

To: Council
Date: 1 October 2018
Title of Report: Questions on Notice from members of Council and responses from the Board Members and Leader

Introduction

1. Questions submitted by members of Council to the Board members and Leader of the Council, by the deadline in the Constitution are listed below in the order they will be taken at the meeting.
2. Responses are included where available.
3. Questioners can ask one supplementary question of the councillor answering the original question.
4. This report is republished after the Council meeting to include supplementary questions and responses as part of the minutes pack.
5. Unfamiliar terms may be briefly explained in footnotes.

Questions and responses

Board member for Culture and City Centre

1. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Brown (Clarkson) – Town Hall accessibility

Could the Leader provide an update on the progress and likely report date of the accessibility audit of the Town Hall?

Written response

The access audit has been undertaken and officers are working on a paper to update on the audit and outline the next steps. This report should be ready by November.

2. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Clarkson – city centre retail health

- a) Can the Portfolio Holder please clarify the figures attributed to the City Council in the Oxford Mail article of 17th August concerning the amount of business rate relief issued by the Council. How much of the stated £31m that is awarded is

part of a mandated Government scheme and how much is given as discretionary relief by the Council? How many businesses benefit from the latter?

- b) In the light of the recent closures of longstanding local, independent traders, can the Portfolio Holder please state how the Council is supporting small traders in the city centre?
- c) Does the Council track the number of vacant retail units in the City Centre? If so, can she provide trend data?
- d) What percentage of Westgate units are currently let?
- e) The Council has previously used footfall as an indicator of the health of Oxford's City Centre retail economy. As the Portfolio Holder will be aware, this is quite a blunt measure of 'success'. A more informative measure is conversion rate, the sales per visitor.
- f) Does the Council collect such information?
- g) Or any more sophisticated measures such as dwell time or detailed flow data on visitor movements – that can be used to better understand why so many businesses say they are suffering despite an expanded retail offer and apparently increasing footfall?

Written response

a)

BUSINESS RATES RELIEF - AT 1-06-2018		
	£000's	Number
Mandatory (Charitable) Relief	25,764	549
Mandatory Small Business Rate Relief	2,162	733
Mandatory Transitional Relief	2,144	n/a
Mandatory Empty Property Relief	758	139
Discretionary Relief	40	6
2017 Spring Budget Reliefs		
Public House Relief	80	86
Supporting small businesses	5	7
Local discretionary revaluation relief	211	181
Local newspaper relief	2	1
	31,166	1,702

Of the £31m quoted, **£30,827,226.20** is either Mandatory Relief/Empty property relief/Transitional Relief or Small Business Rate Relief, awarded in accordance with Rating legislation. **£338,309.05** is Discretionary Relief, which includes the 2017 Spring budget reliefs and Local Newspaper Relief. 275 businesses benefit from a discretionary rate relief.

- b) At least 6 retailers forums are held annually with city centre businesses – ‘Talk of the Town’ plus twice a year a larger business forums are delivered and led by the Leaders from City and County.

Regular email updates are sent to businesses sharing key information on such issues as promotion, events, road works etc. 121 visits to city centre businesses are conducted regularly by the City Centre Manager.

The City Centre Taskforce was launched in September. A partnership between the public and private sectors provides an ideal vehicle for city centre stakeholders to realise their collective aspirations for the city centre and equip the city to respond to the challenges of growth. It also contributes significantly to the development of a vibrant, sustainable and safe economy and promotes the vitality and viability of the city centre. The Taskforce is a voluntary partnership who will work together to create greater economic prosperity for the City Centre and the City of Oxford in general. Its members comprise of representatives of the City Centre business community, Oxford City Council, Oxfordshire County Council, Thames Valley Police, Oxford University and other key stakeholders. Its members acknowledge that there are many parties that have ownership, statutory responsibilities or committed business interests in the City Centre and that by working together in a constructive manner, more will be achieved than by working alone. The Taskforce will aim to create the conditions for business in the city centre to prosper. It will do this by advocacy, encouragement, facilitation and where it is in a position to do so, it will take direct action.

City Centre Taskforce Aims

- To develop Oxford’s city centre through helping to improve the public realm, increasing footfall and growing business revenues.
- To represent the interests of businesses throughout OX1 and to support their needs and objectives.
- To foster strong, fruitful relationships with public and private sector organisations involved in the development of Oxford city centre.
- Shape and influence organisational agendas to develop a shared strategic approach to the city centre’s development

How these aims will be delivered

The City Centre Taskforce will deliver these aims by ensuring there is regular, frequent communication with its constituent members – the businesses in OX1 – in order to ensure it understands and can represent their needs. To this end it will adopt a structure to enable broad participation among city centre businesses and make full use of their expertise and knowledge.

Structure

The Taskforce will appoint a Chairperson, elected by members, to hold office for a one year term (with a maximum of 3 continuous terms of office). The Chairperson will always be drawn from the private sector. The Taskforce will

also have as an executive resource, the Oxford City Centre Manager, a post that is funded by Oxford City Council. The Oxford City Centre Taskforce reports to the Economic Growth Steering Group (EGSG) and in turn the Oxfordshire Strategic Partnership (OSP). It will take a task and finish approach to a range of city centre issues that require the attention of OSP's strategic partners. The Taskforce will comprise a Forum and a series of area and/or thematic networks as required from time to time. The Forum will meet a minimum of once every six months or more regularly as it sees fit. The network groups will meet as frequently as they deem necessary to undertake their business. Each member of the Taskforce is responsible for representing their organisation as well as the wider partnerships and networks in which they are involved. They are also expected to take forward the work of the City Centre Taskforce in their own organisations and other partnerships/networks.

