

To: Council
Date: 27 January 2020
Title of Report: Questions on Notice from members of Council and responses from the Cabinet Members and Leader

Introduction

1. Questions submitted by members of Council to the Cabinet 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 will be 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

Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing

1. From Councillor Gotch to Councillor Rowley – Housing delivery

Question

The City Council has a poor record over 10 years for building social housing — the surrounding District Councils have built more — perhaps because the City has been sitting on such sites as Elsfeld Hall (part of a 2 site deal) and Warren Crescent (following tests last year ,now confirmed as no danger to Lye Valley nature reserve) ; both sites received planning consent more than 5 years ago. Moreover, building

Written Response

There are significant land and cost constraints on developing sufficient social housing in Oxford, and whilst the Council and Registered Providers have maintained a delivery programme, the surrounding districts have the advantage of many more sites that tend to be a lot easier to develop (for example, the Warren Crescent site is awaiting the consent of the Secretary of State to move a notional footpath, that has never been marked out on the ground, a few metres to one side). Fluctuations in Government policy affecting Councils have also

1. From Councillor Gotch to Councillor Rowley – Housing delivery

social housing on City owned underoccupied garage sites has been discussed for 8 or 9 years, with practically nothing built. When are the JCB's going to start building houses and reducing the waiting lists?

been a significant problem.

Oxford is the only Council in Oxfordshire that manages social rented housing, and the only one which requires social rented housing to be part of developments, as opposed to "affordable" housing at up to 80% of market rent; though the District Councils do acknowledge the need for social rented housing and there are encouraging signs that their thinking is now beginning to reflect this. However, Oxford still has much more social rented housing than any of the Districts, and this gives us the ability - and the obligation - to improve the City's housing stock for the benefit of tenants and the climate.

A number of barriers to the Council developing more housing were removed in the HRA self-financing deal in 2012, and the Council responded by building 112 new Council Homes completing in 2015 - and in the HRA 2015/16 budget introducing an ambitious £100m new build and estate renewal plan partly funded through the greater borrowing allowed. In the same year, however, the Government announced a four-year 1% rent reduction, Pay to Stay and High Value Asset Levies which then restricted funding available again.

The Council has set up a Housing Company that is expected to provide greater resilience to sudden Government policy changes. It is delivering 354 new council homes at Barton, and additionally the Council's Housing Revenue Account currently expects to buy over 1,000 new homes from the company to be built over the course of its current business plan, with nearly 800 of these being Council homes at social rent.

This new programme is already delivering new homes at Barton; at the Rose Hill sites construction is under way; and construction is soon to start on a number of other sites, including Elsfield Hall. Further sites continue to be identified to ensure a sustainable development programme going forward, including garage sites – with proposals for one such site being approved by Cabinet in November.

1. From Councillor Gotch to Councillor Rowley – Housing delivery

Additionally, we continue to bring empty homes back into use; from having the highest number of empty homes in Oxfordshire ten years ago, we now have the lowest number, and the number of empty homes in Oxford has declined by well over half in that period.

2. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Rowley – The impact of Government interest rates on social housing delivery**Question**

In the days before the election the Government raised the interest rate for council borrowing by one percent, making it more difficult for councils to finance new council houses. How has this affected our social housing plans?

Written Response

Through the LGA, the Growth Board and our interactions with government we continue to lobby in relation to the increase in the Public Works Loan Board interest rates with respect to affordable housing delivery.

This increase required a necessary review of the Housing Company Business Plan and the Council's financial modelling.

The Housing Company is currently borrowing and repaying approximately £600m over the next 10 years, and this increased cost has added approximately another £10m to borrowing and the overall cost of the proposed developments.

However, the number of units proposed for delivery has not been reduced, and the proposed levels of council housing have not been diluted. The debt redemption period has been increased and housing company operating surplus margin has reduced from an average of 18% down to 15%, which presents greater challenge and risk, but has not required a change to the delivery programme.

3. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Clarkson – Oxford Guild of Tour Guides and Experience Oxfordshire

Question

As the City Patron of the Oxford Guild of Tour Guides, it has come to my attention that the Oxford Guild of Tour Guides is in an unfortunate dispute with Experience Oxfordshire, the city's award-winning Destination Management Organisation. Would the cabinet member update Council on the current situation and provide us with her understanding or what has gone wrong, and why?

Written Response

While this is a matter for Experience Oxfordshire and the Oxford Guild of Tour Guides, officers have sought an update from Experience Oxfordshire. I will also be meeting the Oxford Guild of Tour Guides to hear their concerns.

I understand from Experience Oxfordshire that as part of a continuing review of its services they made a decision to change the commission the Guild of Guides were paid on public tours as their costs had increased due to significant investment and increased costs in new systems, marketing and trade contracting. However Experience Oxfordshire are, I understand, confident that these changes should result in no significant loss in revenue to the guides, due to associated tour price increases and increased volume sales. However, the Guild of Guides executive, on behalf of the majority of their members, have decided not to agree to the new terms and therefore to end their longstanding relationship with Experience Oxfordshire.

