

To: Council

Date: 22 March 2021

Title of Report: Public addresses and questions taken in Part 2 of the agenda – as submitted by the speakers and with written responses from Cabinet Members

Introduction

1. In this section of the meeting, Council hears addresses and questions from members of the public about motions on Part 3 of the agenda or that do not relate directly to matters for decision.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. 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.

1. Address by Kaddy Beck – The ‘Save Bertie’ Campaign
2. Address by Oliver de Soissons – Oxford National Park (Motion d on the agenda)
3. Address by Micaela Tuckwell – Representing: Save The Sheaf campaign organisers
4. Address by Fiona Steel – Representing: Good Food Oxford – on developing a Food Strategy (supporting Motions a and h on the agenda)

1. Address by Kaddy Beck – The ‘Save Bertie’ Campaign

There are two sites. Bertie Park is joined corner-to-corner with a second site which is currently a wasteland. The decision to build on Bertie was made because it was argued that these were one and the same, and so facilities would simply be re-provided on site. But the wasteland is not the same site. It is not a thoroughfare and it has very poor natural surveillance. Current plans are therefore to retain the playground within its current site, but to shrink it to 1/3 of its size. This will reduce to a vestige the area of

grass for supervised free play. The council aims to compensate by clearing part of the wasteland and turning the rest into a nature trail. None of this would be visible to parents supervising their children in Bertie Park.

Recreation grounds like Bertie are protected. The "equivalent reinstatement test" means that any replacement should be equal or better. This is not just council policy; it is a legal requirement. Improving the wasteland so it is somewhere for people to walk with their families is not equivalent to reinstatement. Green spaces for people to walk are not considered to be recreational spaces. Across Oxford, the council is building on green spaces precisely because they don't have either the same function or level of protection as recreational space.

We are currently unsure of proposals because the council is planning to consult us only once technical problems have been solved. But we have the huge advantage that we talk to people about Bertie. We know that a MUGA of its current dimensions with an all-weather surface is totally non-negotiable.

Deshaun Jack, who is 20, says "Bertie park is somewhere I often go with my friends to relax and express myself and stay out of trouble, because without the park there's not really much to do and it's a part of me as I was raised there".

Although we don't know the specifications of the MUGA, but we can surmise that the MUGA and the playground will inevitably be closer to the houses or flats being built. My neighbour asked about the noise problem. When I researched, I found "The closer MUGAs are to dwellings, the higher the likelihood of complaints. Fields in Trust's document "Planning and Design for Outdoor Sport and Play" recommend that MUGAs are located a minimum of 30m from the nearest residential property wherever possible. (If this is not possible), physical mitigation and careful management are key to ensuring acceptable noise levels are achieved". Building a 3m high wall was suggested! Bertie Park should be a place where our young people feel free to let go. Oxford is home to incredible privilege. The area served by Bertie Park is not. It acts as a lifeline to young people and their families.

The Oxford local Plan is based on the premise that Oxford will continue to grow. If this happens, what is the council going to do once it has built on all of its green spaces and sold all of its available land? The Oxford Mail's recent editorial said: At some point, we must draw a line and say if we want this to be a great place for people to live, then we also have to protect the things that make it great.

Oxford City Council aims to provide large quantities of affordable housing, but the SHMA it commissioned says that 40% of Oxford's population do not earn enough to buy "affordable housing". The people I talk to can see that building affordable housing is not solving the problem.

Finally. Is Oxford city council really so desperate for land that it needs to build on its playgrounds? People I talk to are not totally convinced that we have reached that stage, and suggest other brownfield sites. IF Oxford really does have to build on our playground, when should it say enough is enough? Have we reached our Amsterdam moment? Should Oxford be trying to work out how it can sustainably live within its environmental limits at the same time as ensuring that those least advantaged are able to aspire to a decent standard of living? Amsterdam is in a similar position to Oxford. Its development strategies are based on doughnut economics which aims to do just this. The Doughnut Economics model, was developed by Oxford economist and resident Kate Raworth, and is now being used by Amsterdam.

We would therefore ask that Oxford City Council

- Make sure that our young people have a safe place to play.
- Stop pitting our young people and those on the housing list against each other.
- Adopt a strategy that aims to address the high cost of housing for all who struggle to pay rent or mortgages in Oxford.
- Allow our community the opportunity to genuinely participate in a public debate of the issues.

