

**To:** Council  
**Date:** 23 September 2015  
**Title of Report:** Public addresses and questions that do not relate to matters for decision – as delivered at the meeting

### Introduction

Addresses made by members of the public to the Council, and questions put to the Board members or Leader, registered by the deadline in the Constitution, are summarised below. Any responses given are also summarised. These are not a verbatim transcript.

### Addresses in part 2

1. Address by Mr Colin Aldridge, East Oxford Community Centre
2. Address by Mr Nigel Gibson
3. Address by Judith Harley
4. Address 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 as the association was in an awful state.

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 the association was asking to have the lounge decorated - talks were taking place. Now the Council has taken over this is now taking place. Another instance was when we asked to put in showers upstairs to have visiting domino teams come to the Centre (visiting dominos teams brings lot of money and enjoyment to the centre or would have done) which the Council Officer told me at a later date they put a stop to. These are just a couple of the things which in the time I have been there have been asked for and refused. They have not allowed us to get on with the job of running and association and centre properly.

In June 2014 we were given a "Notice to Quit" after having a meeting to discuss the future of the Centre only later I found the Press were 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 were told this was the best we could hope for. While this was going on I was 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 (2 months too late) to address some issues and hopefully talk of the future of EOCA taking true 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. She has done all that we have asked if not more. Some of these things we were asked to be done have magically been started. 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 public 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. If you take nothing else away from this evening I hope you will look and scrutinise what the Council do.

### **Response by Councillor Simm**

Thank you for coming to talk to us today. It's always valuable to hear your views and I know we have had many conversations around these difficult issues I want to say two things at the start

I want to refute the accusation of bullying as that is a very serious thing to say about somebody, but I also do want to acknowledge the hard work of you and your fellow trustees' and I know you have had the best interests of EOCC in your heart. I do understand that and I do acknowledge that you have worked really hard and that's one of the reasons we wanted you to have a space on the site of the community centre and why we want you to be continue to be involved in this process which we are at the start of. I met the architects for the first time earlier this week, as I wasn't part of their appointment. I was very impressed by them - I looked at some of the work they have done in other cities and I have been very impressed with it. They have a good track record of working closely at the grassroots and with community association and community groups and that was one of the criteria that we were very keen to meet. I know that this evening they are down at the community centre talking to members of the reference group so I hope you will really get involved, tell them what it is you want to see, and encourage other people to do that as well because that is genuinely and

honestly what we want to happen. It is your opportunity to tell the architects what local people would like to see and I hope that you and your colleagues in the Association will continue to be active in East Oxford and will help with the processes of designing a new complex and make that a reality for Oxford. I think when you meet with them and see some of the ideas they have got I hope you and your colleagues will be impressed and that you will stay with us and work with us in partnership.

## **2. Address by Mr Nigel Gibson**

Freedom of Information and FOI requests was brought to mind recently: looking at the consultation review on the leisure strategy, there were only 100 responses to this consultation. This number wasn't questioned as unrepresentative and it brought to mind a FOI I made about consultations earlier this year. During the previous three year period did you know there were 119 consultations with amazingly low numbers of respondents? Two consultations had no responses, 80 had under 100 responses and only three had more than 500 responses. For a population of 150,000, it is to my mind extraordinary that in each case you have accepted such a low level of engagement, interpreted it as suitably representative of views as a whole, and kept going irrespective of feedback. You take little notice of anyone who bothers to engage, you don't report, unless asked, on what difference consultation has made. When I asked for the effect of these consultations I was told that you don't hold this information, and you weren't prepared to find it that because of the officer time it would take to check.