City Centre Manager works with and provides support to 'Independent Oxford' such as 2018's Christmas Campaigns and the Independent Compendium. City Centre Ambassadors liaise regularly with the city centre businesses, helping to improve the visitor welcome and reduce ASB on the streets.

We continue to provide relief to small businesses both through the Small Business Rate Relief scheme, and the Spring budget additional relief, Supporting Small Business Relief as a result of the 2017 revaluation. In total we have issued some £31 million in different types of business rates relief to more than 1,700 local businesses in the current financial year.

- c) A count is carried out by the planning policy team usually every six months of the secondary and primary frontages across the city. This data shows the vacancy rates in the city centre have consistently sat below regional and national average. The City Centre Manager also conducts counts on just the city centre premises on an adhoc basis to regularly check the health of the city centre and liaises with letting agents to understand what stage any empty units are at in the process of letting, i.e advertised, leased, fit-out. It is worth noting it usually takes at least between 4-6 months from the signing of a lease for the shop to open so many empty units will appear vacant but a new tenant has been secured.

The number of voids in the city centre currently stands at 36 vacant units, of which 2 have been let and 7 are undergoing redevelopment. This confirms a June 2018 Centre for Cities study which found vacancy rates in Oxford to be 8% compared with 12% nationally.

As the City Council is only responsible for some of the retail units in the City Centre, with other landlords including Oxford colleges, Prudential and other commercial property companies – there is no easy way to gather data and it is only post-Westgate that we have done so. However, the City Council did commission Carter Jonas to undertake a retail study, published May 2017.

As part of this report, the surveyor undertook an analysis in 2016 which found the number of vacant outlets in Oxford City Centre to be some 9.07%, which is below the national average of 11.18%. Although the vacant floorspace (8.22%) is slightly above the national average (7.92%), this probably reflects the impact of the redevelopment of the Westgate Centre. Overall we consider that the centre is performing relatively well in terms of vacancy levels.

- d) This would need to be confirmed by Westgate but their last official update was 95% let and they have reported footfall is above their own forecasts. As

expected, the 'Westgate effect' has benefitted other retailers, with footfall in the city centre up 8 per cent over the past six months and 17 million visits; again bucking national trends.

- e) Commercial agents Carter Jonas, reported consumer expenditure in Oxford grew by 2.0 per cent and is forecasting growth at 1.3 per cent this year, which it says is 'noticeably above the national average'. Retail spend per square foot in Oxford is 10 per cent higher than the average across the UK.
- f) Retailers and businesses are not inclined to share sales data as it is commercially sensitive information. There have been a few initiatives run in the past 4 years to do so but most business chose not to be involved.
- g) Technology is currently being explored by the City Centre Manager and Smart Oxford Officer to see what is available to collect such data, although budget is an issue.

3. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Clarkson – Covered Market

- a) Can the Portfolio Holder please explain the criteria used to determine a business is local and independent (and therefore considered appropriate for the Covered Market)?
- b) This is in light of men's tailoring and country wear shop Leonard Jay moving in. My understanding is that they are a London-based retailer. With three stores in London. I am not certain how they meet the 'local' criteria.
- c) What is the portfolio holder doing to attract a new fresh food trader to the Covered Market to replace Hedges Butchers?

Written response

- a) The leasing strategy states that the council wishes to **encourage** occupation by sole traders, independents and local retailers. It defines "independent" with limited (usually less than 10) other shops. There is no definition of local. It is important that there is some flexibility in the Leasing Strategy so that we don't have too many units standing empty because potential tenants don't fit rigid criteria.
- b) in view of the above there is no absolute requirement for a business to be local. This retailer demonstrated a good fit with the covered market and this particular unit (selling similar branded goods to the outgoing tenant) but with the addition of tailored menswear.
- c) Officers are in discussions with a number of potential tenants. The overall challenge is to secure a quantum of new tenants, and seek to manage a mix, including provision of fresh food, which can support the covered market as an attractive destination in which traders can be commercially successful.

Board member for Customer Focused Services

4. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Chapman – Blenheim Drive trees

I have recently been contacted by constituents about the non-replacement of felled trees at the southern end of Blenheim Drive in my ward.

Can the board member outline the budgeting arrangements for tree maintenance in the City?

Written response

The Council has an expenditure budget of £498k to manage and maintain over 100,000 trees and has a planting budget of £15k for all replacements across the city. The vast majority of the budget is spent on surveying all of the trees across the city (including highways) on a rolling 3 yearly programme and undertaking tree works prioritised on a risk basis.

The trees at Blenheim Drive were on Section 42 Highways land. The city receives approximately £18k funding from the county council to manage approximately 6,000 Section 42 trees. This budget covers the survey, maintenance and possible replacement of highways trees.

