

**To:** Council

**Date:** 5 December 2016

**Title of Report:** Questions on Notice from members of Council and responses from the Board Members and Leader, republished after the meeting to include supplementary questions and responses.

## **Introduction**

1. Questions submitted by members of Council to the Board members, Leader of the Council, by the deadline in the Constitution are listed below in the order they were taken at the meeting.
2. Responses are included.
3. Questioners can ask one supplementary question of the councillor answering the original question.
4. This report is republished as part of the minutes pack after the Council meeting and includes supplementary questions and responses asked and given at the meeting.
5. Unfamiliar terms not explained in the text are briefly explained in footnotes.

## **Questions and responses**

### **Board member for Community Safety**

#### **1. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Sinclair**

Could the Board Member advise what positive alternatives to the Waterways PSPO (Public Spaces Protection Order) are being explored e.g. the setting up of a working group to include the Environment Agency, Canal and River Trust, city officers, waterways users and land-based residents to discuss solutions to problems as they're identified?

#### **Response**

The consultation process has raised many issues and concerns from waterways users and landowners as well as options to tackle them. I shall be drawing these together in a report to the City Executive Board in the New Year. I believe that a sensible way forward would be to instigate a working group to take some of these issues forward, recognising that safety on and by the water will be an important element.

#### **Supplementary question**

There are several groups of boaters and vulnerable adults and homeless who have yet to be engaged in the process.

### **Response**

The Council has an inclusive approach to consultation.

## **2. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Sinclair**

I hugely welcome the council's work to re-engage with Oxford's boating community, but does Councillor Sinclair accept that with the Waterways PSPO draft as it stands, the boaters are right to feel concerned their way of life is under threat if they remain in Oxford?

### **Response**

It was always the intention of the consultation was always to listen to and consider our communities' views not to threaten their way of life. The engagement exercise has raised a number of issues and options. I shall be drawing these together with officers with a view to a report to the City Executive Board in the New Year.

### **Supplementary question**

The next report to the City Executive Board will be an opportunity for the Council to redefine its historically difficult relationship with the waterways community.

### **Response**

The Council wishes to engage with all interested parties.

## **Board member for Culture and Communities**

## **3. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Simm**

The Administration has now disclosed its preferred option for the East Oxford Community Centre – to dispose of the Film Oxford and East Oxford Games Hall sites and sell-off the rear of the East Oxford Community Centre site (which includes the Chinese Community Centre, B block and the land enclosed by these buildings). During the recent consultation, residents were led to believe that the stated aim is to relocate users to upgraded community facilities on the remaining Princes Street site. Can the portfolio holder please tell me the floor area of the community facilities that will be lost and how this compares with the additional floor area that will be created at the Princes Street site as this information was not made available during the consultation?

### **Response**

A comprehensive consultation process was undertaken to help to inform the next steps of the project.

148 questionnaires were completed, over 100 individuals attended the exhibitions and the online adverts were viewed over 670,000 times.

The results were shared and discussed with the East Oxford reference group made up of key community users and stakeholders.

60% of the respondents to the consultation were in favour of combining facilities onto the community centre site.

The main loss of space will be the East Oxford Games Hall which is in very poor condition. We are confident we can relocate the bookings from the games hall in the community centre and relocate the badminton players at schools and colleges.

The advice centre is also a large building and part of the ground floor is condemned.

The total space for the games hall, Film Oxford and the non-condemned part of the advice centre is 2,033 m<sup>2</sup>. The proposed new facility would be 1,135m<sup>2</sup>.

The concept is to take poor quality, high cost spaces that are not as well used as they should be and create a well-used sustainable community hub.

#### **Supplementary question**

What does the 2033m<sup>2</sup> cover – does it include B block and the office – could a plan showing the different sections included in this be provided along with the floor areas?

#### **Response**

**A written response will be provided.**

#### **4. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Simm**

Will the Portfolio Holder agree with me that disposing of community sites is not ideal at a time when Government policy is creating a greater demand for such facilities?

#### **Response**

The plan is to create a well-used, sustainable facility that is used by the whole community. The challenging financial environment means we must find innovative solutions if we are to protect valuable community facilities.

#### **Supplementary question**

Do you agree that this is a short-term solution and the Council should look at innovative options to create a long-term income generating solution?

#### **Response**

Given the scale of the proposed investment this is not a short term option. Although the formal consultation has closed we continue to explore ideas and options for the future of the centre.

#### **5. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Simm**

Will the Portfolio Holder agree to continue to look at other sources of funding for the East Oxford community Centre improvements thereby avoiding the need to dispose of community sites?

#### **Response**

We are open to all ideas to source funding, although we need to be realistic about the level of funding we may be able to obtain.

#### **Supplementary question**

What funding has been applied for and what work has been done to look at income generation?

#### **Response**

We are still at the initial discussion stage and there are as yet no details of funding sources to share.

