

**To: Council**

**Date: 23 July 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 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 below. Any written responses available are also below.
2. The text reproduces that sent in the speakers and is not to be taken as statements by or on behalf of the Council and represents the views of the speakers.
3. This report is republished after the Council meeting as part of the minutes pack. This list the full text of speeches delivered as submitted, written responses, and summaries of further verbal responses.

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

1. Address by Jenny Stanton and Nikki Marriott – Oxford Ramallah Friendship Association (ORFA) address in support of motion on twinning
2. Address by Judith Harley - Temple Cowley Library parking
3. Address by Judith Harley - Oxford City Council Constitution
4. Address by Artwell – Oxford Direct Services Ltd
5. Address by Artwell – Barton Community Association
6. Address by Nigel Gibson – Why is Oxford City Council Still Discriminating Against the Disabled, and WHAT PRICE DISABILITY?
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## Questions in part 2

1. Question from Artwell – Royal British Legion Building, Barton

## Addresses in part 2

### 1. Address by Jenny Stanton and Nikki Marriott – Oxford Ramallah Friendship Association (ORFA) address in support of motion on twinning

#### Previous approach

One of us came to a council meeting in 2003 to ask for twinning between Oxford and Ramallah in the very early days of the Oxford Ramallah Friendship Association. Councillors advised that we work on friendship links and return in five years. An article in the Oxford Mail suggests positive enthusiasm at that time:

“Oxford City Council has backed the idea of twinning the two cities and earlier this year the executive board welcomed campaigners’ moves to build links.” (Oxford Mail, 4 September 2003)

Anyway now fifteen years have passed by and we have been busy building those grassroots friendship links, and will carry on doing so, but perhaps the time has come for the council to consider again an official twinning as well.

#### Similarities between Oxford and Ramallah

There are good reasons for Oxford to choose to twin with Ramallah. Both are university towns, both have leading museums, both have major hospitals that serve the surrounding area, and a group of Oxford medics teach at Bir Zeit University, Ramallah, for a few weeks every year. Both cities have a vibrant youth culture featuring dance and theatre. Oxford is multicultural and Ramallah has a diverse faith makeup, a majority being Muslims and twenty-five per cent being Christians.

Ramallah is the de facto administrative centre for the West Bank, attracting many workers from outside the city bounds, rather like Oxford does with its employment possibilities. It is hard to get exact figures for the population of Ramallah but in itself it seems smaller than Oxford (70,000), while the Ramallah Municipality is much larger (over 300,000).

Both Oxford and Ramallah have strong civil society networks such as women’s support groups, disabled charities, and professional and trade unions.

#### Brief history of ORFA linking

Since 2003 we have made links with many facets of Ramallah society, especially in the Al Amari refugee camp which is among the poorest parts of the city, and also built strong links between trade unionists in both cities.

A major part of our work is arranging and fund-raising for visits from Ramallah to Oxford, for example four visits by young people including learning video making, theatre summer school, and dance performances – as well as the chance to enjoy Oxford’s hospitality. We have organised visits from a women’s development worker, the first woman mayor of Ramallah, and a midwife and community leader (for various Oxford International Women’s Festivals), the director of the Palestine Natural History Museum, and a group of women from the women’s centre in a refugee camp.

Oxford City Council has offered support for these visits in the form of free swimming and ice skating for children’s visits, Lord Mayors’ receptions and visits to the Town Hall, and this year funding from the Cultural Fund.

We have also arranged our own self-funded delegations from Oxford to Ramallah, including a women’s delegation, youth and student, and trade union visits.

In 2014 we became a charity with primary purpose being public benefit through education and promotion of human rights.

Besides visits we have also supported and fund-raised for small projects such as upgrading a teaching room in a women's centre in Ramallah, and the development of an ongoing video project in partnership with UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency).

This work has built up a broad network of contacts from a wide range of civil society in Ramallah.

Why we feel official twinning is a good idea (with ORFA remaining independent)

Links between Oxford and Ramallah will support existing friendship links and enable these to be expanded, giving further energy to the work done over the years by our local charity ORFA and other Oxford groups that have forged links.

If there were official twinning some doors may open more easily, links with a broader range of organisations at both ends would be possible, and visa refusals would be less likely. Currently the UK visa agency can and does refuse visas for cultural and other visits. This time we succeeded (after much concern) in getting our visitors here, and they performed at the Ashmolean Museum, Cowley Road Carnival, ran numerous workshops for young people, met with the Refugee Resource Women's Group, toured the car plant, spoke at Oxford Trades Union Council, and met the Lord Mayor.

