumenfeld – NOA member

I am concerned about the practical implications of paras 26, 27 and 28 of the revised Diamond Place SDP. These paras appear to recommend the demolition of the existing community centre, currently occupied and run by the North Oxford Association (NOA), and its replacement by a new "community hub potentially combined with a GP surgery" (para 28). However, no compelling reason is given for this proposal - only the extraordinarily weak claim that "the blank facade of the [existing] leisure centre and the attached single storey community centre do not relate well to the rest of the site" (para 26).

Leaving aside the fact that blank facades can be rendered less blank, the latter part of this claim also cannot be sustained since no one yet knows how the "rest of the site" will be configured. The proposal also flies in the face of the fact that the existing NOA building is of relatively recent construction and is "popular and well used" (para 27), and can well continue to function as a "flexible and modern" community centre for a long time to come.

The immediate effect of these paragraphs has been to throw into confusion and uncertainty the status and future of NOA and its community home. There are surely other less disruptive, more appealing and more practical options for locating a

medical facility - including not only the existing two large local GP practices, but also ancillary activities such as dental, physiotherapy and osteopathy practices, and a pharmacy - on the Diamond Place site without having to destroy the existing community centre.

As they stand, the implications of these three paragraphs are likely to have a significant - and, I submit, wholly unnecessary - undermining effect on the ability of NOA to sustain and develop its operations for the foreseeable future.

OCC response to questions 1 - 8:

The SPD sets out basic principles for future development on the site. It is intended as a baseline against which future planning applications are judged. It sets out a broad framework for development. The block plans suggesting a layout of uses are indicative; other approaches which might be found to be more suitable are not precluded.

Many details will need to be worked out as part of a planning application. This will include feasibility work that may conclude that a new permanent community centre provision on a different part of the site is the best way forward. Options for the community centre will also be informed by the emerging Community Centres Strategy.

The SPD allows for different approaches to the community centre. Fundamentally, the SPD does ensure that the baseline position for the community centre is that any re-provision will at least match existing facilities. Furthermore, following consultation on the draft SPD, a change is proposed to the SPD to make it clear that a facility will be available throughout the construction phase and also that NOA itself will be supported and maintained during this phase.

The reason for producing a development brief as an SPD was to ensure careful development of the site that maximises the many opportunities provided. This includes the potential for a modern, flexible community hub. The SPD does not state that this must happen, but the potential for enhanced facilities that are an integral part of the new development should be explored. At the same time the SPD ensures there is continuous community facility provision during construction and protects the NOA.

The adoption of the SPD would not give rise to a breach of statutory duty.

9. Anthony Williams

Given that the Principals in this matter are Oxford University and Oxford City Council, what good governance safeguards are in place to prevent the kind of egregious planning mistakes that have been made by them in previous applications, particularly in regard to the height and density of buildings on what is now an open space, bearing in mind the mainly domestic architecture which characterises Summertown High St.

OCC response: The SPD gives further detail to the Sites and Housing Policy SP14. It sets out guidance for whoever develops the site, giving a framework for future development that covers aspects such as uses, layout, heights and other design considerations.

All local planning authorities have to discharge their planning functions including the adoption of local development documents such as SPD and the determination of planning applications in line with statutory procedures taking into account all relevant planning considerations. This matter will be dealt with in line with those statutory procedures.

The identity of the landowners/applicants is irrelevant to any application.

The Council's Planning Code of Practice makes explicit reference to planning applications made by the Council. There is no need to put any further governance arrangements in place in relation to this matter.

10. Philippa Rawlings

I am a lipreading Tutor who has a weekly class for three terms of the year in the Library at NOA. I am very concerned that the building may be demolished. The room is very good for lipreading as it is quiet and has a fixed loop which my other venues do not. In case you don't know a loop has a special microphone which takes the sound to the hearing aid if the user has a loop switch and switches to it. This means that when they need to hear me they have all the background noise cut out and they can hear me more clearly. A fixed loop means that I do not have to set up a portable loop which has trailing wires and is not as reliable as a fixed one. This is a very well attended class and is centrally placed so is convenient for people to get to. Please don't just demolish it, you will be removing a very valued centre where a lot of good community work is done.

OCC response: The details of the facility will be discussed and developed with the community as part of the planning application process. Any replacement community centre will provide facilities at least as good as those existing. The facility would also need to be DDA compliant.

11. Maureen Forrest

I am deeply concerned that these proposals will change the character of Summertown, that adequate support facilities are not being provided for the proposed new homes and that existing facilities, in particular the North Oxford Community Centre may be moved.

I should like to make the following points:

- Summertown has no large park and virtually no open green spaces. These areas are essential for exercise, well-being and general recreation.

OCC response: We recognise that Summertown has limited open space so this development seeks to provide a small new open space as part of the development for people to enjoy.

- The Community Centre is a heavily-used, established facility which provides a range of activities for all ages. The consensus view of its members is that it should remain in its present position. The problems caused by moving it would severely disrupt its function. It needs to be left open during the period of redevelopment. Some expansion of its space may be required.
OCC response: see response to questions 1 – 8 above.
- A new development of houses is proposed but little thought seems to have been given to the needs of the people who will live in them. The activities of the Community Centre will play a vital role in helping them to settle in the new environment and a green space/park is essential for all age groups.
OCC response: see response to questions 1 – 8 above.
- Summertown is an expensive area to shop for basic needs: food etc, it lacks the basic facilities eg a post office, a hardware shop. We need these shops but not a new shopping area especially at a time when the existing shops are closing. Has any thought been given to these points.
OCC response: Neither the planning system nor the SPD can force certain types of shops, such as a post office or a hardware shop, to occupy premises. The planning system can only provide premises for businesses who might then choose to locate in Summertown. The SPD will enable some new modern shop premises which is hoped will attract businesses, increase footfall and local spend and in turn might encourage the desired shops to locate here in the future.