## Board Member for Customer and Corporate Services

### 6. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Brown

How many households in Oxford have been affected by the recently introduced cap on Universal Credit?

Of these, how many of them are currently eligible to receive Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) from Oxford City Council?

#### **Response**

On 7 November the government lowered the Benefit Cap for households who had already been affected by the previous benefit cap. The new lower limit is £20,000. So far this has affected 48 households in the city.

The DWP (Department for Works and Pensions) are in the process of rolling out this new lower cap to new customers on an area by area basis. It is expected that new cases in Oxford will be capped from 12 December. At the moment we expect 275 households to be capped in this process.

These figures do change all the time, as people's circumstances change. The Welfare Reform Team have been proactively contacting people about the lower Benefit Cap over the last year. Work that the team has undertaken with people who might be affected has resulted in 55 people moving into work and 54 obtaining a valid exemption such as a disability benefit which means that they will avoid the lower Benefit Cap.

Any household affected by the Benefit Cap is invited to apply for a Discretionary Housing Payment. The Council's DHP policy clearly sets out the short term nature of the awards and the need for them to be transitional in the vast majority of cases. Therefore, for anyone to receive a Discretionary Housing Payment, they need to show that they are making progress to some means by which they will not need this support in the future.

The Welfare Reform Team supports people to make these changes, but sometimes that support is turned down by the customer, and in those cases, financial assistance will not be provided.

#### **Supplementary question**

Can you give a guarantee that the DHP will be fully disbursed by the end of the financial year?

#### **Response**

I cannot give any guarantee as it will depend on the number of valid applications that we receive. However, it is likely to be oversubscribed.

## Board member for Housing

### 7. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Rowley

Could the Portfolio Holder please update me on the plans for Lucy Faithful House?

Could the Portfolio Holder please update me on negotiations with the County and Districts following the announcement that Julian Housing and Simon House will close with the result that beds for the homeless will be more than halved?

## **Response**

The City Council are exploring options to return the leasehold interest of Lucy Faithful House back to the Council, to ensure the more productive use of this site as permanent housing. The funding envelope for this will be included in the 2017/18 consultation budget proposals.

The City Council, County Council and OCCG (Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group) have agreed the joint commissioning of some adult homeless pathway services for three years, with the city and district councils securing additional funding to help mitigate the £1.5m County Council cuts to this area. This secures approximately 141 bed spaces from 285 currently in the pathway (a loss of about 144 bed spaces by April 2019), as set out in the report to the CEB (City Executive Board) in September 2016. This was the maximum level of provision that the new allocated funds could secure.

Officers at the City Council are entering into discussions with providers - Oxford Homeless Pathways regarding Julian Housing, and A2Dominion in relation to Simon House - with a view to commissioning some additional supported bed provision, for homeless clients with a local connection to Oxford City, from June 2017 and April 2018 respectively. This will not equate to the beds lost, as only about 50% of pathway beds are presently used by clients connected to Oxford City, but should meet the essential needs identified. Officers expect to bring a report to CEB in relation to the commissioning plans for the £1.4m Oxford City Council spends each year on these services, in Feb/March 2017, as part of the budget process.

This Council will maintain 100% of our funds to support local homeless people, and we are grateful to our partners for their help and co-operation in planning to keep vital services going. However, the general funding situation for homelessness prevention and services is very bad and the responsibility for this lies ultimately at national level. Combined with soaring rents, benefit cuts, and the lowest social home building numbers on record, we as a nation are failing in our duty to the most vulnerable among us.

## **Supplementary question**

In the medium term can we provide permanent housing to alleviate the housing shortage?

## **Response**

Provision must be considered in the context of hugely reduced funding. We are working with other providers to provide as good a service as we can.

## **8. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Rowley**

At its meeting of 21 July 2014 the West Area Planning Committee approved an application from the council for 17 residential units, all to be used for social housing, on the Elsfield Hall site, 15-17 Elsfield Way (ref 13/03454). Work does not appear to have begun. Could the councillor give an update on this relatively modest but still important contribution to Oxford's affordable housing need?

## **Response**

This site was being progressed for development for social housing using funding from the Council's Housing Revenue account. Government policy changes with regard to rent reductions and the sale of high value voids to pay for the costs of the right to buy for housing association tenants significantly reduced resources for investment in new

housing. This very regretfully has delayed this particular development. However in order to bring forward this and other sites the Council has now established our own housing company and we intend to include the necessary funding for loans to the company within the Council's draft budget so that the much needed affordable housing can be delivered as soon as possible.

## **Board member for Leisure, Parks and Sport**

### **9. From Councillor Goff to Councillor Smith**

Does the Councillor agree that it's high time the Five Mile Drive play area should be refurbished?

#### **Response**

The Five Mile Drive play areas is planned to be refurbished within financial year 2017/18 and officers will be talking to local councillors and stakeholders to help shape these proposals.