People in both towns will benefit from the opportunity of sharing cultural interests which will be more widely visible with an official twinning. Our patrons and our partners in Ramallah welcome this twinning initiative.

As an existing charity, ORFA would be excited to support this official twinning, and to collaborate in developing further links.

### **Verbal response from the Leader of the Council, Councillor Brown**

Thank you for this address and for the really important work you do to build friendships and links between the cities. If we do not get time to debate the motion tonight I will bring a paper to the City Executive Board to discuss implementing the twinning links it proposes.

## **2. Address by Judith Harley - Temple Cowley Library parking**

Lord Mayor, Councillors,

At April's full council meeting, I addressed council outlining problems with car and cycle parking at Temple Cowley Library caused by preparations for construction work on the former Temple Cowley Pools (TCP) site. Cycle parking has been resolved, as the bike racks were moved to a more visible and accessible position very soon after my address. However, nothing has changed regarding car parking.

The verbal response I received from Councillor Brown in April, as printed in the draft minutes, was:

"I will ask officers to investigate and respond to you."

To date, some three months later, I have received NO response, and the Library still has no parking provision.

Let me remind you of the situation.

In December 2014, despite many objections, the City Council decided to sell the former TCP site to Catalyst Housing Association. Included in this sale was land adjoining Temple Cowley Library which had been used, for many years, as the library car park. 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 site for library staff or users. 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. Again, I am asking the City Council, as vendors of the TCP site, to immediately enforce the obligation on Catalyst to provide a minimum of three parking spaces for Temple Cowley Library. I believe that Catalyst are flouting their legal obligation, to the detriment of library staff and users.

Since I spoke in April, the contractors have provided themselves with ample parking, on the adjoining school field, and are increasing the parking provision at the rear of the adjacent Silver Band Hall. I appreciate that both of these are owned by the County Council, but access to them is across land sold, along with the library car park, by the City Council. The TCP site contractors control this land, and also control parking on the Silver Band Hall site. Access to this parking is through a barrier erected by the contractors and placed where the access road meets Temple Road. This barrier is manned by a workman during all working hours. Those with permits issued by the contractors are allowed through, those without permits are not. A short-term measure to provide library parking would be to oblige the site contractors to issue permits to library staff and users. Please will the City Council ensure that such permits are issued immediately to library staff and users, to provide some parking facility whilst the longer-term arrangement is being investigated and resolved?

I would also appreciate a response in less than the three months that I have been waiting for a reply to my previous question on this matter.

Thank you.

**Verbal response from the Board Member, Councillor Hollingsworth**

I apologise for the failure to respond to you – this was an oversight. The point you raised was followed up. Planning Enforcement concluded that under the planning permission there is no obligation to provide spaces during development.

Negotiations are underway between the City Council, Catalyst and the owner of an adjacent site to allow a site owned by the City Council to be used as temporary parking for the library. I have impressed on the officer leading this that this is a matter which now needs urgent resolution.

### **3. Address by Judith Harley - Oxford City Council Constitution**

Lord Mayor, Councillors,

According to section 17.1 on page 100 of the City Council's constitution, published in April 2018, the following decisions can be "called-in" for further scrutiny:

- resolutions by the Board
- key decision taken by officers
- ward member spend
- planning decision taken by area planning committees
- decisions on planning applications that were going to be taken by the Head of Planning, Sustainable Development and Regulatory Services

My concern is about the planning process, where there is no mechanism to call-in planning decisions made by planning officers – unlike decisions made by area planning committees, which can be called in to the planning review committee. I am asking Council to amend the constitution, and add to the list of decisions which can be called in:

- planning decision taken by a planning officer

This would be called in to be scrutinised and decided by the appropriate area committee.

I am requesting this because there are situations where concerns arise about the harm which could be done to neighbours, the neighbourhood, and environment, as a result of decisions made by planning officers; at present the constitution provides no mechanism for redressing this situation.

I appreciate that planning decisions delegated to planning officers can be called-in before the planning consultation deadline has occurred, but this is also before any decision has been made, not after. I also appreciate that there are situations where concerns of harm done by an application can, theoretically, be "mitigated" by condition. Neither of these addresses the situation that an actual decision by an officer, on a planning application, cannot be scrutinised and challenged. What is there to fear from this type of call-in? If the planning officer's decision is sound, either the call-in will fail, or the area committee will agree with the officer decision.

I am therefore asking Council to amend the constitution, and add to the list of decisions which can be called in:

- planning decision taken by a planning officer

and for this call-in to be scrutinised and reconsidered by the appropriate area committee.

