

To: Council

Date: 23 April 2018

Title of Report: Public addresses and questions that do not relate to matters for decision – as submitted by the speakers and with written responses from Board Members

Introduction

1. Addresses submitted and 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 set out below. The views expressed are those of the individual members of the public
2. This report is republished after the Council meeting as part of the minutes pack. This lists the full text of speeches delivered as submitted, summaries of speeches delivered which differ significantly from those submitted, written responses, and any further responses.

Addresses and questions to be taken in Part 2 of the agenda.

1. Address by Amanda Mackenzie Stuart: Disabled Access to the Westgate
2. Address by Judith Harley: Windrush Day
3. Address by Judith Harley: Temple Cowley Library car park
4. Address by Artwell: Inflated house prices
5. Question by Nigel Gibson: Why is Oxford City Council Discriminating Against the Disabled?
6. Question by Judith Harley: Oxford Direct Services company

1. Address by Amanda Mackenzie Stuart: Disabled Access to the Westgate

Relating to motion 15b

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to address Full Council.

The issue I want to speak about is the problem of access and safe parking for large Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles (WAVS) in the new Westgate and elsewhere in Oxford.

Specifically, the problem is one of height restrictions. This may sound trivial but it's not. The Westgate car park has a height restriction of 2 metres. The standard height of a large wheelchair accessible vehicle (WAV) is 2.4 metres. There's therefore no way that a large WAV can get into the new Westgate.

Once inside, the Westgate is potentially an empowering space for disabled people, including those in larger electric wheelchairs, allowing them to enjoy a great new civic space along with everyone else.

So, it's all the more frustrating that for those arriving at the new Westgate in large WAVs that the complex is, in reality, an impregnable fortress - a situation I believe is at odds with the Council's stated mission of 'Building a World Class City for Everyone'.

Large WAVs are high for a reason. Sufficient headroom allows single users to load and unload safely using a built-in ramp system. Sufficient headroom allows carers for more seriously disabled people to move round the patient and wheelchair easily, ensuring safe care during transit, and reducing chances of further head injuries while the vehicle is on the move. For these reasons, 2.4 metres is a standard height for large WAVs, although some can be even higher, as can passenger cars with hoists on the roof.

For these reasons, BS8300 – the code of practice for design of building and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people - stipulates headroom clearance of 2.6 metres as a minimum for car parks built within the last 2 years.

Passengers using large WAVS include those with Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's Disease and Motor Neuron Disease, as well as paraplegic and tetraplegic drivers. Charities, care homes for elderly adults and specialist children's homes, as well as individuals, are all users of large WAVS. I understand that the new generation of school buses are also being designed as wheelchair accessible vehicles and will thus come into the large WAV category.

But in the case of the Westgate, I believe the current provision for large WAVs is not only non-existent but unsafe. There are no signs warning of height restrictions until the driver is already committed to going down the ramp into the car park. Indeed, signs to the excellent Shopmobility scheme ironically leads to the belief that all disabled vehicles are welcome. It is only once one is on the ramp that a dangerous situation becomes apparent. At that point the sign orders you to do a U-turn – on the ramp, with exiting cars accelerating round the corner up the ramp having passed through the ticket barriers. This design flaw needs urgent attention before an already vulnerable person in the back of a large WAV is seriously injured.

All new car parks like that at the Westgate should be consistent with BS8300, with reasonable adjustments for disabled people laid out in the 2010 Equalities Act.

I have made a short film, illustrating from a personal point of view the problems faced by users of large WAVs which I hope council members will have a chance to view before the meeting.

Finally I would also like the council to consider the implications for users of large WAVs of **the headroom barriers currently going up in car parks all over Oxford.** Whatever the reasons for this, I would ask councillors to bear in mind that these headroom barriers have the potential to exclude disabled people and groups in large WAVs from every space where such barriers exist. This, I'm sure, is an unintended consequence of some other decision. But it's one with consequences for disabled people nonetheless.

Verbal Response from Board Member Councillor Tidball,

Thank you for this speech which we will consider along with the motion later in the meeting. We will make sure that our car parks and planning officers are aware of the problems and ask that they ensure that any height restricting barriers are not installed at too low a height.

2. Address by Judith Harley: Windrush Day

My last address to Full Council, at the end of January, referred to January's Dr Martin Luther King Junior day, and to the fact that this April commemorated the 50th anniversary of Dr. King's assassination. I also mentioned the fact that Oxford City Council observes a range of days celebrating various communities within the City, but has no special day of significance to those of African heritage. From evidence, the City Council's sights seem disproportionately set on championing, for example, the LGBT community, whilst I believe the City's African heritage community are severely under-represented, ill-considered, poorly served, and generally neglected. Those of African heritage tell me they feel that they are being ignored, stigmatised, and met with racism and disparity.