Due to the historic poor standard of the existing planting pits at Blenheim Drive, their relationship to the surrounding roads/footpaths and a multitude of underground services, highway tree planting needs to be carefully planned and funded. This cost is reduced on grass verges where the excavation and engineering costs reflect that. At Blenheim Drive to remove the existing stump, re-excavating the planting pit to the correct standard and replanting the tree, costs approximately £3k per pit. So five tree pits on Blenheim Drive would cost approximately £15k to plant trees alone. This doesn't include the costs associated with young tree maintenance including watering.

Therefore we have no plans to replace the trees that were removed from Blenheim Drive.

Supplementary question

If there is a total budget of £500k for trees in the city, why is so little of the budget allocated for street trees? £15k seems a small part of the total budget to replace these trees so could these be replaced?

Response

The total budget provided trees in parks and open spaces and areas owned by the City Council. The amount provided under our S42 agency agreement is much less, as indicated, and from a different budget. Any replacements would absorb most of the budget specifically allocated for street trees.

Additionally a considerable amount of work is needed to provide good quality planting pits for any new trees.

5. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Chapman – drain clearing

Does the new arrangement between the city and county councils for highway maintenance extend to keeping drains cleared?

If so, could the board member explain why parts of Woodstock Road in my ward and elsewhere regularly experience large and deep puddles which take a long time to clear, even after relatively short periods of precipitation?

Written response

Oxford Direct Services' new highway maintenance responsibilities include the maintenance and emptying of road gullies on the Principle Road network. There are often issues across the City with the speed in which surface water can flow away from carriageways and is often due to the main sewer being at or near capacity which creates a backup of surface water. Woodstock Road, in places, has had historical drainage issues. The recent work undertaken by the County Council between Morton Road and South Parade included the installation of enhanced drainage ahead of the carriageway resurfacing to alleviate some of the known issues. We would encourage Members to report specific highway drainage issues via FixMyStreet so they can be investigated during the occurrence and the appropriate action taken.

Board member for Healthy Oxford

6. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Upton – Five Mile Drive facilities

Is Cllr Upton yet able to let us know why it has taken so long to provide changing facilities at Five Mile Drive Park, and to confirm that facilities, though limited, will be available this season?

Written response

As Cllr Goddard is aware, the cost of providing a new modular unit at Five Mile Drive, turned out to be significantly more than the £50k originally assigned to this project. I have worked with officers to allocate a further £20k. Officers have also worked closely with Summertown Stars FC, who will be the main users of this facility, and they have recently confirmed that they are able to provide £12k towards the project. This will allow us to deliver the non-cladded building option. Officers are currently waiting to hear from the ward councillors whether they would like to contribute to the cost of cladding.

We have provided portaloos as a temporary measure, and certainly aim to have the finished facility in place well before the end of this season.

7. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Upton – cycle lane layouts

Can Cllr Upton let us know whether any part of the recently awarded cycling grants is available to look at cycle lane layouts?

Written response

Within the recently awarded Growth Deal funding there is £1.4m this financial year for walking and cycling connector routes in Oxford. The money is under the control of the County Council and year 1 funding will include planning and design work for some schemes and construction for others. This complements the Growth Deal money being spent on the main road corridors in the city (Woodstock, Banbury, Botley and the South

East corridors) and the Access to Headington project, some of which will be spent on design and some on actually building improved infrastructure for cyclists. The details of the first year Growth Deal projects across the county can be found here:

https://www.oxford.gov.uk/news/article/719/growth_board_announces_first_round_of_projects_to_receive_housing_and_growth_deal_funding

As we work towards a Zero Emission Zone in the centre of Oxford, achieving modal shift to walking and cycling will be vital.

Board member for Housing (Building better homes)

8. From Councillor Roz Smith to Councillor Rowley – Great Estates electric car points

I understand that the City Council estates team are improving car and cycle parking for residents, where there is a recognised need, by creating spaces on deep grass verges, for instance in front of the 3 blocks of flats in Amory Close, Cowley.

As a council wishing to increase and encourage cleaner forms of transport would it not be a good idea to install one or two electric charging points at the same time?

Written response

Further to the Council's commitment to roll out of charging points throughout the City, we recognise the requirement going forward of taking a similar approach amongst estates and parking areas.

During the recent design and planning stages of the Great Estates project work at Amory Close, consultation was undertaken around proposed layout of facilities, and no request was received for charging points to be considered as part of the upgraded parking facilities. Consequently, the current works and design were carried out in response to the parking requirements suggested during the consultation. However, during the work being undertaken, cable is set and sunken into the grass verges and curtilage as a matter of process for replacement/further lighting points infrastructure. This then would allow any points to be installed going forwards should the need or demand be necessary. This is becoming a standard procedure on upgraded hard-standing and redesigned communal areas to allow us to future proof design.

Should the requirement become evident for users at the scheme for electric charging, this can be undertaken.

This Council also encourages use of the travel hierarchy that would promote use of walking, cycling and public transport over use of the individual car user. We hope the spaces will encourage residents to park their car and use cleaner forms of transport.

Supplementary question

Would the Great Estates programme consider providing covered cycle racks as these are better used than uncovered cycle racks?

Response

We do consider installing covered cycle racks where appropriate and the cost/benefit analysis shows these will be worthwhile.

Board member for Planning and Transport

9. From Councillor Gotch to Councillor Hollingsworth – affordable housing policy

Will the portfolio holder confirm that affordable housing incorporated in future planning consents will total 50% of dwelling numbers, as per City policy and not as at Barton Park, with 'affordable' defined as relative to Oxford salaries, not market valuations or rents?