#### **Supplementary question**

Will toilet facilities be available nearby?

#### **Response**

We are in discussion with the local community to ensure that we deliver a facility that takes account of their views.

### **10. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Smith**

Cllr Smith and officers kindly joined Cllr Fooks and me on a visit to Alexandra Courts (or Park) in Summertown. A plan was discussed with officers to relocate some of the fencing around the grassed area in order to bring some of it into open use, as an initial stage in an ongoing consideration of the best use of the entire site. Timing for this initial stage would be determined by officer's work schedules, estimated around the end of this calendar year. Could the councillor give an update on progress and timings for this work?

#### **Response**

Feasibility work has been completed regarding improvements to Alexandra Park including removal of some fencing to create open space. We are currently finalising the project and cost plans with work expected to begin by our internal Direct Services in the new year.

#### **Supplementary question**

Can you give a more precise date for the work to commence?

#### **Response**

No – but can assure Cllr Gant it will be in the new year.

**11. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Hollingsworth**

The other day I saw a ‘burger van’ parked up near Bonn Square running a noisy and polluting generator to provide power. Right next to them was pitched a stall which had been given access to City Council electricity sockets to provide clean, silent power. Will the portfolio holder agree to look at the possibility of providing more concessions with access to existing power sockets to avoid the need to run generators as well as looking at what else can be done to stop the use of generators in the City Centre?

**Response**

There are a small number of fixed power supplies for street traders in the city which were privately installed and managed. The only supply under the Council’s control is at Bonn Square; this is managed by the Events Team who allow event traders to use the supply.

As the councillor is aware, the City Council is developing a network of electric vehicle charging points, and it is technically feasible for these to be made available to street traders as a source of electricity. Unfortunately many street trading pitches are in places that are not likely to be suitable for charging points. Where it is possible to site a charging point the Council will try to do so, but in many or indeed most instances it will not be possible.

Unfortunately, in the absence of a fixed power supply, the use of generators by mobile units is unavoidable. The impact of generators used for small scale short term supplies is insignificant in the scale of air quality and carbon emissions in the city; the Council has used and will continue to use appropriate environmental health powers to address noise disturbance from generators.

**Supplementary question**

Is there more that could be done to reduce the number of generators in the City Centre?

**Response**

The Council will continue to install power supplies where it is appropriate to do so at a reasonable cost.

**12. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Hollingsworth**

Can the member categorically reassure inhabitants of my ward that the Northern Gateway proposal still envisages only the overblown number of 500 new dwellings on the green belt, and not the catastrophic number of 800+?

**Response**

The Councillor can be reassured that the Development Plan policies for the site are those set out in the Northern Gateway AAP, policy NG2: Mix of uses “Planning permission will be granted at the Northern Gateway for: up to 90,000m<sup>2</sup> (gross internal area) of employment development; and up to 500 new homes; and a range of local scale retail uses (up to a total of 2,500m<sup>2</sup> gross internal area); and a hotel with associated leisure facilities (up to 180 bedrooms)”

### **Supplementary question**

Where did the 800+ figure come from?

### **Response**

I don't know where it originated.

### **13. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Hollingsworth**

Can the Board Member advise whether the new draft Local Plan will include a mechanism for identifying sites e.g. the C.S.Lewis Nature Reserve in Risinghurst, which are outside the City's conservation areas but are nonetheless of special importance to the City's cultural heritage?

### **Response**

There is a mechanism in the NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework) which allows sites of local heritage value to be considered as part of the determination process of a planning application. As the Councillor will know all applications are weighed against the policies of the NPPF as well as the local development plan and other material considerations. Any policy considered for inclusion in the emerging Local Plan must add to, rather than simply restate, the policies in the NPPF.

The site in question is a subject to live planning applications, so it is inappropriate to comment further on the specifics of the case.

### **Supplementary question**

With reference to the Heritage Asset Register, can we be sure to include all relevant Oxford buildings and locations?

### **Response**

I intend to speak to officers regarding a "refresh" of the current Heritage Asset Register.

### **14. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Hollingsworth**

It was reported in the Oxford Mail on November 24 that health bosses have no plans to add to the number of visitor spaces at the JR, even though Stagecoach has indicated that cars waiting to park are holding up bus services by 30 minutes. There may soon be further delays while the County Council starts work on the Headley Way roundabout entrance as part of its Access to Headington scheme. To what extent does the Board Member believe that this issue can be addressed in the emerging local plan?

### **Response**

Current Local Plan policy SP23 governs the John Radcliffe site; that policy requires the Trust to "minimise car parking spaces on site", a policy designed to reduce the impact of traffic congestion on Headington and Marston. It is up to the Hospital Trust to properly manage the limited number of spaces on site to ensure that visitors can access the spaces that they need, when they need them, something that can be achieved with better staff parking permit management – which was implemented this summer by the Trust – and other improvements.