Another significant anniversary for the African heritage community is fast approaching – Windrush Day, on 22nd June. Since at least Roman times people of African heritage have lived in Britain; until the mid-20th Century, this presence was maintained by forced and voluntary migration – from the African continent, the Americas and the Caribbean – fuelled by the Transatlantic Slave Trade, colonialism, and World Wars 1 and 2. After World War 2, Britain's post-war national rebuilding programme prompted invitations to Commonwealth citizens to “come to the Mother Country's aid”. On 22nd June, 1948, the MV Empire Windrush landed at Tilbury docks carrying 492 Jamaican passengers, who were termed “the Windrush Generation”. This was the first of many arrivals of Commonwealth citizens willing to help rebuild a broken Britain after the war. This year, Friday 22 June marks the 70th anniversary of this Windrush landing.

Many of these invited Commonwealth workers – British citizens – were treated incredibly badly after their arrival but, despite experiencing years of extreme racial discrimination, they contributed widely to the UK economy and culture. Shockingly, their children, who arrived in Britain between 1948 & 1971, are now in the news for receiving further discrimination and injustice. After years of working, paying tax, and participating in community life, they have been incorrectly identified as undocumented, or “illegal” migrants because, having arrived as children, they are now unable to provide formal paperwork proving their lifetime association with the UK. Some of these are Oxford residents.

Dr. Martin Luther King Junior said, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”. This year would be a good year for you, the City Council, to address the injustices to, and to understand the particular challenges facing, Oxford's African heritage community, and make Oxford more welcoming to this group. One small step would be to help to celebrate Windrush Day, to remind us how much the African heritage community is a crucial part of British culture, and that racism and intolerance is completely unacceptable. This year, Windrush Day is in Refugee Week (18 – 24 June 2018).

There are two further pertinent commemorative days, recognised internationally by the United Nations. These are:

1. August 23 - Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition, observed annually to remind people of the tragedy of the transatlantic slave trade.
2. December 2 - Abolition of Slavery; this is held to raise awareness of the atrocities of modern slavery.

I wish to invite the City Council to work with an organisation with which I am associated, the Oxford African History Celebration (OAHC), to commemorate these days. We

would welcome your help in providing premises, funding, and other support to promote events commemorating these days. I look forward to hearing how the City Council will assist OAHG with these commemorations.

Thank you.

Verbal Response from the Leader, Councillor Brown

I would like to thank Judith for raising this important issue. I said earlier I would have been giving a statement to council on this issue in any event but thought it would be most appropriate to give it in response to your statement as you have raised the issue of this injustice.

This whole affair is a shameful episode for which the Prime Minister personally needs to accept responsibility along with her Conservative and Lib Dem coalition colleagues who supported a change in the law in 2014 which has directly led to this situation. The nature of this mean spirited and discriminatory policy is that people are not necessarily aware of the problems that they face until they are asked for proof of identity when applying for work, benefits, new access to healthcare or a pension.

I would like to reassure councillors and the public that in Oxford, City Council staff working in our customer services teams have been briefed to do all they can to help people who find themselves in this situation and more information will be put in our next tenants newsletter. We are aware that people are only just beginning to realise their situation. So far we have had a small number of enquiries but we expect this to grow in light of the recent publicity.

We are fortunate in Oxford to have a number of excellent organisations such as Asylum Welcome and Open Door Oxford, and the advice agencies that the City Council supports with funding, who are well placed to give helpful advice and support. I would urge anyone who finds themselves in this situation to contact an advice agency, the City Council or their MP, depending on their circumstances. I would remind councillors of the advice note that was circulated earlier today. The way the Government has used its immigration laws to discriminate against the Windrush generation is utterly unacceptable and mean spirited. In Oxford we are proud of the huge contribution that they and other Commonwealth citizens have made to our city.

The City Council was proud to support the combined celebrations of Commonwealth Day and the single act of remembrance in March, recognising the role that Commonwealth citizens played in supporting our country in its hour of greatest need as well as the massive contribution made every single day, in the NHS, in social care, in education, and building up our vibrant local economy. Given all that these citizens have done since the Empire Wind rush arrived in England seventy years ago to come to our support after the Second World War, you would have thought this Government would want to recognise this and celebrate it in this anniversary year.

Instead they have denied hard working members of the African Caribbean community their rightful access to health services, benefits and housing, and refused them re-entry to the UK after they visit their relatives in the Caribbean. By creating a "hostile environment" for immigrants and treating the Wind rush generation so badly, they have again revealed their true colours. They remain the "nasty party" as the current Prime Minister and architect of our immigration laws, Theresa May, memorably described

them. We will also want to see Oxford City Council support celebrations of the Windrush anniversary in June. We will work with local community groups to see how we can support their celebrations and recognise the contribution to our city.

