

**To: Council**

**Date: 27 January 2020**

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

## **Introduction**

1. Addresses made by members of the public to the Council, and questions put to the Cabinet members or Leader, registered by the deadline in the Constitution, are below. Any written responses available are also below.
2. The text reproduces that sent in the speakers and represents the views of the speakers. This is not to be taken as statements by or on behalf of the Council
3. This report will be republished after the Council meeting as part of the minutes pack. This will list the full text of speeches delivered as submitted, summaries of speeches delivered which differ significantly from those submitted, and any further responses.

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

### Addresses in part 2

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2. Address by Oxford Community Forum, Licensing of Private Sector Homes
3. Address by Nigel Day - UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons
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6. Question by Artwell – Citizens' Assembly

## Addresses in part 2

### 1. Address by Magdalene Sacranie, City of Compassion

[www.charterforcompassion.org](http://www.charterforcompassion.org)

Good Evening Lord Mayor, Council Members, Ladies and Gentlemen. Thank-you for the opportunity to address you all.

My name is Magdalene Sacranie. I would like to speak about the Charter for Compassion. I will explain what the charter is, and then speak about what it would mean for Oxford to become a City of Compassion.

In February 2008, Karen Armstrong, academic, renowned author and educator, and most importantly, an Oxford graduate, wrote the book:

“12 Steps to a Compassionate Life”.

She believes that the key to a better life and, ultimately, a better world is COMPASSION, recognizing suffering and DOING something about it. The TED organization awarded Karen Armstrong their \$100,000 dollar prize for this book and the promise to help her build a global society based on the Golden Rule and to create, launch and propagate a world-wide Charter for Compassion.

And so, 800 years after the Magna Carta, we have The Charter for Compassion. The charter is a co-operative effort to restore compassionate thought and action to the centre of political, moral and spiritual life.

On our changing fragile planet, everybody has become our neighbour and the Golden Rule, lying at the heart of all cultures, philosophies and world religions, the “ethic of reciprocity”, has become an urgent necessity.

In November 2009, the Charter for Compassion was unveiled at The Dalai Lama Centre for Peace and Education in Vancouver, which became the first City of Compassion.

The Dalai Lama who says that we need to cultivate a warm-hearted concern for ALL others, has centres here in Oxford pioneering compassion-based education programmes. The evidence shows that children and adults can increase their resilience, their social skills and their emotional wellbeing through compassion training.

In a practical manner, the Charter for Compassion works with cities, its citizens and local governments to identify areas of concern: such as, improving education, services for the elderly, elimination of homelessness and hunger, improvement of health care and social services, restoring and beautifying our green spaces as well as working collectively to create sustainable action plans.

Signing the Charter for Compassion, gives a city access to a network of more than 350 Compassionate Cities around the world, including Rotterdam and Leiden in Holland and Pune in India and Karachi in Pakistan.

This network and sharing of evidence based materials is happening as we speak.

What have the compassionate cities achieved?

In a recent interview, Karen Armstrong explained that ‘they are all dealing with many urban problems, such as racism and homelessness’ She gave the following example of when a mosque in Louisville, USA, was vandalised the Mayor appeared on TV, to ask for volunteers to help clean it up; a thousand people of all ages showed up.

In Karachi there is massive poverty and many children camp under large viaducts filled with rubble.

The Karachi compassion team asked the city council to clear the rubbish under a bridge and build a state of the art shelter for the local people. This included a classroom where University students then came to teach children from poor neighbourhoods. This is a pilot project and when it has been fully tested the city council will build similar facilities in other much needed areas.

There is so much that is fantastic about this beautiful city of Oxford. Declaring Oxford a “City of Compassion” celebrates and validates all the successes, hard work and achievements of all the 100’s of institutions, governmental and private, places of education, religion and businesses not to mention the work of charities, NGO’s and grassroots organizations---and at the same time re-focuses and re-sets the City of Oxford’s core values of always considering “the other”.