Written response

The City Council's policy for affordable housing is clearly laid out in the documents that make up the current Local Plan, in particular the Sites and Housing Plan. The Barton Park AAP, as adopted by this Council, also forms part of the current Local Plan. The Local Plan, along with the NPPF and all other relevant planning policy documents such as Neighbourhood Plans form the suite of policies against which any planning application must be judged.

As the Councillor is surely aware, the granting of planning consents is a quasi-judicial process in which each application must be judged on its own merits against the relevant planning policies. It will be up to the relevant Committee, or officer in the case of a delegated application, to make the final decision and must do so without instruction from this Council.

The policies and definitions used for affordable and social housing are clearly laid out in the relevant planning policy documents. To save the Councillor the trouble of downloading the document and reading it, the Sites and Housing Plan, adopted in 2013, states in Policy HP3 that "Planning permission will only be granted for residential development on sites with capacity for 10 or more dwellings, or which have an area of 0.25 hectares or greater, if generally a minimum 50% of dwellings on the site are provided as affordable homes. A minimum 80% of the affordable homes must be provided as social rented, with remaining affordable homes provided as intermediate housing".

The same document defines 'Social Housing' as "Homes that are let at a level of rent generally set much lower than those charged on the open market, available to those recognised by the Council as being in housing need, and offering long term security of tenure (through Secure or Assured tenancies). The rent should currently be calculated using the formula set out in Appendices C and D of Housing Corporation Circular 27/01 – Rent Influencing Regime – Implementing the Rent Restructuring Framework. Should this circular be revoked at any time, the City Council would use a weekly rent figure equivalent to 30% of the lower quartile net income (after deductions) for full-time employees working in Oxford, pending any revised formula adopted or supported by the Council."

The same glossary defines Intermediate Affordable Housing as "Housing at prices and rents above those of social rent, but below market prices or rents. These can include shared ownership, affordable rented housing and intermediate rent. The Council will consider the suitability of other forms of intermediate housing, such as low-cost market housing, in light of its genuine affordability to those in housing need."

The Barton Park AAP, which sets planning policies specific to that site, adopted a policy of 40% of all dwellings to be social housing, and no intermediate affordable housing, because of the additional infrastructure costs involved in bring the site forward for development.

Supplementary question

Would you accept that despite the Local Plan policies not all developers take the policies on board and provide expected levels affordable housing?

Response

In the case of live applications on which councillors may take planning decisions, all councillors must be careful not to state their position in advance of having all the facts.

10. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Hollingsworth – micro dwellings

It was reported in The Guardian (23rd August 2018) under the heading ‘are these the worst new flats in Britain’ that Ilford Council has given permission to self-contained single person apartments as small as 13sqm in size (approximately 3.6m x 3.6m) and 15sqm for a double; this has been made much easier by recent central Government planning policy changes which enables commercial to housing conversions under permitted development thereby bypassing the planning process.

Indeed, I am aware of one 16sqm two-person conversion near me.

Can the Portfolio Holder say whether we know how many more ‘micro’ developments have occurred in Oxford and, considering they breach local standards (minimum 37sqm for a single person dwelling and 50sqm for a two-person dwelling), what we can do about this?

Written response

The question – or possibly the original report – has a number of errors, but raises a serious issue. First, there has been no such thing as Ilford Council since 1965; Ilford is in the London Borough of Redbridge. Secondly and more importantly, Redbridge LBC did not ‘give permission’ for these flats – thanks to the change to permitted development rights that allows the conversion of office buildings into homes these flats did not require planning permission, and were thus able to entirely bypass Redbridge’s planning processes.

It is not for nothing that the head of the TCPA (Town and Country Planning Association) describes this “as the most shameful built environment policy of the post-war period”. As permitted development, these conversions are not required to meet the national space standards, nor can Councils seek affordable housing provision from them. This was a deliberate decision of Government when it first introduced this change to permitted development regulations in 2013.

As the councillor may recollect, when the changes were introduced the City Council was so concerned about the potential impact that it sought to impose a city wide Article 4 Direction to remove this permitted development right entirely; unfortunately the then Coalition Government blocked this approach. The Council then applied for and received approval for a different Article 4 Direction which removed these permitted development rights on Key Protected Employment sites, but this has meant that other offices can be converted in this way.

Unfortunately, despite widespread concerns being expressed across the sector and across the country about the results of this policy, the Government reaffirmed its support for the change to permitted development rights in 2017, meaning that the Council can do nothing to prevent conversions of this sort.

While I can confirm that there are a total of 68 such applications on the Uniform database, that will include sites where it was deemed that permitted development rights did not exist and withdrawn applications, and possibly multiple applications for the same site. The sizes of the resulting flats can only be gathered by manual inspection of each application. Collating the data requested by the councillor will take a little time, but when it has been collated it will be circulated to all members. I hope that they will then use that data to lobby the Government to reverse this wholly misguided and destructive policy.

Supplementary question

Is there anything else we can do to limit applications being submitted for this type of development?

Response

No, because under permitted development rights we have no control over creating what are effectively new slums and the government, having seen the poor quality developments as a result of this policy, made the policy permanent. We have to publicise how detrimental these policies and these developments are.