I understand that from 6 January 2020, Experience Oxfordshire have sought to work with alternative experienced guides to undertake the delivery of Oxford Official Walking Tours. However, Experience Oxfordshire have made it clear to the Guild of Guides and the individual guides that are members of the Guild, that should they wish to continue to work with the DMO under the new terms at any point in the future then the door is always open. As a result several individual guides, who are members of the guild, have now agreed to Experience Oxfordshire's new terms and are continuing to provide high quality tours of the City.

4. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Clarkson – Experience Oxfordshire subsidy

Question

At the Budget meeting in February 2019 our Liberal Democrat Group strongly opposed the phased withdrawal of the Council subsidy to Experience Oxfordshire. Is the Cabinet Member aware that this has led to EO having to increase fees and charges across private sector partners to which there is much resistance and could result in the organisation not being continued to be supported. Will the Cabinet member now work to restore EO's subsidy in full?

Written Response

Over the past 9 years the City Council has provided over £1.8m of tax payer subsidy to Experience Oxfordshire. The decision to cut Experience Oxfordshire's subsidy was a difficult budget decision, based on the on-going financial pressures the Council is facing, which have not changed, and the need to protect core Council services.

Our aim is to support the organisation to become more sustainable, and this, alongside the difficult financial position of the Council, means that we will not be in a position to fully restore the previous subsidy. However, the City Council is working closely with Experience Oxfordshire on the future relationship between us and the nature of any support from us following the conclusion of the current agreement in March 2021. Part of the shift towards the organisation becoming more sustainable will require a greater contribution from other partners, including private sector organisations.

5. From Landell Mills to Councillor Clarkson – Boswells and the City Centre

Question

Boswells is to close. We are saddened to hear of the forthcoming closure of this Oxford institution. Does the Councillor accept that the loss of Boswells is due in large measure to increased competition from Westgate, where there is ample cheap car parking, contributing to the ongoing undermining of the collective retail offer from George Street and Cornmarket. Is the City Council developing new plans for the Cornmarket and St George area to ensure its ongoing viability as a commercial and shopping area? What is the timetable and

Written Response

I was deeply saddened to hear the news that Boswells is to close, not least because of the impact this will have for staff there, some of who have worked at that store for a long time.

I do not agree that the opening of the Westgate has led to the closure of Boswells. Indeed, rather, the Directors of Boswell referenced the draw of Bicester Village and cited "the pressures of online retail and changing shopping habits" as key factors in their decision. The Westgate Centre has brought scores of new brands to Oxford city centre with associated new jobs.

The issues facing the high street are being seen across the UK and while we did see a slight decline in footfall in Oxford in 2019, Oxford's city centre is performing well ahead when set against its counterparts both regionally and nationally levels. Moreover, footfall is well up on

5. From Landell Mills to Councillor Clarkson – Boswells and the City Centre

brief?

levels recorded prior to the Westgate opening. The Council's audit of vacant units shows that 30 businesses have opened retail, food & drink or services businesses in the city centre since the summer. Of those, 5 are in Cornmarket and George Street, and agents for the majority of the remaining vacant units on those two streets are in active discussion with would-be occupiers.

The upcoming City Centre Vision and Action Plan will feature proposals for Cornmarket and George Street, including on public realm, dwell space and developing an identity. In the meantime, City Council officers continue to work closely with landlords, agents and existing businesses on initiatives to further strengthen their offer and the streets' vitality.

6. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Clarkson – City Centre Public Attitudes Survey

Question

How many people responded to the Public Attitudes Survey on the City Centre and how many of those objected to the only transport related question being that concerning "cyclists riding irresponsibly"?

Written Response

We had a great response with 1577 members of the public completing the survey about behaviours in the City Centre. Previously, these behaviours had been defined using a Public Spaces Protection Order, which included breaching the existing ban on cycling through Cornmarket and Queen Street between 10am and 6pm. The survey was not anti cyclist in any way and the intention was to find out whether or not people still think cycling through pedestrian areas should continue to be restricted. We are also very interested in anti social behaviour by motorists and will take comments on this subject into account when we review all the feedback, which is extensive.

7. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Turner – Stealth Tax

Question

Residents complain of a 'stealth tax' by way of charges for garden and bulky waste removal, funeral services, pest control. Can the Cabinet member advise the percentage by which revenue raised from these services, together with revenue from other environmental, regulatory, licensing and planning services, has increased over the past decade? How does this compare with the rate of inflation over the same period? What is the average yearly payment made by every home in Oxford in respect of these charges on top of its average council tax bill?