### **Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Partnerships, Councillor Brown**

I’d like to thank Ms Sacranie for her address and for highlighting the importance of compassion in public life.

I am fairly sure that all of us here were motivated to become councillors by compassion for the citizens we represent and a desire to tackle inequalities and problems that particularly affect the more vulnerable. And this is reflected in the aims and priorities that we have agreed as a council and the debates we frequently have in this chamber. As our new draft Corporate Strategy sets out – *“we prioritise tackling inequality – our services, investments and policy-making are all designed to address the social and financial inequalities across Oxford. We value diversity and seek to build community cohesion. We want to ensure all Oxford’s citizens have fair opportunities and a real share in the city’s future.”*

That principle drives the work we do, from our investment and focus on tackling the climate emergency and poor air quality; our work to prevent homelessness and support those who are sleeping rough into a life off the streets; as a City of Sanctuary accommodating and supporting refugees and asylum seekers to our support for those on low incomes and our work with and investment in our communities and community groups. We do not have all of the levers we might like to tackle some of the issues, but recognise that we can play a role in providing leadership, working in partnership with other public agencies, NGOs and businesses and influencing others as we are seeking to do through our work to promote an inclusive economy, promoting the Oxford living wage and tackling health inequalities.

I hope therefore that all of us and our residents recognise and value Oxford as a compassionate city.

## **2. Address by Oxford Community Forum, Licensing of Private Sector Homes**

Oxford Community Forum (OCF) was formed in 2012 in response to the implementation of additional Licensing scheme by Oxford City Council (OCC). OCF main purpose was to raise lack of the communication from OCC with local community during the consultation process. OCF held meetings with politicians as well as council officers raising the concerns about the implementation as well the impact of HMO additional licensing scheme. OCF later organised training sessions in collaboration with OCC for private landlords to help implement new HMO rules & regulations.

OCF's view in 2012, was that additional licensing scheme to register all properties with 3 plus unrelated tenants for HMO would increase the cost of rentals as well as increase homelessness as unintended consequence. In our opinion this turned out to be true.

There was Mandatory Licensing Scheme for 3 storey 5 occupants. Oxford City Council (OCC) stated in their additional licensing policy document that their first priority will be 3 storey 5 occupants' properties, we believe this was an indirect admission that OCC failed in the regulation of HMO's under mandatory powers. Another rationale for the scheme was the belief that it would have encouraged landlords to deal with the anti-social behaviour of their tenants. Given that private landlords have no legal liability for the behaviour of their tenants it is hard to see what the council expects landlords to achieve in this area.

The disharmony between HMO rules/regulations and Assured Shorthold Tenancy legislation (regarding landlord's and tenant's responsibilities) was raised by OCF to OCC. This disharmony was not really considered or addressed till today.

The consultation process of the additional licensing scheme was not, in our view, carried out properly which was highlighted to the politicians and OCC officers in several meetings. We all know how additional licensing Scheme of 3 plus unrelated individuals resulted in social engineering and family occupied properties were turned into HMOs resulting in families moving out of areas around Universities. Homelessness increased.

The self funding schemes are perceived to be for the purpose of running a department at the cost of private landlords and several overzealous prosecution were highlighted to OCC by OCF. Instead of working with landlords and targeting rough landlords, the feeling among private landlords was that OCC staffs were more pro prosecution. This was raised in several meetings with OCC.

By introducing a blanket licensing of privately owned rented properties, we believe OCC is discriminating against private sector landlords, increasing the cost of rentals for families and will drive families to the council list hence causing more homelessness. This blanket policy will certainly bring more money to the OCC coffers through the licensing fees of all privately rented properties but in our view will most definitely cause social engineering in Oxford City where poor families will be forced to move out due to higher rents caused by extra cost to landlords through HMO fees.

One wonders why OCC cannot regulate these properties through their existing powers. This policy is only proposed to charge private sector landlords for the job the OCC should have been carrying out under the mandatory powers. The council should not rush into approving a policy without seriously considering its unintended consequences. We believe that the politicians who will be supporting or proposing this policy are not considering the facts on the ground and are just driven by their one sided political views.

