

Proposed address to OCC Budget Meeting 19.02.18

Duration: 3 mins (approx.)

Good evening, my name is Barbara Witkowski and I am the records officer of Oxfordshire Badger Group, which promotes the conservation, welfare, and understanding of badgers. Thank you for the opportunity to address you this evening.

The Protection of Badgers Act 1992 protects badgers and their homes - setts - in law but they remain under threat from road traffic, the government-sanctioned cull in our neighbouring county and habitat loss through development. It is of grave concern that developments such as the Seacourt Park and Ride extension agreed by Oxford City Council could lead to the loss of badgers from our city.

We are opposed to the extension of the Seacourt Park and Ride into the adjacent flood-plain fields as it will destroy a locally important, abundant wildlife habitat which has remained largely untouched since early last century. It should be protected as a habitat of principal importance under the City Council's own Biodiversity Plan.

It is in the interest of Oxford city's residents and visitors that the Council adopts effective environmental policies and processes and funds the resourcing of a full assessment of the city's wildlife before it vanishes forever. It was extremely discouraging to hear one Labour councillor at the West Oxford Planning Review meeting dismiss this land at Seacourt Park and Ride as 'only 5 acres of Green Belt which no-one except the houses that back onto it ever sees'.

In fact this land provides a mosaic of habitats used by a wide range of resident and transient species from butterflies and pollinating insects, nesting songbirds to bats and terrestrial mammals including deer and badgers.

This development will have a severe impact on the badgers, their setts & foraging ground and no mitigation will compensate for what will be lost. The Badger group has been monitoring the badgers at Seacourt for over 30 years. Contrary to the contracted ecologist's opinion that the area is "suboptimal" for badgers, it is one of the few semi-wild places that remains safe for them to live in amidst the creeping development that has been approved around Botley Road on floodplain. Badgers have learnt to live with frequent flooding but they won't survive drilling, piling or aggregate materials pouring onto their setts & the fields where they forage.

Building over this Green belt floodplain that flanks Botley Road is not the best or only solution to Oxford's traffic and parking issues and sets a destructive precedent. Like many local residents, we do not have confidence in either the Council's experts nor the Environment Agency's lack of modelling of what the impact of the park and ride expansion and the proposed flood alleviation scheme earthworks, will have on groundwater flooding in this location.

How can the City Council justify spending millions of pounds on a scheme that will destroy precious floodplain in the green belt, when in my view the data behind their decision is at best scant and skewed to favour growth at any costs? Making Oxford a World Class City for everyone else comes at a cost to local residents, our green spaces and precious wildlife. This is too high a price to pay and will be a terrible legacy.

Speaker and author:
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