The emerging Local Plan will certainly have specific policies for the major hospital sites in Headington, and these developed alongside the masterplanning process currently being undertaken by AECOM on behalf of the Trust. I look forward with interest to the publication of the Trust's plans, and to working with them to plan for reductions in the traffic and better and more efficient public transport, cycling and pedestrian options for staff and visitors alike.



### **Supplementary question**

Would the Board member comment on the suggestion that the Hospital Trust could promote car parking at the Park and Ride by offering a free shuttle bus service to health workers?

### **Response**

That is a matter for the Hospital Trust. But we acknowledge that parking represents a serious challenge for the Trust.

### **15. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Hollingsworth**

Network Rail remain in breach of an important planning condition set in June 2015: Condition 2 of the Council's agreement to their application 15/00956/CND, requiring submission of proposals for the use of Tata SilentTrack rail dampers in Section H (Wolvercote); given that Network Rail have completed the development of East West Rail Phase 1, and have announced that train services are about to begin, what action is the Council taking to enforce the condition?

### **Response**

An Advice Note to Members issued on 28.11.16 and posted on the Council's "Railway Developments" web pages included a question and answer expressed in legal language which relates to this question:

*Paragraph 3. OCC position on the possibility of taking enforcement action in view of the commencement of rail services between Oxford Parkway and Oxford Station prior to determination of the current planning applications*

*As a matter of planning law, enforcement action is discretionary (e.g. section 172 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990). The Secretary of State's policy requires Councils to act proportionately in responding to breaches of planning control (paragraph 207, National Planning Policy Framework). A breach of planning control does not trigger enforcement action as a matter of course. There is a clear requirement to consider enforcement action on its merits and whether this is proportionate, in the public interest and appropriate in the circumstances. Please see for example the Secretary of State's Planning Practice Guidance (Paragraph: 011 Reference ID: 17b-011-20140306) stating, "[n]othing in this guidance should be taken as condoning a wilful breach of planning law. Enforcement action should, however, be proportionate to the breach of planning control to which it relates and taken when it is expedient to do so. Where the balance of public interest lies will vary from case to case...".*

*In the case of EWRP1, if train services commence a breach of planning control will have occurred. However, in view of the current planning applications (see note 2 above) and the additional information recently provided by Network Rail in support, which the Council is evaluating, members are advised that it would not be expedient to take enforcement action at this time.*

This is a very difficult position, and I personally and this Council as a whole have great sympathy for the position that local residents have been put in through no fault of their own. It is clear that undertakings made by both ministers and Network Rail have not been delivered on; the City Council has been left to try to make good these shortcomings. While the legal advice above makes clear that enforcement action to prevent the running of trains on the new tracks would fail the test of prematurity, the

City Council has and will continue to put as much moral and legal pressure as possible on all those responsible for this situation.

**Supplementary question**

Given the wording of the planning condition Condition 2 15/00956/CND, is Network Rail not already in breach of this? What actions have been taken or are possible to pursue this as a solution?

**Response**

**I will arrange for a written response.**

**16. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Hollingsworth**

Network Rail has delayed testing Tata Silent Track in Sections H and I-1 of the Oxford line despite assurances that it would do so as far back as 2013. The likely damage in Section I-1 to the amenity of St Philip & St James primary school, the track-side housing estates, Port Meadow and the Trap Grounds, can only be ameliorated if Network Rail test and invest in the promised mitigation measures. Network Rail now says it is not going to proceed with tests but still expects Oxford City Council to approve the inadequate work it has done and remove the planning condition forthwith. Could the Board Member confirm that the condition will not be treated as satisfied until Silent Track has been tested here and if, as we expect, it is found to mitigate vibration, has been fitted to the I-1 section of the track?

**Response**

Yes the condition is not currently satisfied.

For clarification SilentTrack is the trade name for a rail damping product which is intended to reduce noise from the wheels of trains passing along the track; it is not a vibration mitigation measure. Rail damping is one of three potential mitigation methods referred to in the deemed planning permission which this Council has been given the responsibility to discharge. Network Rail's argument is that, in its opinion, SilentTrack is not reasonably practicable for use in Oxford. On 13 September the West Area Planning Committee decision effectively rejected this claim by Network Rail. The recent re-submission of Noise Schemes of Assessment for Sections H and I-1 present new information which officers will be reporting to the Committee on. As such the issue is subject to a live planning application which will be decided in due course in the usual way.

**Supplementary question**

What is the new information and if Silent Track is not suitable can another product be considered?

**Response**

This is a matter for consideration as part of the active planning application.

**17. From Councillor Goff to Councillor Hollingsworth**

In the application for the Seacourt Park and Ride extension, policy CS2 about development in the flood plain is not mentioned. Why was this the case, as it seems a very pertinent Core Strategy policy?