The OCF opposes this motion as it is also discriminatory policy against one sector of the community (private landlords) and do not cover Universities accommodations or OCC own properties, it will increase the cost of rentals as a result, increase

homelessness and in our view causes social engineering. The target of this policy are private sector landlords who are already under pressure from tax on mortgage payments and huge number of student blocks being developed by venture capitalist firms who have no local connections or contributions to local economy. Majority of the private landlords are local hard working people who have invested their hard earned money into property market.

### **Response from the Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Leisure and Housing, Councillor Linda Smith**

There is no evidence that licensing schemes push up rents. There are a large number of factors that influence rent and market conditions are always the biggest driver of rental increases. The cost of compliance, particularly for better landlords is relatively low in Oxford and if we successfully introduce Selective Licensing our aim would be to set a licence fee that is in line with other councils in the south east that only covers the cost of running the scheme.

There is also no evidence that our Additional Licensing Scheme has had a negative impact on homelessness. There are a range of issues that can contribute to homelessness and whilst one of those is the ending of a tenancy in the private rented sector there is no evidence that extending the licensing requirement for HMOs has had any impact on evictions leading to homelessness in Oxford. The requirement to have a HMO licence actually protects tenants from rogue landlords because if they living in an unlicensed HMO then the landlord cannot evict them without getting the HMO licensed. The same protection applies under Selective Licensing.

There was no failure to use our powers to licence mandatory licensable HMOs. We licensed approximately 600 HMOs under mandatory licensing and our success in improving those properties by using our licensing powers was one of the reasons why the council chose to extend the requirement to licence to every HMO in the city.

The introduction of Selective Licensing would give the Council the power, where appropriate, to add conditions to the licence for landlords to take reasonable steps to prevent anti social behaviour from their tenants. This would be a good step forward as it would ensure landlords fully co-operate with the Council and deal with anti social behaviour from their tenants.

Licensing legislation sets out clearly who is responsible for the management and maintenance of a property. The council does not accept that landlords can evade their responsibilities by arguing that their tenants are to blame because of their tenancy agreement.

There was a robust and extensive consultation process for both the introduction and renewal of the Additional Licensing Schemes. Our intention is always to consult properly and listen to what the public, tenants and landlords say. This is evidenced by the fee structure which rewards better landlords and by introducing and renewing the schemes, which were overwhelming popular with consultees.

There is no evidence that citywide licensing of HMOs has resulted in social engineering. In fact, the planning policy related to HMOs has been considered sufficiently successful to be transferred without amendment into the latest version of the local plan which has recently been approved by the government inspector.

The council has the ability under the Housing Act 2004 to charge licence fees so that its licensing scheme is self funding. The council's view is that this is an appropriate choice as it means the council tax payer does not have to pay for important regulatory work to be carried out and the costs are paid for by the people who are benefitting most from the property.

The Council is proud of its record as a robust regulator. There are stringent processes to ensure every legal case is reviewed twice before submission to our Law & Governance Team who then conduct an independent assessment including evidential tests and public interest considerations before recommending a course of action. We believe that strong enforcement plays an important role in deterring offenders and demonstrating to compliant landlords and the public that the Council will uphold minimum standards.

Nationally there is no evidence that licensing results in a decline in properties in the private rented sector and the same is true in Oxford. In some cases Selective Licensing Schemes have resulted in more properties being licensed than was originally estimated by the local authority.

The legislation covering the Private Rented Sector has increased significantly in the last few years as a result of increasing concerns over how it operates and a recognition that the sector requires significant improvement. Local authorities have been actively encouraged to use the powers given to them by the government and therefore the Council is not discriminating against private sector landlords by increasing regulation and seeking to expand licensing in the city.

The reason why University managed accommodation, councils and other social housing providers are exempt from licensing is because they have their own regulators and a high level of accountability.

Whilst we understand the concerns from landlords and recognise that licensing schemes are not universally popular with them, we do appreciate their feedback and look forward to continuing to work together in a constructive way.