Thank you.

### **Verbal response from the Board Member, Councillor Hollingsworth**

The constitution is kept under review. We have to balance the need to meet strict timescales and our obligation to make decisions in a timely manner with the need to allow councillors appropriate oversight of decisions. At the moment I feel the balance is correct and councillors have proper and proportionate call-in powers. It would be inappropriate to allow a call-in of a planning decision once it is taken by a planning officer.

#### 4. Address by Artwell – Oxford Direct Services Ltd

Publicly funded organisations, and people who hold public office, have a well-defined legal duty to uphold the characteristics of probity; integrity, economic transparency, accountability and behaviour in private and public which promotes virtue and civility. Lord Mayor and Elected Councillors, I believe the demands for the City Council's salaried Executive Servants to uphold the high standard of behaviour, which Public Law requires, will become a challenge, especially with the privatisation of Oxford Direct Services (ODS). ODS will be competing and tendering for work like any other "for profit" Company. As ODS tenders for contracts, I believe there will be a conflict with the commercial need for secrecy against the public requirement for economic transparency; accountability and integrity. Councillors' ability to hold the privatised ODS to account on behalf of Voters, will also be strained.

However, I believe it is completely unacceptable, deceptive and a transgression of Public Law for Oxford City Council, in its publication called "Tenants in Touch" to claim "our Direct Services has been transformed into a **social enterprise**; Oxford Direct Services (ODS)."

I believe this is a lie intended to deceive the people of Oxford. ODS is a for profit company. A **social enterprise** has it its heart an intent and objective for social improvement - the sole intent of ODS is to make more revenue, to the detriment of local Oxford businesses who now have to compete at a marked disadvantage.

Our democracy is dependent on upright people who are bold enough to expose deception.

The truth is that the City Council registered ODS with Companies House twelve months before the official launching of ODS. Moreover, I believe Labour deceptively failed to inform the voting public of Labour's intention to privatise the delivery arm of Oxford City Council.

Will the City Council publish an apology for what I believe to be its deceptive wording?

Will the executive members ensure that officers remember the requirements of Public Law supersede all commercial norms for secrecy?

Will the City Council implement measures, which make the privatised entities directly accountable to, elected Councillors?

#### **Written Response from the Board Member, Councillor Chapman**

Oxford Direct Services operates like a social enterprise. Elements of its operation are commercial but the key test is how any surplus is distributed. All social enterprises make surpluses or profit: that is how they fund their good works.

In the case of ODS, every penny of net surplus (after paying relevant taxes) is returned to the Council and is spent on the wellbeing of the City's citizens.

The Council has already implemented measures to ensure that this company, which is wholly owned by the Council, is directly accountable to Members. The Council's control is exercised through the City Executive Board, at regular Shareholder Meetings. The company's activities are also subject to oversight by a dedicated Scrutiny panel, which can make recommendations to the CEB.

#### **Verbal Response from the Board Member, Councillor Chapman**

There is no deception so no apology needed. It is also perfectly legitimate to register a company before it starts trading.

## **5. Address by Artwell – Barton Community Association**

Mayor and Elected Councillors, a sizable minority of people in the Sandhills & Barton Ward, are disturbed that public money is still being given to the Barton Community Association (BCA). I believe the BCA does not uphold the principles of economic transparency and accountability.

I believe It is unacceptable for Oxford City Council to continue to financial reward the BCA, as the BCA has created what appears to me a privatised entity in order to frustrate the requirements for economic disclosure which the Charity Commission expect and this mechanism also shields the BCA from City Council scrutiny. Economic transparency is a basic requirement for any organisation, which receives public funds. Without economic transparency, how can the City Council monitor if employees are receiving Oxford's Living Wage for example?

The BCA has paid staff. For this reason I believe it is unacceptable for the City Council to continue to give public money to what I consider to be this secretive organisation. I call on the City Council to suspend all financial relationship with the BCA, until all its accounts are completely transparent to all who may wish to scrutinise how public funds are being used.

### **Written Response from the Board Member, Councillor Tidball**

Barton Community Association is accountable to its members, the Charity Commission as a registered charity and Companies House as a registered company limited by guarantee, none of these require the publication of individual staff salaries.

We work closely with the Association and are very happy with their work. The improvements we are making to the centre will increase its role in reducing inequalities, improving skills and helping to bringing communities together.

### **Verbal Response from the Board Member, Councillor Tidball**

I repeat that Barton Community Association is accountable as set out in the written answer and to their legal duties.