11. From Councillor Garden to Councillor Hollingsworth – parking in Headington

Residents in Headington are complaining about increased levels of parking on pavements following the substantial tariff rise at Headington car parks over the summer.

Can the Board Member please update Council with the following information:

- i. The total number of vehicles using each of the Headington car parks in July, August and September 2018, and comparable figures for July, August and September 2017.
- ii. Total income derived from parking charges for each of the Headington car parks in July, August and September 2018, and comparable figures for July, August and September 2017.
- iii. A breakdown of the above figures showing the length of stay i.e. numbers of vehicles parking for 0-1, 1-2, 2-3, 3-4, 4-6, 6-8 and 8-24 hours, and after 8pm.
- iv. Number of local resident/business permits issued during the months specified above in 2017 and 2018.

Written response

As September hasn't finished, I have provided the data for June, July and August instead. The figures for these three months show a reduction in use of 4%, and an increase in income of 15%. These figures would not appear to support the premise of the question.

The usage figures for these three months are as follows:

	2017/18	2018/19
June	14,271	13,729
July	14,392	13,739
August	13,970	13,335
Total	42,633	40,803

The income figures are as follows:

	2017/18	2018/19
June	£28,131	£32,613
July	£27,654	£33,168
August	£24,994	£27,160
Total	£80,779	£92,941

The breakdown of by month and by tariff band is as follows:

2018/19	0-1 Hour	1-2 hours	2-3 hours	3-4 hours	4-24 hours	Fixed	Total
June	7,688	3,858	1,249	444	265	225	13,729
July	7,800	3,907	1,147	428	227	230	13,739
August	7,485	3,989	1,067	340	231	223	13,335
2017/18	0-2 Hours		2-3 hours	3-4 hours	4-24 hours	Fixed	Total
June	12,351		757	697	249	217	14,271
July	12,524		689	740	251	188	14,392
August	12,164		807	610	208	181	13,970

The number of parking permits issued was as follows:

	2017/18	2018/19
June	1	1
July	0	1
August	4	3
Total	5	5

12. From Councillor Harris to Councillor Hollingsworth – Woodstock Road cycle track

Will the Council exercise its powers of persuasion on the County Council to extend the Woodstock Road cycle track southwards from Frenchay Road?

Written response

Yes, but that is not always a guarantee of success. I believe that County Council officers have explained the issues and costs to the Councillor and his County Councillor colleagues. The councillor, and his colleagues, might wish to consider apply their ward/division budgets to the issue, as that might prove even more persuasive for the County Council.

In the meantime Oxford Direct Services is working closely with Oxfordshire County Council officers to deliver walking and cycle route improvements in the City funded via the Growth Deal, and will raise this location for future consideration.

Supplementary question

Is there an estimated cost for this extension and could I be sent this?

Response

You can make enquiries of the County Council. City and county councillors have put substantial amounts of their ward budgets to local highways schemes in Carfax and in St Clement's wards. This makes a more persuasive case for getting the works done. This may be an option in this case.

13. From Councillor Roz Smith to Councillor Hollingsworth – 'homes in gardens' inspections

I would like to thank Cllr Chapman for forwarding the officer response to my supplementary question (at the last Council meeting) regarding thermal imaging data to check for unauthorised 'homes in gardens'

As the funded work is ongoing would Cllr Hollingsworth agree that officers should be advised to informed local councillors that letters to householders are about to be sent out in their ward, and provide safety shoes and hard hat for the officer making the site visit?

Written response

Planning enforcement visits are carried out by the Council for a wide range of reasons, including checks for unauthorised dwellings. Notifying ward councillors in advance every time such a routine visit is due to occur or a letter relating to a planning enforcement activity is sent seems excessive and unnecessary.

Where officers are targeting a particular area for significant enforcement activity they are already notifying the ward councillors.

All council staff, including planning enforcement staff and building control officers, wear clothing appropriate to the nature of their visit and the work that might need to be undertaken during that visit.

Supplementary question

Is this in place as ward councillors in Headington area did not know that a large number of letters about enforcement had been sent? And are ordinary clothes and shoes suitable for these visits?

Response

Appropriate clothing is worn: heavy boots and hard hats may not be appropriate for an enforcement visit.

(After the meeting it was separately confirmed that the process of notifying ward members about batches of enforcement letters was started in July 2018)

Board member for a Safer and Greener Environment

14. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Hayes – city centre benches

I have heard different reasons for why benches have been removed from Oxford City Centre – a move which has been criticised by elderly and disabled individuals in the Oxford Mail (2nd September).

Can the Portfolio Holder please confirm whether, or not, the benches were removed in the belief that they would help tackle anti-social behaviour or for some other reason?

Can the Portfolio Holder also confirm how many benches were removed and where and when they will be relocated or replaced?

Written response

This reproduces the press statement given at the time.

Over the weekend, working in partnership with Thames Valley Police, we removed two benches from Gloucester Street, near Friars Entry, to stop prolific and years-long anti-social behaviour. We have been hearing concerns from residents, business owners and tourists about racial abuse, intimidation, abuse of customers, and drug taking and dealing from several users of the benches. NewRiver, which manages Gloucester Green, is currently installing four new benches in Gloucester Green. These, alongside the benches around the trees in the square, aim to ensure disabled people, the less mobile, and the elderly continue to have somewhere to stop and rest. We want Oxford's city centre to be safe and accessible for absolutely everyone.