The recent consultation on your Leisure Strategy is an exemplar of how you show zero interest in properly listening to the public, and how you show no concern at the extremely low level of engagement with the public. In this consultation, just over 100 members of the public bothered to respond, and only one school was in direct contact, And you consider that level of engagement appropriate to support how you will affect people's quality of life and level of health over the next five years. According to your document, you provide a world class leisure service. I would remind you that one of your policies is that people should have access to leisure facilities mostly walking or cycling. As an appendix in the Leisure strategy there were maps showing access to swimming pools within 20 minutes' walk. Some interesting supporting evidence is provided. This is the result of an 'expert' system from Sport England. On these maps, you will see a pink area in North Oxford; this shows, apparently, that people living there are within a 20 minute walk of five swimming pools. Whilst technically correct, only one of those, Ferry, provides any sort of public access, and that is increasingly limited by classes and provision to the Swimming Club. No-one I've spoken to recognises the view that you are using to support your strategy, and nowhere in the strategy development do you comment on how wrong this interpretation is.

And down here in the East, or South, we have a finding that you have conveniently ignored for over five years. You can see an area coloured in blue, which shows where people have to walk more than 20 minutes to get to a swimming pool.

Our proposal to take over Temple Cowley Pools under a Community Asset Transfer also had an appendix with a map very much like this, although it was much, much closer to reality in that we focused on public health and fitness provision. And we highlighted, shown on our map, the people you were abandoning through the closure to a lower quality of life and lower health outcomes. Yes, it was a Blue Hole – maps pretty much to your independent research validating your strategy doesn't it? Of course, you have now invested £500,000 of our money in a part-time gym at Spires Academy, and you are trumpeting this as being adequate health and fitness provision in the area; well, you can't swim in a gym. And there are many people across all sorts of demographics

for whom swimming is the best, or the only, way they can exercise. Always good to have our research validated by your independent research.

The Ears theme you see in the public gallery this evening was devised by several campaign groups across the city, all frustrated at your arrogant attitude towards the public, where you simply tell us what you are going to do without listening properly to what services we want and need, where we want and need them. These groups felt that if you were presented with some additional ears you might listen more, and more attentively, to the people you are here to represent and deliver services to.

So, this evening I offer you the Blue Hole challenge – are you prepared to fill the void left by your decision to close Temple Cowley Pools, listen to and talk with the people of Oxford who are still ready, willing and able to take over the site, and bring it back into use at no cost to the Council? I await your reply.

### **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 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 the 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 tell a different story. On Monday this week this application was still not withdrawn despite assurance to the contrary from Councillor Rowley but active and pending. Today Planning confirmed that it was on hold but could be presented to a November Planning Committee with a report recommending approval. Here over quite a period of time we have two conflicting versions of what is happening with this application one from Councillors one from Officers – There are 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?

#### **Response by Councillor Rowley**

I can confirm the application will be withdrawn.

It is not appropriate to criticize officers: restrict your comments to Councillors and the policy they pursue.

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

For the last six weeks we have been collecting signatures from the people of East Oxford. They have been pleased to sign our petition because they are so upset you have taken over the management of East Oxford Community Centre. We have almost 1000 and when we get the right number we will present it before you for a full debate.

When we present our petition we want you to look at how Labour has managed this and we want you to know the people of East Oxford do not support Labour and their plan to destroy our community centre.

#### **Response from Councillor Simm**

This is a misrepresentation of what we are trying to do. We are not destroying but restoring it to what it should be for the people – it is not our aim to destroy it but to maintain it for the people of East Oxford.

## 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 NO<sub>2</sub> 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?

### **Response by Councillor Tanner**

Thank you for this

We removed the diffusion tubes because NO<sub>x</sub> levels were just above 40 PPM, just above legal limits, because we wanted our efforts focused on the areas with higher levels which needed it more – so we concentrated on those areas. When Sunderland Avenue resident contacted us we replaced the tubes. I don't have immediately to hand the results for 2015 as these have been delayed. They will be published by December and Mr Semple and Wolvercote Action Group will be able to see these. This will become the baseline to judge the air quality as a result of the housing development in the northern gateway. As soon as information is publically available it will be made available to the group.