

Consultation on the proposed Headington Community Council Response from Headington Action

Oxford City Council is carrying out a consultation on a proposed Community Council for Headington and has asked Headington Action for a response, which we are pleased to provide. This response has been prepared by the Trustees and Executive Committee of Headington Action, and strongly supports the proposed formation of a Community Council.

Headington Action

Headington Action was set up with the financial support and encouragement of Oxford City Council about 15 years ago. Our purpose is to improve the quality of life of those who live, work and study in Headington. We do this by working with the inhabitants, together with voluntary, commercial and other organisations and local authorities to promote the area, increase civic pride, undertake community projects and environmental improvements. Our members consist of representatives of any organisation or group within Headington, plus local councillors and the Local Authorities. A list of all our members can be seen on our website <https://www.headingtonaction.org/who-we-are.html> . We are a registered charity.

Current activities include running the weekly market, an annual festival, Christmas displays and events, proving grants to small community groups, environmental improvements, and liaison with local authorities on matters of concern of residents. We also act as an information exchange body, passing relevant information between our 30 member organisations and through them reaching perhaps over 1000 members of the public.

We are about to embark on three new projects all of which are closely aligned to our remit to improve the quality of life of residents – to make Headington a greener place, a more socially connected place, and a more visually interesting place.

A Community Council and its relevance to Headington Action

The activities of Headington Action are described above in some detail because they are relevant to the work of a community council.

It is a remit of parish/community councils that they work towards improving community well-being and providing better services. Their activities fall into three main categories: representing the local community; delivering services to meet local needs; and striving to improve quality of life and community well-being (source National Association of Local Councils). Thus, if a Community Council is set up in Headington there will be some overlap with current activities of Headington Action. In particular both organisations would have the remit of improving quality of life and community well-being. So, from Headington Action's point of view the question

which arises is, would quality of life be improved for residents and workers with a Community Council operating alongside Headington Action? We believe the answer to this question is a resounding 'yes' for the following reasons.

1. It is clear that some of the work currently done by Headington Action would be best led by a Community Council. Example of this are responses to planning applications, representation about traffic concerns and lobbying about other matters which are under the jurisdiction of either the City or County Councils. A Community Council would be more effective than Headington Action in responding to such matters as it would have democratic legitimacy and greater awareness of the issues involved. It would represent the community in a way which Headington Action does not. The Council would, for example, become a statutory consultee on planning applications whereas Headington Action (and its sister organisation Headington Forum) has no more involvement than any other consultee.

The work of Headington Action may well continue on such matters, if a Community Council is set up, but as a lobbying and advisory group to the Community Council.

2. If a Community Council is set up it will be up to Headington Action to decide if it wishes to operate differently. But it is reasonable to assume that many or most of the project related activities currently undertaken by Headington Action would continue in support of Headington Action's charitable aims. So, would a Community Council help Headington Action in its continuing activities? The answer is a clear 'yes' because:
 - a. it will provide encouragement and local support;
 - b. there will be more direct access to Community Infrastructure Levy funds to pay for projects;
 - c. it will help with volunteer recruitment;
 - d. it will provide a sounding board through which Headington Action will get community feedback.
 - e. a Community Council would have access to funds for projects which Headington Action cannot access, for example through the precept. This may enable Headington Action to undertake more ambitious projects.

In summary, we strongly believe that a Headington Community Council would help make Headington a better place in which to live, work and study. We argue in this paper that although Headington Action also has such aims, which it believes it fulfils to the limit of its abilities, these aims would be strengthened by the presence of a Community Council.

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Headington Action Executive Committee