Written Response

I am surprised that the councillor does not acknowledge an important reason for the increase in charges for particular services, which is the decade of austerity, begun by her party when in government. Our changes are by no means unique in local government, and indeed we try to keep charges fair and to a minimum. For instance, our garden waste service is provided free to those on the lowest incomes, unlike the approach taken (as I understand it) in our neighbouring Lib Dem led local authorities Vale of White Horse, and South Oxfordshire District Council, where all are charged. I am also surprised that residents have complaint of a "stealth tax" in respect of bulky item collection. I trust the councillor explained to them that it is free of charge in Oxford, unlike in neighbouring, Lib Dem led councils.

On the figures: Fees and charges increases over the last ten years vary by service, depending on the individual cost drivers. The table below summarises movements in the unit charges for the highlighted services.

	Year 1 2011/12	Year 10 2020/21	Average Annual Increase
RPI (preceding Dec)	228.4	291.9	2.8%
Garden Waste	£35	£51	4.6%
Bulky Waste	Nil	Nil	n/a
Burial Services *	£460	£700	5.2%
Pest Control **	£100	£105	0.5%

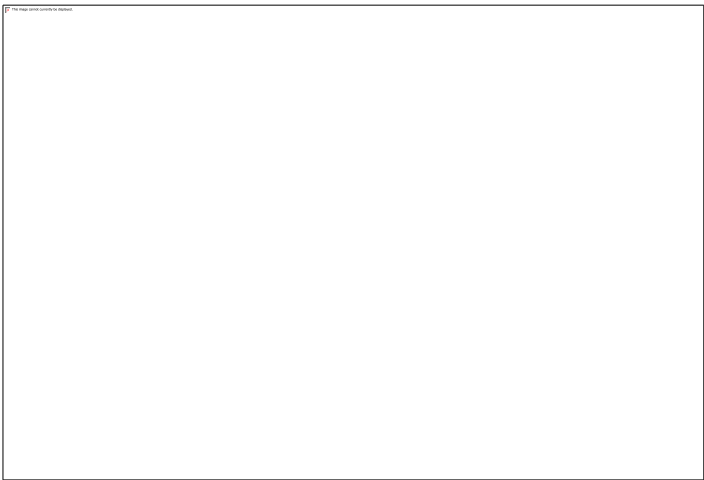
* Adult Interment fee for resident

** Flea treatment used as typical example

The increased charges for Garden Waste and Burial Services (adult interment fee) over the ten year period reflect the general increase in charge to a level which more accurately effects the actual cost of the service.

An analysis of the income between 2011/12 and

7. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Turner – Stealth Tax

	<p>2018/19 the last actual full year income figures is given below. Whilst to some extent this increase in income is derived from the increase in charges, clearly there is also variation in the take up of the service as well as the service offered. For example in respect of garden waste the take up has increased significantly since it was first launched. In respect of regulatory services the council phased in its HMO licencing scheme over a number of years commencing in 2011 and the increase in planning income reflects the significant amount of regeneration in the city as well as the fact that the charges for such services are set by Government.</p>  <p>It would be misleading to break this down by household, because many of these charges only apply to business and landlords.</p> <p>In summary income from services provided, provides a useful source of revenue for the council. It charges residents and businesses who use the service and against a backdrop of reducing Government Grant in the order of £6million over the period it is essential alongside efficiency savings if the council is to maintain all its other services that are essential to the citizens of Oxford.</p>
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8. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Turner – Unspent Government grant

Question	Written Response
The city has received a Government grant to help local businesses for the 4 years from	Yes, we look at the spend as we near the financial year end, and consider how we utilise any remaining grant. We are proactive in

8. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Turner – Unspent Government grant

2017-2021. Any funds not used up during a year have to be paid back to the Government. Between 2017-19, the City paid back £111,897. This year only £73,732 has been spent so far out of a grant of £96,000. Can the Cabinet member confirm that the remaining £22,000 will be spent before the end of this financial year, or can we expect it to be paid back to the Government?

awarding this grant. In the first year of the scheme we like most authorities initially expected business to apply for the grant but when take up was limited we applied the account to the account direct which we continue to do. During the year businesses vacate, Rateable Values are adjusted on appeal or when a split/merger occurs and also some awards are returned where State Aid limits are reached, hence the spend can fluctuate from month to month. If we award over our grant amount then the cost of that falls to Oxford City Council, hence us always keeping a pot of money back for Rateable Value changes that we don't yet know about.

The amounts of grant awarded over the 4 year period are high in the first year and taper down to around £14k in the last year of the scheme next year. The scheme is to cover increases in business rates following the revaluation in 2017. Some businesses receive transitional relief to cover these increased costs anyway so don't need the grant. The transitional relief tapers down so at the time the businesses lose the transitional relief we don't have the discretionary grant to award. Also there is no mechanism within the scheme to roll over unspent amounts at the end of the year.

It is likely that we will top up those currently in receipt this year by a further percentage, to ensure the grant is spent, but we do need to consider changes to the current rates payable for those currently in receipt of the grant until the end of September 2020, to allow for any changes to the amount of Rates due.

9. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Upton – Cyclists and markets in Broad Street	
<p>Question</p> <p>Will the portfolio holder offer assurance to cyclists that future markets held in Broad Street will prioritise the retention of cycle parking provision over and above car parking provision and offer a safe cycle through-route that does not create conflict with pedestrians.</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>I am working closely with officers from both City and County to look at the location and layout options for future temporary markets in Broad Street. This review is considering how we could accommodate two-way cycling, and exploring options to maintain cycle parking provision in the area. Cllr Clarkson is working with the market organisers to ensure that they can maintain the good and safe operation of the market with any change of layout. Once this work has been progressed in more detail, I will engage key stakeholders to discuss the proposals.</p>

10. From Councillor Harris to Councillor Upton – Gilligan report on cycling	
<p>Question</p> <p>Does the Council expect to implement any part of the Gilligan report on Cycling in Oxford during 2020? If so please give details.</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>Cycling is a key priority for the City Council as we seek to promote its health, environmental and economic benefits for the city. The need to deliver high quality cycling infrastructure, as identified in the Gilligan report, is a long-term exercise and requires partnership working with the County Council and other key stakeholders, alongside significant infrastructure funding. It is important that we build on the report to produce costed and evidenced proposals, in order to secure the necessary funds.</p> <p>The County and City Councils' Connecting Oxford proposals, if implemented, are expected to deliver significant traffic reductions, which will create opportunities for both redesigning and re-prioritising road space in favour of more sustainable modes of travel, including cycling. To support this, by summer 2020, the City Council, working with the County Council and the University of Oxford, will commission a strategic cycleways plan for Oxford. The project will build on the</p>

10. From Councillor Harris to Councillor Upton – Gilligan report on cycling

	<p>Gilligan report and identify proposals for a safe, consistent and well-connected network of cycling and walking routes from surrounding towns and villages into Oxford. It is envisaged that by 2021 the partners will have deliverable route proposals to bid for government funding.</p> <p>The City and County Council are also working on a phased installation of new city centre cycle parking. Phase 1 has identified 114 new cycle racks (228 spaces), and will shortly go to consultation, with a view to delivery by summer 2020. An initial scoping exercise on potential phase 2 installations is underway.</p> <p>The County Council, as the transport authority, is preparing a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan for Oxford. This will set out a series of measures and programmes to achieve a transformational change in the levels of cycling and the attractiveness of walking in Oxford.</p> <p>The County Council is also undertaking County-wide work in this area. In 2020 it will be developing its Oxfordshire Local Transport and Connectivity Plan which will also provide a framework for interventions in this area.</p>
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11. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Upton – Headington Hill Park

Question	Written Response
<p>Will the Portfolio Holder consider re-classifying Headington Hill Park as an arboretum; reflecting its history and informing future management practices.</p>	<p>We would be open to exploring the possibility of reclassifying Headington Hill Park as an arboretum, but in order to do this an assessment would need to be undertaken to compare the benefits and possible drawbacks of doing so.</p> <p>This would need to include various stakeholder input and a understanding of the implementation and ongoing costs to the council before any decision could be taken.</p>

12. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Upton – Public Health Funerals

Question

How many Public Health funerals has the Council had to pick up over the last year, and is this number increasing? Are they all cremations, and are families able to attend, and retain the ashes of their deceased relatives?

Written Response

The Council dealt with 5 Public Health Funerals in 2019. The numbers have decreased over the last 3 years. All funerals were cremations in 2019 but we do carry out burials, for example if there is a religious reason. Families can attend and ashes can be collected by family members.

13. From Councillor Harris to Councillor Hollingsworth – Local Plan and the climate change emergency

Question

What amendments if any has the Council proposed to the Local Plan to reflect its declaration of a climate change emergency?

Written Response

The Local Plan already contains a wide range of policies designed to address the need to tackle climate change, including but not limited to higher environmental standards for new buildings, charging points for electric vehicles, and the requirement for a much higher proportion of new sites to be built as car free developments. It includes policies requiring a phased approach to achieving zero carbon on new residential and student developments by 2030. These are among the most ambitious policies in the country in this area.

The Local Plan Hearings finished last month, and we are now at the final formal stages before the adoption of the Local Plan. Once a Local Plan has been submitted – as ours was in March of 2019 – only the appointed Inspectors can make modifications to it. If the Council were to make new modifications to the Plan at this stage, the Plan would need to be withdrawn and re-consulted upon, meaning the entire process of consultation and public hearings would need to be restarted, delaying the adoption of this Plan by up to two years and therefore meaning that the ambitious new policies it contains could not be brought into force.

Future iterations of the Local Plan can and must aim to improve standards still further, while complying with whatever the requirements of the NPPF are at the time.

14. From Councillor Henwood to Councillor Hollingsworth – Enforcement or CPO action at the Priory update

Question

Occupied since 1445, the Priory in Littlemore has remained derelict for many years, and is now considered to be at 'risk'.

Written Response

Works have been agreed, and at the timing of writing are due to begin this month (January 2020).