Supplementary question

When deciding where to place or remove public seating, what consideration is given to people with mobility issues or who need to rest frequently?

Response

There is no specific consideration, but I will ask officers to bear these factors in mind in the overall planning of public seating.

15. From Councillor Harris to Councillor Hayes – blue badge holders and the ZEZ

Will Disabled Permit ("blue badge") holders be exempt from the proposed 2020 Zero Emission Zone?

Written response

Yes.

16. From Councillor Harris to Councillor Hayes – ZEZ and air quality

When Oxford City Council applied for central Government funds for the 2020 Zero Emission Zone did it draw the Government's attention to the statement by Ricardo Consultants that such a zone would have "potentially little overall effect on air quality", and if not, why not?

Written response

The statement highlighted has to be read in the full context of the report which sets out the benefits of introducing a zero emission zone. The feasibility study which is informing the proposals for the zero emission zone has been published and is readily available via the [Oxford City Council website](#).

Supplementary question

The statement by Ricardo Consultants about the minimal impact of the ZEZ was tucked away in the report: why was no attention drawn to this and why is the conclusion not given more consideration?

Response

It is true that the initial red zone of the ZEZ will have little impact on overall air quality. However the expansion of the ZEZ into the proposed orange and green zones will have a markedly larger effect. Hence the evaluation and conclusions in the report.

17. From Councillor Harris to Councillor Hayes – air quality in city centre

What are the latest statistics for the levels of harmful vehicle emissions in

- (1) Queen Street;
- (2) St Aldates?

Written response

Details of the latest measurements of air quality across the City can be viewed in the Air Quality Annual Status Report available on the [Oxford City Council website](#).

Supplementary question

Will the proposals in the Zero Emission Zone to move buses from Queen Street to St Aldates after 2020 increase NO2 emissions there beyond the legal limit?

Response

We have seen a steady decrease in emissions on St Aldates over the years and have no reason to assume this will not continue past 2020 and offset any increase from buses moving from Queen Street. So there is no reason to expect the changes will cause an increase beyond the legal limit

18. From Councillor Harris to Councillor Hayes – air quality and buses

By how much are emissions in Queen Street expected to fall as a result of the planned transfer of bus services from Queen Street to St Aldates?

Written response

We do not have such data available. Monitoring of NO₂ in Queen Street in 2017 found levels to be at 28µg/m³. The legal limit is 40µg/m³.

19. From Councillor Harris to Councillor Hayes – LEZ for HGVs

Will the Council take immediate steps to introduce a Low Emission Zone for HGVs as London has already done, and if not why not?

Written response

Oxford City Council and Oxfordshire County Council are currently working together to introduce a Zero Emission Zone in the City. As part of this proposal we are considering how we can reduce emissions from all sectors, including HGV's.

Supplementary question

Why are you not creating a Low Emission Zone which will save lives?

Response

Because we are creating a Zero Emission Zone instead.

20. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Hayes – feed in tariffs

The Feed-In Tariffs (FITs) Scheme is the government's subsidy scheme for generation of renewable electricity from small-scale low-carbon installations. A recent Government consultation, which closed on 13th September 2018, sets out a proposal to close the export tariff alongside the generation tariff on 31 March 2019, which would mean full closure of the FITs scheme to new applications after 31 March 2019.

Given this Council's stated commitment to small-scale renewables, did it submit a response objecting to these proposed changes?

If not, will the Council be submitting a late response doing so?

Written response

Along with a range of stakeholders, the City Council lobbied Clare Perry MP, Minister of State at BEIS in August 2018 via letter asking her to consider the impacts of the removal of export tariff.

There has been a raft of consultations from BEIS over the summer, and it is simply not possible to respond to each one. Officers have prioritised those where we believe we can exercise the maximum benefit for the City Council, for example, the consultation on the Public Sector Energy Efficiency Fund.

21. From Councillor Harris to Councillor Hayes – electric charging points

In view of the Council's plans to trial pop-up electric charging points in Frenchay Road, Rutherway and Lonsdale Road please state:

- A. Why these roads were chosen for the trial?
- B. How many pop-up charging points are planned for each of the three named roads?
- C. How the trial will be monitored?
- D. Whether the Council expects the trial to impact on existing residents' parking?

Written response

Oxford residents were asked for nominations for streets to trial a maximum of twenty pop-up charging points in one road.

The trial will be evaluated on a number of factors: the performance of the chargers; the cost effectiveness of the technology and “whole street” installation model; the prospect for commercialisation of the charger technology at scale; the user experience of using specific chargers and accessing chargers; and the experience of residents living on the street relating to the presence of the chargers.

No changes to the Controlled Parking Zone for the selected street will be requested.

Supplementary question

Can you confirm that no parking places are lost as a result of putting in the electric charging points?

Response

I have no information on this but would assume the number of spaces should remain the same overall.

Board member for Supporting Local Communities

22. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Simm - SVPRS/VCRS

This Council has a long history as a City of Sanctuary and – over the last three years - chose to welcome 30 refugee families in Oxford under the Government-funded Syrian Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS) and the Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Scheme (VCRS). My understanding is that the Council has now stopped welcoming refugees despite the Government scheme continuing until May 2020.