### **3. Address by Nigel Day - UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons**

The UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), or the Nuclear Weapon Ban Treaty, is the first legally binding international agreement to comprehensively prohibit nuclear weapons, with the goal of leading towards their total elimination.

Nuclear weapons pose an unacceptable threat to people everywhere.

This is why 122 nations voted to adopt the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. All national governments are now invited to sign and ratify this crucial global agreement, which prohibits the use, production and stockpiling of nuclear weapons and lays the foundations for their total elimination. The UK government is refusing to support this multilateral treaty.

However, 34 countries have now ratified the treaty, and when 50 nations ratify the treaty it will enter into force.

Cities and towns can help build support for the treaty by endorsing the ICAN Cities Appeal, a commitment by cities and towns to show support for the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and call on their governments to join.

228 cities worldwide have signed their support, including Paris, Berlin, Oslo, Sydney, LA, Toronto.

In the UK Manchester, Edinburgh, Norwich, Renfrewshire, West Dumbartonshire and Hebden Royd. A number of other cities, like Oxford, are in the pipeline.

Cities are asking for another way to resolve the nuclear arms problem. To debate and talk about the issue, not re-arm and threaten.

Oxford is a city with a great history of peaceful initiatives and commitments. There is a Peace Plaque in Bonn Square commemorating those who have worked for peace in the city.

Trident warhead convoys regularly travel past Oxford on the A34, supporting the UK nuclear weapon system. We are that close to nuclear weapons.

We are asking you to support the motion and to send a resolution showing Oxford City Council's support for the treaty.

#### 4. Address by Alistair Morris – Climate Emergency and allotments

Good evening,

One year on from declaring a Climate Emergency, and I feel a bit like the fictional character Jon Snow in Game of Thrones...

" You Know Nothing, Jon Snow". I, Alistair Morris...know nothing! Who is leading, what action is being taken, what can we do..?

Why is there not a Climate Tzar? or a Climate Team, who we can be in regular contact with.? Why can't the City organise monthly briefings to its Parish councillors and Community leaders/organisations with updates and recommendations/action plans for each parish/suburb? This is what would be happening in a war; and by the advice of the government's own Committee on Climate Change we are supposed to be on a war footing.!! I just don't understand? :-(

2020 is the year of Climate, our country is hosting COP26 in Glasgow in November. This is it, this is the year we are supposed to make significant changes to how we run our economy and our lifestyle behaviour...We are already 1/12th into it! Scientists around the World are saying, its now or never!? I am just a concerned citizen, but I don't see the will, leadership, coordination, urgency and decisiveness you would expect in a war situation. There is SO much we could and should be doing right now! It involves cooperative, joined up working, between different groups and the sharing of resources big time! But, people don't seem to be taking responsibility, showing true leadership and taking decisive actions!!! ? At least, I don't see it!??

Allow community groups to plant more trees, reseed grass verges, grow more food....GIVE them the resources and equipment they need!!! Like, right NOW!? Why is everything sooooo difficult?

For example: Trees, turf removal machines, tractors, water dowsers, etc. Why not!? YOU would in a war...! If not directly, then allow council staff to help?

The British Government's number one future security concern, is food supply! We need to be enhancing, supporting and developing our city's allotments to maximise future local food production, and encouraging people to grow more of their own food. As well as working communally to be more self sufficient, and to cut down on the carbon generating international transportation of food? Is this not simple best practice?

We are at crisis point, you should be throwing all the money and resources you can at supporting local community groups, including allotments.!!! Are you able to allocate more resources/staff to help with fully restoring allotments and bringing them back to full production? Especially maintenance and upgrade of buildings, removal of rubbish(deep clean!), restoration, delineation, fencing and numbering of plots? Can there be more help with noticeboards, water storage, improving access and perimeter fencing please..? Perhaps there should be an allotments Council officer to help with this?

Finally, to borrow another phrase from an excellent BBC historical drama, The Last Kingdom "Destiny is All". NO, it isn't.! But.....