14. From Councillor Henwood to Councillor Hollingsworth – Enforcement or CPO action at the Priory update

The site is owned by Oxford City Council and leased to Firoka, former Oxford United owner Firoz Kassam's company who also own Ozone and the Oxford United Stadium.

As part of the original planning application, a condition was incorporated into the planning application that the applicant repair the grade II listed building. Last year Oxford City Council, sought enforcement action to make Firoka honour the agreement. Can the portfolio holder update council on the status of the enforcement action, or whether Firoka's architect(s) report can now be released to the public? Have the proposed works been agreed, and is there a commencement date?

15. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Hollingsworth – Community Infrastructure Levy

Question

Constitutionally, larger decisions to allocate CIL monies are a matter for full Council. However, in practice I believe the Head of Planning Services has been authorising CIL expenditure for payments up to £500,000. I believe there also exists a schedule of forward projects earmarked for CIL funding, but I do not know whether these are prioritised in any way. Could we be told :

- a) what percentage of CIL monies are typically allocated without being brought to Council in advance?
- b) how the CIL spend is prioritised?

Written Response

This question is evidence of a common misunderstanding about what CIL is. This Council has always treated CIL as being one of the sources of funding for the capital programme. Decisions about what schemes to fund within the capital programme have been previously made as part of the budget, and are now made under the new capital programme approval process agreed by Council. When a scheme is approved for inclusion in the capital programme the funding source or sources are identified. There is no separate programme for CIL schemes, nor is there any 'schedule of forward projects earmarked for CIL funding'.

CIL cannot be applied to every scheme in the capital programme, because the rules governing what CIL receipts can be used for are more restrictive than for other forms of receipt or borrowing. Each Council with a CIL scheme has to publish a list known as a Regulation 123 List of the types of infrastructure scheme on which CIL can be spent, but that is not a list of schemes on which it will be spent. It is this

15. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Hollingsworth – Community Infrastructure Levy

crucial distinction that seems to cause confusion. Government regulations on CIL, and what is permitted to be included on a Regulation 123 list, vary from time to time, and the latest guidance can be found on Government websites.

All CIL expenditure is thus allocated in exactly the same way as any other spending on the capital programme, with exactly the same reporting and delegation arrangements, as set out in the Constitution, as for any other spending that makes up that programme.

The prioritisation process is exactly the same as for any other spending within the capital programme, using the new capital programme approval mechanism and decision making processes.

16. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Hollingsworth – Development on the sites in the 2015 Sites and Housing Document

Question

How many of the sites identified in the 2015 Sites and Housing Document have actually been developed? What is the Council doing to encourage appropriate development on those sites that still have not been developed for housing?

Written Response

The Sites and Housing Plan (not Document) for 2011 to 2026, which was adopted by this Council in 2013 (not 2015) and forms part of the current Development Plan, contains 63 different allocated sites. These sites include residential, employment, student and mixed use sites, and vary significantly in size and complexity. As the dates in the correct title of the document suggests, the Sites and Housing Plan 2011 to 2026 assumes that these 63 sites would be developed over the period from 2011 to 2026.

Of these 63 sites roughly half have been wholly or partially developed, while others have extant planning permissions with development not yet under way. All sites not commenced have been included, with updated policies where appropriate, in the new Local Plan 2016-2036 alongside newly identified and allocated sites.

Progress on sites identified in the Sites and Housing Plan has been reported each year in the Annual Monitoring Report, the most recent update of which was considered by Cabinet and

16. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Hollingsworth – Development on the sites in the 2015 Sites and Housing Document

Scrutiny late last year.

The projected timescales for delivery of all housing and student housing sites in the new Local Plan are set out in the published evidence base and can be found at the Council website [here](https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/6895/0cc8_-_appendix_1_-_housing_site_trajectory):
([https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/6895/0cc8 - appendix 1 - housing site trajectory](https://www.oxford.gov.uk/downloads/file/6895/0cc8_-_appendix_1_-_housing_site_trajectory)).

Once the new Local Plan is adopted the Annual Monitoring Reports will measure progress against this proposed trajectory.

In seeking clarification about what the councillor was asking (as the document name and dates were confusing) it became apparent that the councillor was actually interested in the timescales for 3 of the 63 sites listed in the Sites and Housing Plan, which are in effect two sites in the new Local Plan.

The first of these - Government Buildings and Harcourt House, now SP17 – was the subject of a session at the public Hearings into the Local Plan last month, with the Inspectors making some recommendations to adjust the wording of the policy; the final wording of the policy is subject to the process of consultation on Modifications to be carried out on behalf of the Inspector next month.

The second – Union Street Car Park, now policy SP60 – is also subject to minor wording changes required by the Inspector, and will also therefore be confirmed after the consultation on Modifications.

My advice to the councillor is that when seeking information on specific sites the question as worded should refer to those sites.

On the broader second question, and referring also to new sites included for the first time in the draft Local Plan 2016-2036, the Council is working in a number of ways to bring sites forward for development.