**6. Address by Nigel Gibson – Why is Oxford City Council Still Discriminating Against the Disabled, and WHAT PRICE DISABILITY?**

The text of the address is on the **following** pages

**Verbal answer from the Board Member, Councillor Smith**

The scheme does not discriminate against disabled people. I would remind you that the Bonus card is available to people in receipt of many different benefits and offers generous discounts. The more generously low off-peak pricing is to encourage use when the centre is less busy. Fees are just part of ensuring accessibility for all residents: we also offer free swimming for under-17s and free swimming lessons for children whose families are in receipt of benefits. We will be working with Fusion on better disabled access and improving their IT systems.

## **Why is Oxford City Council Still Discriminating Against the Disabled, and WHAT PRICE DISABILITY? – Nigel Gibson, July 2018**

At the Council meeting in April, I revealed in a question just how Council was discriminating against the disabled – I received an inadequate answer, but I did think my point had been made and that something would be done. The reason I am back here this evening is, unfortunately, to provide you with an update and report that nothing has been done. The disabled, and in fact anyone that uses the Bonus concession card at Council leisure centres, continue to be discriminated against.

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. In April the minutes of the January meeting had not been published. They have now, and there is no mention of increasing the prices for the disabled. Or even in the minutes of the May meeting, where I thought that at least my question to Council might have been mentioned, and discussed amongst the 23 members – if ever there was a committee that should have fewer people, this has to be it.

The 2018/19 increases for the Bonus Card concession are in fact buried in the middle of an Appendix 7 of the budget document voted through by Council in February. There was, as admitted in the answer to my question in April, no discussion of increases in fees for the disabled, and other Bonus card holders. Councillors, you can see for yourselves attached to my address, the increases you voted through in the budget, and the way in which your vote discriminated against the disabled, with a total lack of transparency or discussion, or even a mention to the public. How many of you were even aware of what you were voting for?

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. Councillors, you voted to do two things to discriminate against the disabled and other Bonus card users, totalling just under 24,000 people.

Firstly, you agreed to introduce a 'peak' period between 4-8pm each weekday, when Bonus card holders are charged more than at other times. This differential charging does not apply to other users.

Secondly, you voted to increase the admission price during the 'peak' period from £1.50 to £2.00. 50p may mean nothing to you, but it is a 53.85% increase on the previous year's flat admission price of £1.30.

Meanwhile, as you will see in the appendix, everyone else only has a 3% increase.

And it gets worse. The £2 charge was being applied after 8pm in the evenings and after 4pm at weekends. I thought, after my question in April, that this would get sorted.

I am here to report that no, it hasn't been sorted, and shows no sign of being addressed. If you are a Bonus card user, unless you know otherwise and are prepared to ask to pay the correct fee, you will still be asked for £2.

This is not the fault of the staff on the tills at the leisure centres. The computer system that runs the tills charges £2, and staff either have to get £2 from the user or account for a

shortage when cashing up at the end of the day. Or, I have found out, secrete the 50p overcharge in a hidden account. Apparently the computer system cannot be changed, as it can't cope with a peak period charge.

I hope you are now wondering why you voted through an admission price increase of over 50% just for the disabled and other Bonus card holders.

I also hope that you will question Fusion on why they even proposed introducing a pricing scheme that their computers can't make work. Perhaps you might even mention it at a Leisure Partnership Board meeting.

And I hope you will want to do something about having overcharging the disabled and other Bonus card holders for four months.

I ask you this evening to stop this discriminatory charge against the disabled, stop the underhand overcharging and allow people access to exercise when they want to. And everyone who has been overcharged must be refunded, without having to each make a claim.

What was, before April, a very simple pricing structure that clearly offered real benefit to those in need remains a complex mess. It would be good to think that the Council still wants to provide those benefits rather than leaving vulnerable people feeling persecuted by these increases in admission charges. I look forward to you actually doing something about this.

## Ferry Leisure Centre Price List

	Adult	U17, 60+ & Students with Fusion card	Family (2 adults + 2 children)	Bonus (off peak)	Bonus (peak M-F 4pm-8pm)
<b>Pool</b>					
Casual Swim	£4.70	£3.00	£12.10	£1.50	£2.00
Water Workout	£6.65	£4.40	N/A	£1.50	£2.00
Inflatable fun	N/A	£4.40	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Health &amp; Fitness</b>					
Gym	£8.50	£4.50	N/A	£1.50	£2.00
Gym - teen (11-15)	N/A	£3.40	N/A	£1.50	£2.00
Group exercise class	£6.80	£4.40	N/A	£1.50	£2.00
Badminton (per person)	£3.80	£2.80	N/A	£1.50	£2.00
Squash (per person)	£4.30	£2.90	N/A	£1.50	£2.00
Table tennis (per person)	£3.60	£2.80	N/A	£1.50	£2.00
Racket hire	£1.50	£1.50	N/A	£0.50	£0.50