CLIMATE IS EVERYTHING.! :-)

I appreciate and respect your time, effort, commitment to public service, but please, PLEASE, get on with saving our Planet, and making Oxford a greener, healthier and safer place to live!

## **5. Address by Artwell - Barton British Legion Site**

I have delivered my Independent Campaign Manifesto to most of the homes on Sandhills and Barton and this has allowed me the opportunity to talk with a wide range of the Constituents.

Never has a Constituent in Barton called for a library. Nevertheless, in last week's Oxford Mail, Labour's Cllr Rowley is pictured with a cake celebrating the opening of Barton Neighbourhood Centre's Library. (OM16/12020)

Young people have asked for Ballerina and Street Dancing facilities.

Teenagers also have asked for soundproof facilities for Band Practice and milestone Licenced facilities for Celebrations.

Adults and senior Citizens have enquired many times for Licenced premises to combat loneliness and isolation.

Others have asked for the restoration of the Neighbourhood Centre's Computer Suite which, I believe the Barton Community Association needlessly destroyed.

Non-Caucasian residents tell me that they are disappointed with the lack of Community Space for hire to host their traditional celebrations.

As Councillors are aware, Oxford is home to the game of Aunt Sally, which Oxford people like to play and watch. The City Council should be pleased to support this inclusive game and provide facilities for Aunt Sally on Barton. But a Library on Barton is, in my opinion a fine example of the Labour City Council providing what the residents have not asked for whilst ignoring facilities which the residents have specifically requested.

Despite the Labour City Councillors constantly stating that "community engagement" is welcomed the experience of the people of Barton, in the last twelve months, demonstrates the opposite in my opinion. For example, last summer the City Council spent £900,000 on the already pristine Neighbourhood Centre. Few on Barton could understand why the City Council determined that this huge sum of public money needed to be spent on Barton Community Association (BCA) administered Neighbourhood Centre; a facility which does not welcome youth or licenced activities and is largely unused at weekends.

In my opinion the £900,000 wasted on expanding the Neighbourhood Centre only assisted the Barton Community Association retail income. Barton's Library has just opened and it is already appealing for volunteers. Surely the BCA should be willing to pay Oxford's Living Wage to staff the newly opened Library? The BCA has sufficient funds. The BCA rental income is supposed to be used for the benefit of the "deprived" Constituents.

The "deprived" people of Barton are appealing one last time to the current Labour Councillors and Council Officers to support our call to refurbish the former British Legion site into an imaginative inclusive Community faculty which could benefit all the people of Barton increasing population.

## **Response from the Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Supporting Local Communities, Councillor Tidball**

The City Council continues to improve its existing community spaces across the city, and especially in Barton with nearly a million pounds worth of investment in the existing Barton Neighbourhood Centre, which is managed by the Barton Community Association. This investment has turned the centre into a community and health hub providing modern, improved community, health and youth space.

The City Council, Barton Community Association and County Council have worked in partnership to develop a new community library using develop funding that will improve residents wellbeing and literacy levels. The new library at the Barton Neighbourhood Centre in Barton is part of the expanded services to residents provided in partnership with the Barton Community Association.

The library had a grand opening in January with over 100 people attending and a huge amount of positive feedback has been received from residents. We want to see everyone in Barton having the same great opportunities as elsewhere in the city, and the library is another great addition to the community. The new library will expand the range of cultural services on offer to the whole community and all ages including story times, rhymetimes, a range of online services and as a venue offering and enabling council services.

Within the new Barton Park development a community pavilion has been built, also community managed, and now provides additional space for hire. There will also be a community hub in the new school in Barton Park for hire for community activities, opening at the end of 2020. This is on top of the existing hireable spaces in the leisure centre, school and neighbourhood centre, making sure that there are sufficient community facilities for existing and new residents in Barton.