**Response**

*The paragraph in Policy CS2 on development in the flood plain.* relates specifically to sites allocated for development in the Sites and Housing Plan or some other part of the

Local Plan suite of documents. The site in question has no allocation and therefore CS2 does not apply. The relevant Core Strategy policy is CS11 on flooding, which the application refers to explicitly. The Planning Statement quotes from the policy noting that “planning permission will not be granted for any development in the functional flood plain (Flood Zone 3b) except water-compatible uses and *essential infrastructure*” (my emphasis). The application is based on the premise that the provision of Park & Ride services as part of the transport system of the city is essential infrastructure, and is thus in compliance with policy CS11.

#### **Supplementary question**

Can this be justified as “essential infrastructure” in view of the County Council long term plans to reduce traffic in the city?

#### **Response**

The opening sentence of the written response should read as follows: **The paragraph in Policy CS2 on development in the flood plain** (as shown in the amended text of the response above). This is a matter for consideration as part of the active planning application.

#### **18. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Hollingsworth**

The presence of badger setts on the site for the proposed extension to Seacourt P&R may make development difficult if not impossible. Was the site surveyed to ascertain where any badger setts are located, as it is known that there are many badgers in the area?

#### **Response**

Yes. Chapter 8 of the application explains in considerable detail the processes followed, and has maps showing badger survey areas (figure 8.5). Paragraphs 8.77 to 8.80 contain precise details of the findings of the series of surveys carried out.

#### **Supplementary question**

Will independent data and evidence be taken into account?

#### **Response**

Yes – all relevant information will be considered.

#### **19. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Hollingsworth**

The application for an extension to Seacourt Park and Ride car park is known to be liable to flooding. The application describes emergency evacuation procedures. Can you explain how these would allow a driver who has caught the train to London for the day to retrieve their car safely, if it is in possibly over a meter of water?

#### **Response**

The purpose of the emergency evacuation procedures are to ensure that there is no risk to life, to safety of individuals, and as limited risk as possible to property, including cars. As recent floods in Bristol show, sometimes it is not possible for all cars to be retrieved from rising flood waters. In the unlikely event of an entirely unpredicted 1 metre rise in floodwater in the Thames floodplain at Oxford during a single working day it might not be possible for every car owner to retrieve their car safely from Seacourt Park and Ride or elsewhere. The primary concern of staff and the emergency services would be the prevention of loss of life, and would instruct any such car owner accordingly.

## **20. From Councillor Fooks to Councillor Hollingsworth**

Two firms of consultants were commissioned by the City Council to advise on the planning application for an extension to the Seacourt Park and Ride car park, Turley and WYG. Could Council be told how much these consultants were paid for their work?

### **Response**

The level of professional fees to progress this project to a robust planning application and outline costing are as follows: WYG - £156,599; Turley - £97,616.

## **21. From Councillor Landell Mills to Councillor Hollingsworth**

Could the Board Member advise how the City plans to deal with the shortage of cycle parking in the city centre and whether the City can replace some of the car parking spaces in St Giles and Broad Street with additional cycle stands.

### **Response**

Cycle parking throughout the city centre is in short supply, and needs to be increased. However the capacity to do so is limited by the limited availability of space. To remove car parking spaces from Broad Street and replace some with cycle parking as part of a comprehensive public realm scheme is something I would support, but it does involve the agreement of the County Council as the Highways Authority in order to happen. The council intends to pick the issue of areas where public realm improvements are needed through the new local plan. In the meantime the City Council has been work with ParkThatBike to provide more cycle parking; projects that will provide 80 new spaces, with a further 64 in the pipeline, have been delivered through them.

### **Supplementary question**

How is the total demand for cycle parking in the city assessed and what is the total number of spaces in the city centre?

### **Response**

**I will arrange for a written response.**

## **22. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Hollingsworth**

As the days get shorter, is there anything more that the City Council can do to encourage cyclists to use lights and otherwise make themselves more visible at night?

### **Response**

The City Council continues to encourage cyclists to use lights to make themselves visible – and when they do use new ultra bright lights to make sure that they dip them so they don't dazzle other road users and pedestrians – and to wear reflective or light clothing. The City Council supports the campaigns by Thames Valley Police to stop cyclists without lights and issue them with fines and/or advice as appropriate. The City Council also supports the efforts by both Universities' Student Unions to encourage their members to buy and use proper lights and clothing.

### **23. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Hollingsworth**

The council's licensing scheme for HMOs (houses in multiple occupation) has resulted in an increase in the number of HMOs known to the council. Is any data available about how many of these are actually new HMOs, and how many were already HMOs and have been newly-registered?

