

To: Council
Date: 23 September 2015
Title of Report: Public addresses and questions that do not relate to matters for decision.

Introduction

Addresses and questions submitted by members of the public to the Board members, Leader of the Council, by the deadline in the Constitution are listed below in the order they will be taken at the meeting.

Responses to questions are included where available. If responses are not included here, they will be included with the minutes.

The person submitting the address or question can address Council for up to five minutes, keeping to their submitted text. No supplementary questions are allowed.

Addresses in part 2

1. Address by Mr Colin Aldridge, East Oxford Community Centre
2. Address by Mr Nigel Gibson (attached separately)
3. Address by Judith Harley
4. Petition about East Oxford Community Centre to be handed in by Mr Artwell

Question in part 2

5. Question by Mr John Semple

1. Address by Mr Colin Aldridge East Oxford Community Association Trustee to Oxford City Council

I joined the association about two and half years ago. If there was a time to take control of the centre that was it.

The Trustees would ask the Council Officer of the time for help with different things such as metal no smoking signs as others were destroyed by users of the centre. This took months of asking with the end result of stick on signs, which were destroyed again. Before I was there talks were taking place to redecorate the lounge, which were stopped by the Council Officer. The wiring needed checking and putting right this took to about 2 months ago when it was finally done. Another instance was when we asked to put in showers upstairs to have visiting domino teams come to the Centre, which the Council Officer told me at a later date they put a stop to. These are just a snippet of the things that were asked for and refused.

June 2014 we were given a "Notice to Quit" after having a meeting to discuss the future of the Centre only later to find the Press was informed before us. This was notice for a month which after some extensive work we found it to be an illegal notice as in the licence we should have been given a year.

We were then given a correct Notice of a year from the beginning of September 2014. We decided we must start from scratch with EOCA creating a new constitution and going through almost 30 policies, which needed some serious work doing to them. This would form the foundation of EOCA then we could build on this. At the same time (as we did not agree with the consent form) we were then bullied into signing it with threats of going to Court which the Council knew we could not afford as we are a charity and could not justify possibly spending all reserves in this way. We took advice on this matter and was told this was the best we could hope for. While this was going on we were told by a Senior Officer we could not talk to each other as we were in litigation but when a different Trustee contacted the Council there was a conversation on EOCA topics.

We have only recently started talks with council officer again (9 months too late) to address some situations and hopefully talk in the future of EOCA taking control of the management of EOCC again. The one person who has been the most helpful to us has been Councillor Clack who has been to every meeting she could and hopefully will continue. Now some of the things we were asking to be done have magically started work on. This is only some of the grievances I have with the council.

Overall I feel that the East Oxford Community Association has been unfairly treated and misrepresented by a Council determined to take control, despite the way we have clearly run the Centre for the people in an inclusive and financially viable and stable way. I would like the Council to publicly acknowledge the good work that the Community Association has done and what we have achieved despite your lack of support up to this point. And I would like you to listen to what the people are telling you, to work with us to transfer East Oxford Community Centre back into the independent community control and operation through the Community Association that so many of its users in East Oxford want to see.

2. Address by Mr Nigel Gibson (Attached separately)

3. Address by Ms Judith Harley

Councillors, I wish to address you on two separate, but related, issues today.

The first is that Councillors CAN change their minds over local leisure facilities; the second is that there can be a conflict of information given out by Officers and Councillors. I will use the example of Cowley Marsh Park to illustrate these points.

In July the City Council's Cowley Marsh Depot submitted a planning application to expand their premises into the adjacent Cowley Marsh Park, a much-used local facility and protected open space. In the documentation accompanying this application, the applicant stated that they had consulted with the two ward Councillors, Cllrs Malik and Abbasi, who were happy for the Depot to proceed with this application. The Old Temple Cowley Residents' Association publicised this issue, resulting in over 60 letters of objection being lodged with the Planning Department. Subsequent correspondence with Cllr Rowley resulted in a statement from him that he, Cllr Tanner, and Cllrs Malik and Abbasi were all agreed that this application should never have been submitted, and that it would be withdrawn. This illustrates that Cllrs Malik and Abbasi changed their minds, probably due to public pressure. Given that there has been significantly more public pressure over two other local issues, the closure of the Temple Cowley Pools and Fitness Centre, against local wishes, and the management takeover of East Oxford Community Centre, against local wishes, I request that Councillors look again at both of these facilities, listen to public opinion – which is based on fact - and follow the examples of Cllrs Malik and Abbasi and have a change of mind.