Can the Portfolio Holder please inform Council of the Executive’s on-going policy with respect to the SVPRS/VCRS?

Written response

This updates the briefing provided to all Councillors in July. Oxford continues to lead the way among local authorities in the South East in engaging with the Government’s Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS) and Vulnerable Children’s Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) programme

We have settled 29 families, which will rise to 30 families including 129 individuals by the end of October 2018. As far as the most up to date available figures show that is

more than any other locality in the South East - where there is already very significant pressure on housing – including cities like Southampton which is a significantly larger city than Oxford.

Locality	Population	No of families settled
Oxford	160,000	29 – rising to 30
Southampton	253,000	25
Reading	218,000	12
Brighton	160,000	10
Cherwell	145,000	6 – rising to 12
South and Vale Districts	266,000	8
West Oxfordshire	109,000	6

Oxford City Council has taken 25 families under SVPRS, three under VCRS and one family under a Community Sponsorship Scheme. Oxford has been one of the few local authorities to participate in VCRS and we have taken more families under the scheme than any other council in the South East.

Many of the families have complex needs and Oxford City Council, has successfully worked with partners including Asylum Welcome, Connection Support and Refugee Resource to build expertise and capacity in the provision of support to facilitate the successful integration of families into their local Oxford communities.

Internal evaluation of the Oxford programme has been positive, but has highlighted the need to further focus on integration and independence especially helping people to find work. While children have very rapidly adapted to their new school environments and learning English, many of the adult family members continue to need support in this area.

All families are accommodated in the private rented sector in the city with their housing costs met by Government funding. However, the funding is for five years only and so it is important to help all families find employment, so they can avoid a cliff edge situation - which might see them having to move - once the Government funding runs out.

Nationally, the Home Office are confident of meeting their target of resettling 23 000 refugees under the resettlement schemes by 2020. Therefore, Oxford City Council has decided to focus on the successful integration of its 30 families for the final two years of the Schemes rather than bring further families into the city.

We will however provide support to any group wishing to resettle a family under the Community Sponsorship Scheme. This, together with the expansion of Cherwell’s Scheme, could provide further reunification opportunities for overseas-based relatives of those families already settled in Oxford. Furthermore, if the Government extend the resettlement programme beyond 2020 then, subject to our successful delivery of the current programme, Oxford City Council would be willing to consider participation.

Supplementary question

I have been told that in some cases because the scheme has stopped organisations no longer receive funding to continue their integration work. We are taking a high number of families but can take more because we have a centre of excellence.

Should we continue to offer refugee families a home and support here and find ways to make this successful?

Response

Thank you for acknowledging the work we and our partner charities do to support these families. We want families to be successfully integrated with children in school and adults in work and this is proving more time consuming than we originally thought. It would be worth discussing this further.

Deputy Leader of the Council; Board member for Leisure and Tackling Homelessness and Improving the Private Rented Sector

23. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Linda Smith – Fusion 1

The Portfolio Holder will no doubt be aware that Oxford Bangladeshi Islamic Centre and Mosque had been due to mark the religious holiday Eid al-Adha in Leys Pool and Leisure Centre's main sports hall on 21st August but were told at the last minute by Fusion that a full event management plan including 'anti-terrorism measures' was required resulting in the event being relocated to a less satisfactory venue.

Has the Portfolio Holder sought an explanation from Fusion and can she share it?

Written response

There was an administration problem with this booking and Fusion have issued an apology. I have also met with Fusion to discuss actions which can be taken to avoid another situation like this, and measures will be put in place to improve staff training. The 'anti- terrorism form' is a standard form concerned with the safety of participants at large public events: it was given to this group in error because of a misunderstanding about the nature of the event planned.

24. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Linda Smith – Fusion 2

The Portfolio Holder, along with other members, will have seen the extended exchange between Oxford Hoops and Fusion lifestyle regarding an attempted booking.

Has the Portfolio Holder followed this up with Fusion and what will be improved going forward as a result?

Written response

This is regarding a booking at Oxford Spires Academy that is not within our leisure contract with Fusion.

Fusion have advised us that Oxford Hoops had an outstanding debt that meant that no further bookings could be taken until paid, (this is a standard for block bookings). The debt has now been paid, however, as a consequence of Oxford Hoops delay in payment booking times they requested are not available. Oxford Hoops have been accommodated with alternatives times.

25. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Linda Smith – Fusion 3

At the time of writing (23 September) Fusion Lifestyle's accounts to 31 December 2017 do not appear to be publicly available on the Companies House, Charity Commission or Fusion Lifestyle websites.

The deadline for submission is [was] 30 September.

Could the board member inform us if she has seen the accounts, what the headline income and expenditure figures are, and if there are specific matters in the accounts which will be of interest to members of this council?

Written response

We have not yet seen the accounts. Fusion have confirmed they will be adopted at their AGM shortly and will be sent to us immediately following this.

Leader of the Council, Board Member for Economic Development and Partnerships

26. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Brown – Kassam Stadium

Partly as a result of Oxford United's poor start to the season, public discussion of the desirability of a new ground has revived to a certain extent.

Could the Leader confirm if she has had any discussions with the club, the owners of the Kassam stadium and other stakeholders since becoming leader?