## 7. Address by Sharone Parnes – IHRA definition of anti-Semitism

Thank you for allowing me to speak here today. My name is Sharone Parnes, and I am here as an Oxfordshire resident, an elected Councillor and a Jew (...not necessarily in that order). In my own experience, and being a Jew, I have found Oxford to be a wonderful place: to study, to teach, to do other kinds of work, to play, to pray and to stay. The parking charges, I'm not so crazy about...

That remark - the lighthearted jibe about myself - a Jew who doesn't like paying your parking charges – can be taken in the spirit of comedy (albeit probably bad comedy) or friendly banter; on the other hand, in some atmospheres that same comment might trigger discussion descending to expressions of anti-Semitism.

How would you know when you've crossed the line? Would you know anti-Semitism when you see it?

In January 2017, the Rt Hon Sajid Javid (then- Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government) wrote to all Council Leaders. He informed that in the previous month, the Government formally adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance working definition of anti-Semitism; the first European Union country to do so! The definition – he said – although legally non-binding is ***an important tool for public bodies*** [*emphasis added - SP*] to understand how anti-Semitism manifests itself in the 21st century, as it gives examples of the kind of behaviours which depending on the circumstances could constitute anti- Semitism.

He concluded: “We are well aware that anti-Semitism continues to be a problem in this country. It is therefore right that, as a Government, we are able to demonstrate the seriousness with which we take it, as for all forms of hate crime. Anti-Semitism must be understood for what it is – an attack on the identity of people who live, contribute and are valued in our society. In light of this, I would like to take this opportunity to ***strongly encourage you to formally adopt the definition and consider its application in your own authority.***” [*emphasis added - SP*]

Information provided to me in response to a Freedom of Information Request indicated that Oxford City Council has not approved the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism. 17 months after the Secretary of State's letter, it has not even been debated by this Authority. Had the Leader or Chief Executive even issued any response to the Secretary of State? What was done with his letter?

In October, Cherwell District Councillors **unanimously** voted in favour of formally adopting the world-recognised IHRA definition of anti-Semitism.

- Last month, an Oxford City Cllr used social media to convey a purported analogy between the US President and fascists who Churchill fought against. Although not anti-Semitic per-se, such an analogy in itself dilutes the repugnance of what the Nazi's did to the Jews and others, and the genocidal mechanisms of their craft.
- In May we saw an Oxford City Cllr resign a party post after sharing posts on social media.
- In the same month an Oxford Jewish Centre location was targeted in a number of hateful attacks.
- There have been apparently anti-Semitic incidents, including in the education and political spheres, which many of you here in Oxford will be well aware of ... and which can be linked to people associated with Oxford.

The fact Oxford City Council has not yet considered the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism is unfortunate. If it won't do so in the very near future, it will be a travesty.

Will the Leader undertake to table a motion for adoption of the IHRA definition of anti-Semitism at the next Council meeting?

**Verbal response from the Leader, Councillor Brown**

Thank you for your speech.

*The full text of the formal response is in the formal Minutes of this meeting.*

*The letters referred to are in a separate supplement to the Minutes.*

## Questions in part 2

### 1. Question from Artwell – Royal British Legion Building, Barton

Barton and Sandhills people have noticed activity at the site of the former Royal British Legion Site.

Could the City Council please inform the people of Barton and Sandhills of the Council's plans for the site of the Former Royal British Legion?

As the Council may know, I have been campaigning to transform the site into a community managed space for hire; equipped with an Aunt Sally facility and space for group activity and celebrations. Such a space is terribly lacking in Barton and Sandhills.

#### **Written Response from the Board Member, Councillor Tidball**

The City Council continues to improve community spaces across the city. In Barton we are investing just under a million pounds into the Neighbourhood Centre so it can better meet the needs of local people with improved community, health and youth space.

Barton Park housing development also includes new community provision with a community pavilion and the new school will have spaces that can be hired for community activities, this is on top of the hireable spaces at Barton Leisure Centre.

The Royal British Legion building has experience several break-ins through the roof recently and is unusable in its current state. Therefore the site is being considered for other uses, including much needed housing.

#### **Verbal Response from the Board Member, Councillor Tidball**

We do continue to improve community spaces including the Barton Community Centre. The British Legion site is unusable in its current state so we are considering other uses for the site.