The British Legion site was vacated in 2012 and the asset was only transferred to the City Council in 2018. The site was in serious disrepair and had asbestos throughout. Therefore, it has been decided to use the British Legion site to build housing to help ease city wide pressures on housing. Planning permission has been submitted to build 7 affordable homes, 3 of which will be available for social rent and 4 shared ownership. The City Council has organised for the building to be demolished in February 2020.

## Questions in part 2

### 6. Question by Artwell – Citizens' Assembly

Oxford's Labour Councillors took a definitive decision to transfer the Service Delivery of Oxford City Council into a Companies House Registered commercial entity called Oxford Direct Services (ODS) in 2017; without first giving the Voters of Oxford the right to vote on this major alternation. I do not believe the Labour City Councillor informed the Voters of Oxford of this privatisation in their Local Election literature.

Even more galling was that Oxford City Council had registered ODS at Companies House in 2017 months before the privatisation decision was publicly announced to privatise Oxford Direct Services to Oxford's City Council Taxpayers and Voters.

I was so outraged at this Democratic process that I wrote a complaint to the Local Government Minister, but the Minister's response was not helpful.

It appears to me that once again and without a specific mandate from the Voters of Oxford, a joint Oxford City Council and the County Council have agreed on the establishment of a

- Work Place Levy;
- Taxing cars entering Oxford City Centre,
- Creating five Bus Gates and other policies which will in my opinion increase living costs for the majority earning Oxford's Living Wage and less.

Oxford is a car manufacturing City. The Council recently celebrated the opening of the £440m Westgate Shopping Centre which has ample Car Parking. Now the Councils are seeking to be the first to Tax and Ban cars from Oxford City Centre and other parts of Oxford.

Even more troubling is the £200,000 funding which is used to pay for England's "Citizens Assembly" delegates; who are paid to attend weekend training, which comes from the Climate Lobby.

In short, the "Citizens Assembly" is in my view a Political Lobby group masquerading as the will of a "diverse" and "representative" selection of Oxford's Council taxpayers and Voters.

Oxford's Labour Executive Board Members have in my view no democratic mandate to implement the policies of the un-elected "Citizens Assembly" which appears as being a front for the Climate Lobby.

It appears perverse for the City Council to be spending £2m on a Homeless Shelter compared with the £19m on policies supported by the "Citizens Assembly." Oxford is a City with a great need to restore lost Public Services. I call on Oxford City Councillors to use the £19m on restoring Public Services.

Will Oxford City Council Elected Councillors and Executives please suspend all policies from the un-Elected "Citizens Assembly," as Labour failed to make clear in their Local Elections literature their intention to adopt policies from the un-Elected "Citizens Assembly?" This use of the "Citizens Assembly" to determine and influence Oxford City Council Policy is, in my opinion, undemocratic and must be exposed and extinguished.

## **Response from the Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Partnerships, Councillor Brown**

The questions raised here reveal a fundamental lack of understanding on a number of issues which I am happy to clarify.

Firstly, Oxford Direct Services Ltd is wholly owned by the Council as its only shareholder. It is not privatised or outsourced.

Its profits are ploughed back into funding the City's needs - a very different and much better model of public service than rewarding private shareholders.

Secondly the council is democratically elected by the residents of Oxford and on this basis has a clear mandate to take decisions about policy and services. Residents are consulted on strategies and policies as they are developed. Tackling problems of congestion and air quality have long been a stated priority for the city council and all of the policies highlighted by the questioner are subject to public consultation.

Thirdly, Citizens' Assemblies are a well-recognised form of participatory democracy which have been used by governments across the world as a means of developing citizen-led solutions to complex issues. From the outset we have been clear our Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change is solely advisory, with policy-making on appropriate responses to climate change, remaining with the City Council, Government and other statutory bodies. Assembly members were randomly selected as a representative sample of the residents of the City – a requirement of Citizens' Assemblies – with recruitment, organisation and facilitation provided by Ipsos MORI, a well-respected, independent research organisation. A wide cross-section of interests was brought together to advise the City Council on the structure and content of the Citizens Assembly, with an Advisory Group that involved Labour, LibDem, Green and Conservative councillors, academics and business as well as community representatives.