On behalf of the City of Oxford I know that colleagues across the council will want to say "thank you" to the African Caribbean community, as we do to all the different communities who contribute to the rich diversity of Oxford life.

3. Address by Judith Harley: Temple Cowley Library car park

Lord Mayor, Councillors,

In December 2014, despite many objections, the City Council decided to sell the former Temple Cowley Pools (TCP) site to Housing Association company Catalyst. Included in this sale was the land which had been used, for many years, as a car park by the Temple Cowley Library. This car park had space for around 10 vehicles, and was an essential component of the library, especially for its elderly and disabled users. Planning permission for developing the TCP site was formally granted in February 2018, and part of the sale, and grant of planning permission conditions, included a legal obligation on Catalyst to provide a minimum of three parking spaces for Temple Cowley Library staff and users somewhere on the TCP site.

Since planning permission was granted, contractors for Catalyst have boarded up the entire library car park, without providing any alternative parking spaces on the site. I have notified the County Council of this, and Catalyst have acknowledged their obligation, but have still done nothing to provide any parking spaces for the library. This is most unacceptable, as visitors requiring parking have to park either on the narrow library slip road – into which Catalyst have trespassed with their hoarding – or in the very limited parking spaces in the area, if they can find one. The hoarding around the car park has also severely restricted access to, and vision of, the library cycle racks. I am sure that this lack of visibility contributed to the theft, only last week, of two cycles locked to the racks.

I am asking the City Council, as vendors of the TCP site, before proceeding with final completion of the sale, to immediately enforce the obligation on Catalyst to provide a minimum of three parking spaces for Temple Cowley Library. I believe Catalyst are flouting their legal obligation, to the detriment of library staff and users. I would also ask the City Council to encourage Catalyst to improve the accessibility and visibility of the library cycle racks.

Thank you.

Verbal Response from the Leader, Councillor Brown

Thank you for raising these issues, I will ask officers to investigate and respond to you.

4. Address by Artwell: Inflated house prices

I would like to invite the Labour controlled Oxford City Council to apologise to those in need of Affordable accommodation; the Key workers and those for which two thirds of their income is used for rental purposes.

As awful as this situation is for many people in Oxford, the contract with Grosvenor's to construct 800 homes on the Barton Park estate has added to Oxford's over priced housing crisis.

A seller on the Sandhills estate, who has a three-bedroomed home, has added over £130,000 to her asking price, simply to keep in line with the extortionate prices of £600,000 which Grosvenor's have set as the price of their three-bedroom family homes in Barton Park.

Oxford's Estate agents warned that the inflated prices being asked of Barton Park would have the effect of raising the average price of an Oxford home from £400,000 to nearer Barton Park's prices of £600,000 for a three-bedroom home.

The Oxford Mail front page of Monday 16th April carried the headline "Need a home? Go to Walsall", stating "High city rents force council to move people over 100 miles away", and "the city struggles to come to terms with the housing crisis".

I regard the price of £600,000 for a Barton Park home as complete corporate greed. This appears to be aided by the City Council's actions, and lack of intervention over sale prices.

How does aiding what I believe to be Grosvenor's corporate greed tally with the stated mission of highly paid City Executive Officers to "promote sustainable communities" or "community development and social regeneration"?

I believed that Oxford's Labour-led City Council is directly responsible for inflated house prices being aggravated by prices in the Barton Park development. In my opinion, the latter will worsen, not improve, Oxford's housing crisis. I invite the Councillors to apologise for what I consider to be their financial incompetence which will only add to the misery for thousands of Oxford home-seekers.

Artwell

Written Response from the Board Member, Councillor Rowley

To be clear, there is no contract with Grosvenor under which Grosvenor would build homes at Barton Park. The Council entered into a joint venture (BOLLP) with Grosvenor to enable the development of homes and extensive leisure and community facilities. This means that BOLLP has gained consent for the development and has provided the infrastructure in order to sell phases of the site to house builders. It is the house builders that build and sell the houses, in this case Hill. The house builders set the value of the houses in line with what house buyers are prepared to pay, they are also responsible for gaining planning consent for the detail of their development proposals.

There is an extensive array of infrastructure such as a new school, sports pavilion & football pitches, green spaces, not to mention a new junction on to the A40 and contaminated land clean up. More importantly, 40% of all the homes will be social

rented and owned by the Council's Housing Company. The sale of the private homes effectively pays for these requirements.

In addition there are other S106 requirements, for example paying for an enhanced doctor's surgery in Barton Community Centre; these are also funded by the value generated by the sale of private housing.