#### **Response**

The original estimate in the number of HMOs was based on an analysis of the 2011 Census, and was around 5000. Since then the Council has licensed 3600 HMOs. Since the implementation of the scheme the team responsible have used the original Census records, the electoral register and other data to identify houses which may be HMOs. With this continual refreshing of the original data set it is not possible to separate the number of HMOs into those that existed at the implementation of the original scheme and those which have become HMOs during the scheme's lifetime.

However as the scheme has matured, and numbers have become more stable, it is possible to make reasonable estimates of numbers in each a category over a shorter time span. Since January 2016 the team has licensed 142 newly created HMOs, while the enforcement team has identified 109 properties which were operating as HMOs but without a licence.

The evidence seems to suggest that there are now a limited number of unidentified HMOs remaining – and that the original estimate of 5000 might have been a slight over-estimate - although it is important to bear in mind that new properties will move into as well as fall out of the HMO licensing scheme all the time.

For the first five years of the scheme the focus has been on identifying and licensing properties; as the scheme moves into this new mature phase, the emphasis will shift towards quality and compliance. The main measure of success up to now has been the percentage of an estimated total number of HMOs licensed; it will still be important to measure that percentage, but moving forward we will also start to judge success by increasing the proportion of properties that comply with the required standards at the point of licensing or renewal, just as with our highly successful food standards scheme.

### **24. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Hollingsworth**

Has the council received any representations that the HMO (houses in multiple occupation) licensing scheme might impose unwelcome administrative and financial burdens on good landlords, thereby discouraging them from participating in the market?

#### **Response**

Yes. During the life of the first scheme there were a number of representations about licensing fees. On balance this Council has felt when establishing and then renewing the scheme that the benefits in improving the quality of accommodation outweigh any perceived burdens in complying with the scheme.

When consulting to renew the scheme in 2015 the Council sat down with a group of local agents who represented about 40% of the HMO market and discussed these concerns. This led to the Council introducing longer licences with lower fees for compliant landlords and retaining annual licences with higher fees for the non-compliant.

### **Supplementary question**

Since the 2015 review is there any evidence of the scheme discouraging good landlords?

### **Response**

I am not aware of any decision to avoid the licensing scheme on the part of landlords. Overall the scheme balances the benefits for the tenant against the requirements placed on landlords.

### **25. From Councillor Fooks to Councillor Hollingsworth**

The opening of the new Westgate and the John Lewis store is certain to increase the numbers of people wanting to come to Oxford to shop. To reduce the possible increase in congestion and pollution from extra traffic, has consideration been given to having a collection point at the park and ride sites for goods purchased at John Lewis and perhaps other city stores?

### **Response**

Whilst this solution was put forward by officers in discussions with the development partners and John Lewis, John Lewis decided that this wasn't commercially workable. Collection points are already available at five other John Lewis Group outlets in Oxfordshire, with two in Oxford.

There is also the wider issue of more efficient freight movement into and within the city centre and ensuring this is managed efficiently. Officers will be monitoring the impact in terms of congestion and air quality and if solutions need to be sought in future – such as tighter restrictions on times for deliveries to take place in - this issue will be considered carefully in partnership with the County Council and local business and transport operators.

### **Supplementary question**

Where are these other outlets in Oxford?

### **Response**

The Waitrose stores in Headington and on the Botley Road.

**Deputy Leader of the Council, Board Member for Finance, Asset Management and Public Health**

### **26. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Turner**

This year the five year rent reviews of Covered Market tenancies coincides with the expiry of the 15 year lease term. It is a difficult time for tenants. Can the Board Member confirm that the many proposals for improvement made in the independent report of 2012, and not acted on, will be reviewed urgently?

## **Response**

The Council is currently involved in lease renewals for the Covered market units; there is no separate rent review. The new leases are offered at a rent reflecting current market conditions.

The 2012 report made 15 suggestions for improvement, of which 10 have been implemented. Those that are outstanding or partially outstanding are:

- New Marketing Campaign & Brand Development – initial discussions were held with traders but they have shown little appetite for such a campaign.
- New Signage- A trial Market Street banner sign has been installed and there are consultations ongoing with structural engineers and third party land owners.
- Car & Van Free Entrances - the yard has been subject to a refurbishment & improvement scheme to aid efficiency of deliveries. The parking bays in Market St may be raised with the County Council but changes may cause further delivery problems and bring little benefit.
- Covered Market Quarter – this is a longer term plan and is dependent on consultations with both landowners and adjacent tenants.
- Covered Market Oscars – started on smaller scale with features on best performing & award winning traders announced through the newsletter.

## **Supplementary question**

Would the Board member comment on:

- Grants to retailers: how many and what value?
- What are the plans for ground floor improvements?

## **Response**

I can't comment on the grants; and the improvements remain a long term aspiration when funds are available.

### **27. From Councillor Brandt to Councillor Turner**

1) What has the council done to divert footfall towards the Covered Market, especially in light of the overall fall in footfall in the city centre due to the Westgate redevelopment works?