Cllr Rowley's statement that the Cowley Marsh Depot Planning Application would be withdrawn was made to me, and to other local residents, several times between mid-August and early September. However, the Planning Department Officers, particularly the case officer Mehdi Rezaie, tell a different story. At the date of writing this, 17th September, this application has still not been withdrawn, but is active and pending, according to the Planning Department's website. A week ago, despite assurances to the contrary from Cllr Rowley, Mr Rezaie told me that the application would be presented to the October East Area Planning Committee, and that he would be writing a report recommending approval. Cllr Rowley's response to me was that, as it was a Council application, the Council would not support the application going ahead. Here, over quite a period of time, we have two conflicting versions of what is happening – one from the Councillors, one from the Officers - with this application. There appear to be parallels to this situation with other local Community facilities – and again I think particularly of the underhand dealings over both East Oxford Community Centre and the Temple Cowley Pools and Fitness Centre. Who is the public to believe when there is a conflict between what the elected representatives – you, the Councillors – say, and what the employees of the City Council – the Officers - say?

Councillors – now that we know that you CAN change your minds, please change your minds over Temple Cowley Pools and Fitness Centre – which is still owned by you, not by Catalyst – and allow those interested in developing the site to include a broad range of Community facilities, including a Pool and Gym, as well as housing, to have the opportunity. Please change your minds over taking over the management of East Oxford Community Centre, and support and assist the Trustees of the East Oxford Community Association to improve their management skills, if necessary, to enable them to continue managing the Centre. This would all be in accord with local wishes.

Also, Councillors – as the Cowley Marsh Depot illustrates, do you know what your Officers are doing and saying on your behalf? Do you know how they are behaving on your behalf? This also applies to dealings between Officers and Tenants at East Oxford Community Centre. How are you going to check that the Officers, your employees, are dealing with the public in a true and honest manner?

4. Petition about East Oxford Community Centre to be handed in by Mr Artwell

Elected Oxford City Councillors, I am here to present a Petition calling for East Oxford Community Centre to be managed by the people of East Oxford, for the people of East Oxford. I am pleased to say that over 1000 people have signed this petition.

We strongly oppose the management take-over by Oxford City Council and the Corporate, money-driven transformation of Tenants' leases. We strongly oppose any plans of Cllr Price and his Labour Colleagues which will utterly destroy, brick by brick, our vibrant and well-run East Oxford Community Centre.

With the support of over 1000 petitioners, a full Council debate to investigate the manner and means of the "take-over" of the management of East Oxford Community Centre against the wishes of the people of Oxford East. Specifically we want an investigation into whether the discussions and actions used by Elected Councillors, Officers and Executives Offers were legitimate, or whether they constituted harassment and duress.

5. Question by Mr John Semple

Sir,

Sunderland Avenue/Northern Gateway Area Action Plan

As a representative of the Wolvercote Action Group, I wish to exercise my right, under Section 11.11. a. of the Constitution of the Oxford City Council, to address the Full Council on Wednesday 23 September, 2015 and ask the following question:

Since the Council stopped monitoring air pollution in Sunderland Avenue and the Woodstock Road at the end of 2012 at a time when, according to the Council's own monitoring data, the NO₂ levels were already in breach of the limits set by Government legislation, could the Council please explain why they stopped monitoring in these areas and confirm what the baseline levels of pollutants will be for the city's Air Quality Management in Sunderland Avenue and in the vicinity of the proposed Northern Gateway development, in accordance with Core Planning Policy 23?

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