Where the Council owns an as yet undeveloped and allocated site the Housing Company is working to bring forward development plans.

Where sites are owned or controlled by third

16. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Hollingsworth – Development on the sites in the 2015 Sites and Housing Document

parties the Council’s planning team are co-ordinating efforts to make sure that those sites are brought forward in as timely a way as possible, in particular where planning permissions have been granted but development work has not yet started.

In instances where sites cannot be developed before necessary infrastructure is put in place or where additional investment is needed, work is being co-ordinated with the County Council and the Growth Board to ensure that appropriate funding – for example from the Growth deal or from the Housing Infrastructure Fund - is identified to enable development to take place.

17. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Hollingsworth – Seacourt P&R extension costs

Question

Original:

The initial cost of the Seacourt extension was £2m. It has now gone past £7m and currently stands at £8.2m. How long will it take to recoup this cost?

Revised:

The initial cost of the Seacourt extension was £2m. It currently stands at £6.872m¹. How long will it take to recoup this cost?

Written Response

The total approved budget to deliver the current scheme is £5,156,120. The payback period is expected to be approximately 17 years, assuming that there are inflationary increases to car parking charges, as was set out in the report to Cabinet and Council.

In seeking clarification on where the entirely incorrect figures in the question – both as originally asked and in its revised form - had come from, it became apparent that the Councillor had added together figures found an Oxford Mail story, apparently without reading the (entirely accurate) story itself let alone the Council report on which it was based.

The Oxford Mail story of 5 December 2019, which the Councillor claims says that the costs of the project have increased by £1.227m, does not in fact do so. The story instead correctly reports on the details of the re-phasing of the Capital Programme as outlined in paragraph of 10 of the Q2 Integrated Performance Monitoring Report which went to the

¹ The original question quoted a figure of £8.2m; this was corrected as shown and the source identified as an article in the Oxford Mail, 5 December 2019

17. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Hollingsworth – Seacourt P&R extension costs	
	Finance Scrutiny Panel, where it explained that that part of the spending profile for the Seacourt project would be moved forward from the 2019 to the 2020 financial year.

18. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Hollingsworth – Seacourt P&R extension	
Question	Written Response
The land earmarked for the Seacourt extension is currently underwater. Canoeists have named it the Seacourt Lake. Does this flooding, now annual, affect the decision to build the extension?	The frequency, timing and duration of flood events, and the impact of the extension and of the Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme, were fully considered at both the project development and planning stages, and were exhaustively discussed in Cabinet, Council and at the planning committees. The design of the Seacourt extension allows for seasonal flooding within the sub structure make up, via an attenuation system, as required by the planning permission.

19. From Councillor Landell Mills to Councillor Hollingsworth – Connecting Oxford	
Question	Written Response
Will the Councillor release the evidence base behind the decision not to include congestion charging in the Connecting Oxford proposal?	<p>The potential costs and benefits of congestion charging were spelled out in briefings open to all councillors from the City and County Councils, and explanations of why certain options were preferred over others were included in the 2019 consultation. I'm sure that if the Councillor was unable to attend the briefings he will be able to request a copy of the relevant information.</p> <p>Further, the Councillor will be aware that this question is clearly answered within the Cabinet papers on Connecting Oxford published by County and City Councils on 13 and 14 January respectively. These state that:</p> <p>“The councils believe the Connecting Oxford proposals are the fairest, most effective way of reducing traffic. Alternatives such as a congestion charge have been considered but are not being progressed at this stage because a congestion charge would not achieve – and sustain – the same level of traffic reduction as traffic restrictions,</p>

19. From Councillor Landell Mills to Councillor Hollingsworth – Connecting Oxford

particularly if it applied only to the city centre. A congestion charge covering the whole city would require a large number of enforcement cameras and involve hundreds of thousands of daily transactions; this would make it expensive to operate, with less funding available for transport improvements.

“Several individuals and organisations, including some large employers, expressed support for alternative options, including a congestion charge or expansion of the Workplace Parking Levy (WPL) area. Alternative options will be considered at the next stage, as required as part of the Department for Transport business case process. Any alternative options pursued would need to be deliverable and proportionate, and it is important that any WPL scheme delivers clear benefits to employers who pay for it and their employees.”