2) What commercial comparators have been used to assess the proposed rent increases for the Covered Market given that the CM offer is very different from the rest of the City Centre?

3) Is any more refurbishment work planned for the Covered Market?

4) Covered Market traders are not getting the 2% business rate reduction that other city centre traders have been getting as a result of the Westgate work, because they are classed as a 'market' (though their insurance classes them as an 'arcade'). Seeing as they are suffering the same (if not more) fall in business as the other traders, what is the council doing to try and secure the CM traders a rate reduction?

## **Response**

1. Diverting footfall:

- The council have produced a Covered Market leaflet/flyer advertising the market and the businesses within. These have been distributed to local tourist offices, libraries, events, P&R stations, local hotels etc.
  - The spill out onto Market Street has continued this year with the last event being held on Friday 9 December. This event aims to reach out and showcase businesses from within the market whilst drawing attention to the market itself.
  - Continued support is being provided to traders on the use of social media which is now gaining real momentum and providing strong results for some businesses.
2. The Council has taken advice from a firm of surveyors who specialise in retail property. The rental levels have been calculated using evidence of new lettings within the Covered Market.
3. Refurbishment work:
- Phase 3 of the market roof refurbishment programme starts January 2017, this is an ongoing project which has secured budget for the next 4 years
  - Improved lighting in avenues 1-4 High Street has been approved and will start early 2017
  - Sprinkler system refurbishment - just completed phase 2 of a 3 year project
  - Roof infill and refurbishment of avenue 2 (High Street end) is scheduled for spring 2017
  - Safe Roof Access system is about to be procured with a budget secured
4. It is for the individual traders to seek independent advice regarding whether or not they should appeal the business rates valuation.

**Supplementary question**

What is the position on new lettings? Will we favour chains or local traders?

**Response from Councillor Clarkson**

We will follow our robust lettings policy for independent, local companies or small chains but no high street chains.

**28. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Turner**

What assumptions sit behind the site valuations used during the consultation on East Oxford Community Centre for the assumed income from the disposal of the Chinese Community Centre and associated land, Film Oxford and the East Oxford Games Hall? Was it assumed that these sites would be sold for market housing or social housing?

**Response**

The assumptions used were residential development of the subject sites in line with current Oxford City Council planning policy.

**Supplementary question**

Given the size of the site can we assume it will be used for market housing?

**Response**

Yes.



## **Leader of the Council, Board Member for Corporate Strategy and Economic Development**

### **29. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Price**

Given recent comments by the Shadow Chancellor that Brexit is "an enormous opportunity to reshape our country" does the leader of the Council share his parliamentary colleague's enthusiasm for Brexit and his optimistic view that it offers "an enormous opportunity" to Oxford?

#### **Response**

SWOT analysis proceeds from the basis that most human situations present both threats and opportunities. So much, so banal. The purpose of using that sort of analytical framework is of course to allow the decision makers to determine the balance of one against the other. At the present moment, the terms on which the UK will leave the EU are unknown, so it is very difficult to conduct such an analysis with any confidence. However, if, as seems very likely in the light of the statements made by the Brexit Triad Gang, this will involve leaving the single market and customs union, and restricting the ability of Oxfordshire employers to recruit the many nurses, doctors, construction workers, researchers, teachers, administrators, technicians, IT specialists, care workers, streetscene operatives, restaurant, hotel and café workers who are playing a vital part in the buoyancy of the city and county economy, it would be reasonable to reach the conclusion that any opportunities created by Brexit will be massively outweighed by the threats. The impact on the universities and big science facilities is already being felt, and the uncertainty created by the lack of a clear government strategy is affecting many parts of our sub regional economy.

#### **Supplementary question**

Will you be supporting the Labour candidate in this week's Lincolnshire by-election who is an enthusiastic Brexit supporter in comparison to the Labour candidate in last week's by-election who was not?

#### **Response**

Equality of views for all party members is exactly that and everyone has the right to express their views. And those are my views.

### **30. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Price – motion in September**

At the 29 September meeting of this council, a motion was submitted asking the leaders of all councils in Oxfordshire to continue talking about local government reorganisation, based on the widely acknowledged potential benefits. The leader of the council and his colleagues chose not to support the motion as submitted, amending it to refer to devolution without reorganisation. However, a motion identical to the unamended version was also tabled at a meeting of Vale of White Horse District Council on 12 October 2016\*, and was passed unanimously. Could Cllr Price provide an explanation for this apparent discrepancy between himself and his counterpart at the Vale on the desirability of keeping alive discussions about reorganisation?

\*<http://democratic.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=108&MId=2143&Ver=4>

#### **Response**

Discussions between the Oxfordshire local authorities on the terms of a fresh devolution proposal involving a combined authority and an elected mayor are under way. No other joint discussions are taking place about local government reorganisation outside this devolution package.