Can she confirm that the council will play an active in pro-active part in seeking the best possible solution for the club, its fans, and the city as a whole?

Written response

Oxford United play an important role in the city and since becoming leader I have met with both them and Firoz Kassam to talk through their plans, most recently last week.

Clearly there are currently issues that the club needs to resolve and the city council is supportive of Oxford United and the good work they do in our local communities and will provide them with any advice that they need.

27. From Councillor Roz Smith to Councillor Brown – informing ward members

Would the leader agree that members should be informed of officers' high level actions in their wards in advance? For instance the serving of a Community Safety Order?

Written response

The council undertakes a huge volume of work across the city and having good officer / member relationships is very important to make sure we are able to meet the needs of residents.

From my experience our officers have a good understanding of what matters needs to be communicated with local members.

I would recommend that you meet with the community safety manager and talk through your specific concern about the CSO as any matters that could end up in court have more complex sensitivities around them and they cannot always be shared in advance of the action being undertaken.

Supplementary question

Do you think it is important that ward councillors are informed about major issues in our wards so we are not surprised by a large volume of correspondence about a problem we are not aware exists?

Response

As far as we are aware, as far as practicable officers do keep ward councillors apprised of significant matters in their ward, in advance, where appropriate and if you feel this is not happening then please contact the relevant officers.

28. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Brown - Oxford Democracy Cafes

Will the Leader join me in welcoming the new series of monthly Oxford Democracy Cafes – organised by Oxford Compass - to reinvigorate the discussion of democracy?

Discussion topics so far have included 'changing our broken electoral system', 'localism' and 'participative democracy'?

Will she also agree to receive the notes from these meetings to feed in to our own constitutional review?

Written response

I would be happy for the council to receive the notes from the Democracy Cafes and consider these. Anything that encourages debate and participation in the democratic process is to be welcomed. As a Council we encourage participation in democracy.

Where appropriate suggestions should be considered as part of the council's constitutional review alongside any other suggestions - subject of course to the bounds of the legislative framework within which we work.

29. From Councillor Goddard to Councillor Brown – Westgate disabled access

Could Cllr Brown update Council on her and the Chief Executive's contacts with the Westgate Alliance about the matter of access for disabled people, as mandated in the April meeting of Full Council?

Written response

Blue Badge parking spaces for the Westgate centre have been identified and are on the Westgate website. Pick up and drop off points and signage are outstanding and require permission from the Local Transport Authority. This issue has been raised with Westgate Alliance and the County Council as Local Transport Authority, but the matter has not yet been concluded. We will continue to pursue this matter with both parties to seek resolution.

Supplementary question

Will you provide further updates?

Response

Discussions need to take place and actions need to be agreed between the Westgate Alliance and Oxfordshire County Council as resolution of the issues are in fact their responsibility. We hope this will be resolved soon: we will ask for updates and keep councillors informed.

30. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Brown - expressway

Given the recent announcement on the Oxford-Cambridge Expressway and the mounting opposition in Oxfordshire against the project, will the Council re-consider its position NOT to oppose the Expressway road?

Written response

We discussed this at the last Full Council meeting. I raised this at the Growth Board meeting on 25 September and at my instigation the Growth Board agreed to write to Government Ministers and Highways England to explain the issues and express our concerns over both the uncertainty around the choice of route and that the expressway must be properly integrated with public transport.

So last week I signed and sent the following letter from the Oxfordshire Growth Board, which reflects our position on the Expressway:

The Oxfordshire Growth Board welcomes the announcement of a preferred corridor for the Expressway, a decision which removes some of the uncertainty around the project.

The Board is however disappointed that a decision has not been made on the route around Oxford at this stage, and that there are still two options under consideration. This is particularly concerning because:

- It does not allow our communities to fully understand the likely impact of the project and leaves a significant level of residual uncertainty in many locations;
- The speed/pace of consultation and next stages of the project means we are now looking at this decision potentially not being made for another two years;
- During this time, we will be working with and consulting communities on Oxfordshire's Joint Statutory Spatial Plan, so it will be harder to factor in the Expressway and what it might mean for this (and related) work.

This position is likely to impact a wide range of Stakeholders in scale/size, and carries the risk of making your proposed Engagement programme harder to manage.

At the Oxfordshire Growth Board's meeting on 25th September, an update report on Expressway was considered, which included reference to a set of principles which we are now looking to inform future decision-making. These say that any decision on the Expressway should:

- i.* Help to secure a more sustainable and integrated Oxfordshire Transport Network by:
 - a.* Linking with and strengthen key transport hubs, such as integrated bus, rail and Park and Ride facilities.

- b. Securing opportunities for the development of new Park and Ride connections to Oxford, Milton Keynes and Cambridge and rapid bus links between the three cities and surrounding market towns.
- c. Providing enhanced local connections to reduce transport pressures on local roads around key settlements.
 - ii.* Minimise its environmental damage and avoid sensitive areas such as areas with SSIs and protected habitats.
 - iii.* Support growth and the investigation of new settlement options through Joint Spatial Plans.
 - iv.* Be future proofed, in terms of taking account of modal shift and innovation such as the rise of autonomous vehicles.

We would welcome further discussion on how this project may progress to enable it to bring a greater degree of certainty to Oxfordshire's spatial, infrastructure and investment planning.

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