Cabinet Member for Safer Communities and Customer Focused Services

20. From Councillor Henwood to Councillor Chapman – Motion rotations	
<p>Question</p> <p>Currently only motions from individuals related to a group are rotated, this practice is dormitory and doesn't provide an equal opportunity for an independent to present a motion. Can we be updated as the whether Labour group will allow individuals who are independents be rotated.</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>The procedure rules set out in agenda item 12 do provide an opportunity for non-grouped independent members to submit motions to Council.</p> <p>The suggestion is that any single independent member should have the same opportunity to have their motions debated by Council as all the members of any political group collectively, which does not seem fair or equal to me.</p> <p>I can confirm that this request has been considered and is not agreed.</p> <p>It is recognised in law that councils are generally organised into political groups. Across local government procedures for meetings acknowledge the role and status of political groups. Individual non-grouped independent members are not political groups or treated as such.</p> <p>In my view the procedure rules strike the right balance by enabling individual non-grouped independent members to submit motions to Council while recognising the primacy of political groups.</p>

21. From Councillor Henwood to Councillor Chapman – Constitution cross party review committee	
<p>Question</p> <p>Currently only members belonging to a party belong to this committee, can a more inclusive approach be considered that will permit the participation of independent members. The constitution currently does not take into account independent councillor views.</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>All members of Council are able to make representations to myself as the chair of the cross party working group or to officers about the provisions of the Council's Constitution and indeed the questioner has done so.</p> <p>As the Council is organised into political groups, any informal cross-party working groups will broadly reflect the political balance of Council and as such nominations are sought from political groups.</p> <p>Non-grouped independent members are not political groups and, by definition, do not purport to represent or speak for any other members. On this basis I am not convinced of the need to change the</p>

21. From Councillor Henwood to Councillor Chapman – Constitution cross party review committee

	<p>established approach to cross-party working.</p> <p>That said I would be happy to commit to ensuring that the views of independent councillors continue to be given due consideration in future Constitution reviews.</p>
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22. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Chapman – Long Service Awards

Question	Written Response
<p>I recently had the pleasure of presenting the Long Service Awards to City Council staff. I was surprised to learn that the City Council only gives out an award after 25 years of service. Would the leader agree with me that we should recognise shorter periods of public service as do other public bodies?</p>	<p>The current arrangements for long service awards, including the nature of awards and periods of service to be recognised, is being reviewed by the HR team. As a result, proposals for a new scheme, including associated costs, will be developed.</p>

Cabinet Member for Supporting Local Communities

No questions

23. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Hayes – Zero Emission Zone	
<p>Question</p> <p>Would the Portfolio Holder agree that is more accurate to describe the present ‘Zero Emission Zone’ 2020 proposals to restrict vehicles and improve air quality in the City Centre as a Low Emission Zone, Ultra Low Emission Zone or Clean Air Zone (terms used by the Government and other Council’s planning similar schemes) as – in addition to the range of exempt vehicle types and the fact that restrictions only operate at certain times of the day – anyone with a polluting vehicle can enter the zone for a fee of £10.</p> <p>(Vehicle emissions have the same impact on people’s lungs whether they are paid for or not).</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>The terms proposed including Low Emission Zone, Ultra Low Emission Zone and Clean Air Zone are all charging schemes with established definitions. Is the Ultra-Low Emission Zone in London, backed by Liberal Democrats, any less ultra-low because polluting cars have to pay to come in and out of it? Bath and Portsmouth are Liberal Democrat councils creating clean air zones which charge polluting vehicles. Just because polluting vehicle drivers pay, does that mean those councils are not clean air zones? As far as I know Green Party and Liberal Democrat spokespeople in London, Bath, and Portsmouth, and other areas with proposed Low Emission Zones, Ultra Low Emission Zones, and Clean Air Zones are not making this criticism, so why should it apply here?</p> <p>The many experts we have consulted are completely confident that we are using a definition which is correct and justified. Our ZEZ is the only zone in the country proposed to only allow zero emission vehicles free access.</p>

24. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Hayes – Oxfordshire Trees for the Future	
<p>Question</p> <p>Does the Council support the Oxfordshire Trees for the Future target to double tree cover in the County as part of the Friends of the Earth national strategy to double UK tree cover by 2045? How many trees are being planted in Oxford each year and how does this align with the target?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>During the summer of 2018 Oxford City Council worked in partnership with Treeconomics to survey the trees in Oxford. Using i-Tree Eco, the team quantified the structure of Oxford’s urban forest resource and found Oxford’s urban forest contains an estimated 248,200 trees with 73 different tree species. That’s nearly two trees per person, double the ratio for London.</p> <p>Trees are important and we are committed to planting more. Planting of trees needs to be part of</p>

24. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Hayes – Oxfordshire Trees for the Future

our response to the current climate emergency and we need to ensure of course that trees go in appropriate places and that we support a wide range of biodiversity such as grassland as this also has a very important role in carbon sequestration and the provision of wider biodiversity benefits. We must understand the impacts and potential unintended consequences of such a policy and in a city like Oxford with very limited land availability and internationally recognised grassland habitats, we must ensure we balance the needs of all ecosystems.

In the past five years the City Council has planted 7000 new trees across the city, including 2000 new trees during National Tree Week. We have worked with 'Oxfordshire Trees for The Future' to plant trees at the edge of recreation grounds across the city and we continue to work with this group to explore how we can increase tree cover further across the city.

25. From Councillor Wade to Councillor Linda Smith – Rogue landlords

Question

Was Oxford City Council one of the 100 plus councils across England awarded a share of over £2 million to target unscrupulous or criminal Landlords? Did we apply for this grant?