### **31. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Price**

Will the Leader join me in thanking all those involved in the Oxford Christmas Light Festival including the City's own staff and the many other organisations around the City (many staffed by volunteers) that opened their doors for the weekend.

#### **Response**

Yes; of course. I have already expressed our collective thanks to Rachel Capell, Ian Nolan, and the Events team who made this year's Light Festival such a massive success, in terms of attendances throughout the weekend, and the quality and variety of the programme. We should also record our thanks to the main sponsors, the Westgate Alliance and the University of Oxford, whose funding is so vital to the support

### **32. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Price**

For most employees in Oxford, a salary at the level of the Oxford Living Wage (OLW) remains aspirational.

Why has Oxford City Council still not started a scheme to promote the Oxford Living Wage and reward and recognise business that pay the Oxford Living Wage?

#### **Response**

The Council does indeed promote the Oxford Living Wage by requiring all its contractors to observe the OLW as a minimum wage, and through our regular meetings with the business community, both collectively and on a one to one basis. The Council is also supporting the various student campaigns in the University and the colleges which are seeking to promote the OLW.

#### **Supplementary question**

There appears to be a Council blind spot and inertia in failing to get more employers to offer the OLW.

#### **Response**

It is a slow process to get employers to accept their social responsibility but we have a regular campaign to promote the OLW and promote face-to-face whenever possible, and this will continue.

### **33. From Councillor Thomas to Councillor Price**

Will the Leader agree with me that the Campsfield Detention Centre, where a demonstration recently took place marking its 23rd year, and where more than 280 people are currently being detained, is a disgrace and take the opportunity of the recent protest to again write to the relevant Government Minister expressing our opposition to the Centre?

*(Many detainees are being held without charge, without time limit, without proper reasons given, and without proper access to legal representation. Amnesty International reports that these are breaches of internationally recognised human rights. Authorities and organisations such as Chief Inspector of Prisons, the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, and Medical Justice, have condemned conditions at Campsfield House.)*

## **Response**

Conditions at Campsfield have been heavily criticised over the years and improvements have been made in response to the campaigns that have been mounted locally. Writing to a Minister is unlikely to make a great impact other than on the workload of an HEO in the Ministry of Justice but I am happy to do so.

## **Supplementary question**

Will you help promote the Campsfield demonstration in January 2017?

## **Response**

Yes.

## **34. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Price**

Will the City Council be offering to do an expanded, leaflet drop - or information campaign - on behalf of the charity Guide Dogs after it was reported that another blind person was turned away from a restaurant as he was accompanied by his guide dog, despite the fact that he had the right to enter under the 2010 Equalities Act.

## **Response**

Yes. I am sure that all members will be shocked and surprised that a restaurant owner should be unaware of the provisions of the Act which have been in force for 6 years now. The Council has been working with Guide Dogs Oxfordshire to raise awareness and has contributed to their recent campaign. A new webpage on our website provides food businesses with information and advice. In addition, a newsletter containing guidance on the legal obligations relating to guide dog access was sent out to approximately 900 food businesses in October. We will continue to work with the charity to support their campaign.

Link to website:

[https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20055/food\\_safety/1145/guide\\_dog\\_access\\_to\\_food\\_premises](https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20055/food_safety/1145/guide_dog_access_to_food_premises)

## **35. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Price**

The Chancellor, Philip Hammond, has been described as “reassuringly boring”. From his perspective as leader, did Cllr Price regard the recent autumn statement as “boring”?

## **Response**

While the media may have sought to trivialise the Chancellor’s Autumn Statement by focussing on his speaking style, it is very unwise to treat the content of the statement as ‘boring’, and I hope that the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group is not simply making a petty political point against his former Coalition ally.

This was the first occasion when the likely economic consequences of the decision to leave the EU were quantified, and their implications for the people of the UK were spelt out: £120 billion of extra borrowing to 2020, half of which is directly due to Brexit, no real wage growth for the longest period of years since the 1920s, slower economic growth, higher inflation. Despite the Prime Minister’s rhetoric about the ‘just managing’, no change in the benefits cap level, an imperceptible reduction in the rate of UC withdrawal, nothing extra for the NHS, or for social care, despite the clear signals that vital services are on the verge of crisis, all the previous spending limits on departmental spending maintained implying a deepening crisis in education spending – except for

new grammar schools, no mention of business rates devolution. I could go on, but while these announcements were all unwelcome, they are certainly not boring and reflect the abject failure of the Coalition's and the subsequent Tory governments' economic policies since 2010. To be projecting a debt to GDP ratio of over 90% in 2019 says it all.

Looking at the positive aspects of the Statement is also not boring. Over £1 billion for infrastructure projects to unlock affordable housing in high demand areas is welcome. The investment in the early planning for improved road links across the centre of England between Oxfordshire and Cambridgeshire is also welcome.

In summary; neither reassuring, nor boring.