Without the sale of private housing this major development would not be deliverable, this would mean that up to some 350 properties would be unavailable to those in greatest housing need.

5. Question by Nigel Gibson: Why is Oxford City Council Discriminating Against the Disabled?

In July last year, the Council Leisure Partnership Board confirmed that Fusion admission fee increases are contractually limited to the Retail Price Index, and noted that the price increases for this year would be discussed at the October Leisure Partnership Board and then forwarded to CEB and Council for approval.

There is no record in the October minutes of any proposed fee increase, and there are no published minutes of the January meeting. The 2018/19 increases for the Bonus Card concession increases are in fact buried in the middle of an Appendix 7 of the budget document voted through by Council in February. There is no record I can find of any discussion of increases that, far from being within the RPI, are in fact several multiples of it, while 'normal' users have increases of under 3%.

The Council offers a concessionary rate, called a Bonus card, for a range of people in need, including the disabled and their carers and different types of income support.

Can you please explain why the admission price for these concessions at Ferry Leisure Centre has been increased by 53.85% from £1.30 to £2.00 since the start of April, with no advance warning, especially as this discriminates so much against the disabled and those on benefits who now have to find extra money in order be able to participate in exercise?

I would also like to know why the pricing shown on the Fusion websites is in line with your Budget appendix, but not what people are being charged, is different between different leisure centres and in my opinion further discriminates against the disabled by introducing the £2 charge in a 'peak time' of 4-8pm during weekdays – with £1.50 at other times, which is a mere 15.38%.

The Blackbird Leys leisure centre pricing shows the higher increase at peak times for swimming, but kept the gym price at £1.30.

It would be helpful to understand if you intend implementing a 'Peak Time' at some point, or whether you plan to continue with the massive percentage price increase regardless of entry time or venue.

What was, before April, a very simple pricing structure that clearly offered real benefit to those in need has become in my view a complex mess.

It would be good to think that the Council still wants to provide those benefits rather than leaving in my view vulnerable people feeling persecuted by what I consider to be iniquitous increases in admission charges, and that you will do something urgently to sort things out, including refunds for overcharging.

Written Response from the Board Member, Councillor Smith,

The schedule of fees and charges including the price of activities in our leisure centres was consulted upon as part of the public consultation on this year's budget between 21st December and 28th January. The fees and charges were then agreed by the City Executive Board on 13th January and by Full Council on 19th January. The new concessionary charge of £1.50 off peak and £2 peak for holders of a Bonus card still represents a very large discount on the full price and excellent value for money. For

comparison the normal price for swimming is £4.70, for a swim and sauna £8, for an exercise class £6.60 and for a visit to the gym £8.30. This means that a Bonus Card holder pays only 18% of the regular price off peak and only 24% of the regular price at peak times for gym access.

These fees and charges agreed by council are the maximum prices that Fusion Lifestyle can charge under our contract with them for the operation of our leisure services. Fusion currently offer a monthly membership for Bonus Card holders for only £19 a month. This equates to £4.38 a week for unlimited access to our leisure centres and demonstrates the commitment shared by this council and Fusion Lifestyle to inclusive and affordable leisure facilities for all residents of this city

Supplementary verbal response from the Board Member, Councillor Smith,

We will consider how to improve the consultation on fees and charged for next year as this was not as clear as it could be. If people have been overcharged then they should contact the Leisure Centre in the first instance.

6. Question by Judith Harley: Oxford Direct Services company

Lord Mayor, Councillors,

On April 1st, Oxford Direct Services (ODS) became a limited company. As they are occupying City Council premises at the Marsh Road Depot in Cowley, I wish to know the following:

1. How much rent is ODS paying the City Council?
2. How much are ODS paying in business rates?
3. As ODS have publicly stated their expansion plans, what measures are they taking to relocate away from their Marsh Road site? For example, at present their services include working on a wide range of vehicles, from taxis to buses to private cars. Their current site, in a residential location and next to leisure facilities, is totally unsuitable for this operation, and totally unsuitable for any subsequent expansion. Local residents are convinced that the expansion of ODS is what necessitated their theft of part of Cowley Marsh Park.
4. As planning permission for expansion into the Cowley Marsh Park wildflower meadow was granted for 5 years, and some 6 months of this have passed already, how will the City Council reassure residents that it will ensure that ODS relocates within the next 4 ½ years, and restores the wildflower meadow to its previous state?

Written Response from the Board Member, Councillor Turner

1. Total of £520k per annum which is at market rent rates for the premises around the city
 2. Total of £223k per annum
- 3 & 4

Part of the ODS plan is to consider its corporate property portfolio to review whether it is fit for purpose to support the business expansion plans and this will be looked at over the next couple of years. The Council is mindful of the 5 year planning permission granted at the Cowley Marsh Park site