Written Response

We applied for this grant and were awarded the full amount of our bid for £70,788. This will allow us to develop a toolkit to claim back unpaid financial penalties and carry out 1,000 visits to properties in the Private Rented Sector.

26. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Brown – Air BnB

Question

Whilst short lets such as AirBnB contribute to Oxford's hospitality industry (albeit at the risk of undermining hotel and guest house business) they do nothing to mitigate the city's housing crisis or build neighbourhood communities, and they potentially push up rents. What powers does the Council have to manage these short lets and/or limit their spread, and are we using them to the fullest extent possible? Do we check that Council-owned properties are not being sub-let on AirBnB?

Written Response

Our powers are limited because short lets do not require licensing and we have repeatedly called on the government to tighten the national legislation. Using a house for short lets can be a change of use in planning law but very few councils have taken any action. However, our Planning Enforcement Service does investigate cases and take action and there is currently an appeal underway against the first enforcement notice that was served. The ownership of any short let that is brought to our attention is checked as a matter of routine.

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

27. From Councillor Simmons to Councillor Brown – Climate Protesters

Question	Written Response
<p>Will the Leader join with me in condemning attempts by the police — in a guide intended for use by public bodies (such as teachers, local authority officers and others) — to label climate protesters and groups such as Extinction Rebellion as extremists?</p>	<p>As the Councillor is aware, Oxford City Council works closely with Extinction Rebellion Oxford. At our invitation they joined the independent Advisory Group that helped establish our Oxford Citizens Assembly on Climate Change and their contributions were welcomed. We have also commended the activism of Oxford’s School Climate Strikers in helping raise public awareness of the climate emergency. Therefore, it is evident that we have a different perspective on these groups to the authors of the guide. I do however, note that the police have now withdrawn this particular piece of guidance.</p>

28. From Councillor Wolff to Councillor Brown – Flag flying on 31 January 2020

Question	Written Response
<p>On January 31st, the day on which the UK will formally leave the European Union, I understand that Group Leaders have agreed to fly the European flag from the Town Hall as an act of defiance. Would you consider flying it at half mast as an act of mourning?</p>	<p>I can confirm that it has been agreed to fly the European flag on 31 January as a proud recognition of our city’s ongoing commitment to the EU. It has also been agreed to fly the flags of our twin cities in the EU on consecutive days from 3-7 February to demonstrate an ongoing commitment to our links with those cities post-Brexit.</p> <p>Flags are normally flown at half-mast to mark the announcement of a death or the funeral of an individual. As the EU is an international organisation that will continue when the UK leaves I think flying the European flag at half-mast would not be appropriate and it may be open to different interpretations, potentially implying disrespect to the EU which is clearly not our intention.</p>

29. From Councillor Gant to Councillor Brown – Oxford Expressway**Question**

Following the General Election last month it has been reported that Transport Secretary Grant Shapps MP has been unable to find time to honour a pre-election pledge to meet local stakeholders as part of a review of government plans for the Expressway. Given the relevance of this project to other initiatives including the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, and the previously-expressed views of this and other local councils, will the Leader join me in urging Mr Shapps to honour his commitment as a matter of urgent priority?

Written Response

Yes.

30. From Councillor Henwood to Councillor Brown – Parish Council sign-up to climate emergency**Question**

Parish councils and community centres are valued public bodies that serve respective communities. Could the council leader write to these bodies asking them to consider signing up to the climate emergency, and seek advice on what these organisations are doing to combat the climate emergency?

Written Response

At the meeting with Parish Councils that I chaired last November we had a formal discussion of lessons from our Citizen Assembly because we know that they are keen to work with us on the climate emergency. Officers have already contacted Parish Councils to see what we do collaboratively to respond on climate emergency and to offer support.

31. From Councillor Harris to Councillor Brown – 5G**Question**

What advice if any has the Council received on the safety of 5G radio wave transmission?

Written Response

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), Future Telecoms Infrastructure Review (FTIR), and other policy documents issued by Building Digital UK (BDUK), all refer to the importance of high-quality digital infrastructure to the UK economy. The delivery of full fibre broadband infrastructure, as well as mobile infrastructure, including 5G, is a priority to achieve the government's targets set out in the FTIR. The draft Local Plan has been informed by these documents and aligns with paragraphs 112 to 116 of the National Planning Policy framework (NPPF). Paragraph 112 of the NPPF states that

31. From Councillor Harris to Councillor Brown – 5G

“planning policies and decisions should support the expansion of electronic communications networks, including next generation mobile technology (such as 5G) and full fibre broadband connections.

Public Health England (PHE) has issued guidance on health and 5G, concluding that a) while it is possible that there may be a small increase in overall exposure to radio waves when 5G is added to an existing network, or in a new area, the overall exposure is expected to remain low relative to guidelines, and b) as such, there should be no consequences for public health. PHE is committed to monitoring the evidence applicable to 5G and other radio technologies, and to revising its advice, should that be necessary.

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