* <https://www.cassallen.co.uk/5-steps-to-minimise-noise-from-multi-use-games-areas-muga>

Response

From the Cabinet Member, Cllr Hollingsworth

As the address rightly points out, Oxford is one of the least affordable cities for housing in this country, and our young people face acute difficulty in finding a home they can afford in the city that they grew up in. It's my view and the view of this Council that we – the current generation fortunate enough to live in this wonderful city – to do our best to make sure that our children both have places to play in their childhood AND the hope of being able to live in Oxford when they grow up and want to have children of their own. Our responsibilities do not end with the first of those.

It's unfortunate that the address suggests that 'affordable housing' is just the Government definition of a small discount from the purchase price. That is not what is proposed here, nor anywhere else in Oxford: our Local Plan policies require that at least 40% of any site should be for social housing – Council houses in other words – and a further 10% should be other forms of intermediate tenures like shared ownership or housing co-operatives. The current proposal for this site is that it will have 12 new Council homes for rent, a further 12 homes for discounted rent, and 6 homes for shared ownership, all of which would make a contribution to meeting the huge need for genuinely affordable housing for local people. I don't see how not building any affordable homes at all does anything but make the existing problem worse.

The Local Plan 2036 has a housing need that is based entirely on the need for more affordable housing for our current and future populations. We have worked with our neighbouring authorities to find sites inside the city and outside to meet that need, using criteria that were common to all. I do not think it would be fair, reasonable or workable to ask other councils in Oxfordshire to allocate sites for housing to meet the needs of Oxford, and to not do the same ourselves.

This scheme, on a site allocated for development not just in the current Local Plan but the previous one as well, makes a small but important contribution to providing genuinely affordable homes for local people. The current design retains both play areas on the main site, and creates a new nature reserve for local people on the currently inaccessible site B. That seems to strike a good balance between the demands of past, current and future generations.

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2. Address by Oliver de Soissons – Oxford National Park (Motion d on the agenda)

Dear Councillors,

Thank you for this opportunity to talk about the motion and why you should vote for it. It is vital to have the support of Oxford City Council and its strategic partnerships to get this National Park project off the ground. The park will benefit the health and wellbeing of people in Oxford. During Lockdown we have all experienced the importance of the countryside on our doorstep which we have taken for granted. It will work particularly well for people who don't have cars because the plan provides for sustainable transport access to get to the park and improved cycle routes and pedestrian paths through the land.

And these sustainable transport measures have an added benefit, you can reach the proposed Park without spending part of the day in the car adding to carbon emissions as you might if you were driving for a day out in the Chilterns or Cotswold. The increase in natural habitats within the park will lock up large amounts of atmospheric carbon.

There is long term benefit to the economy because a national park so close to the city with good sustainable transport links enhances Oxford as a desirable place to live and work.

I originally submitted my ideas about a national park for the Oxfordshire 2050 plan in 2019 and it is a sign of the times that we have all been through that people across Oxfordshire have responded so positively to the proposal. But what is really exciting is that the vision for a National Park can be realised within the framework of government policies for designated national landscapes and nature improvement area. It will also qualify for funding through transport and development plans. A national park can be fully integrated into the Regional Spatial Strategy to implement the Ox-Cam Arc and there is an even greater need for it if Oxfordshire's population were to double in line with ARC objectives.

So to help people who live here now and in the future, I ask you to vote for this motion. The new national park is a truly positive initiative that will benefit people and nature and help to tackle climate change. Thank you for listening.

Response

From the Cabinet Member, Cllr Hollingsworth

I am pleased to offer Council's support for exploring the potential for further protection and enhancement of the ancient and important landscapes of Otmoor and Bernwood, and I hope Shotover as well. These are areas which are rich in biodiversity, landscape character and are truly valued by Oxford's residents.

Of course a National Park is one of a range of designations that can be used to offer further protection and special status and as the case of the South Downs shows, something that can take decades to bring about. In the meantime the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan offers a great opportunity to look at these special areas and plan for their future which is overdue, and I look forward to putting the case to do just that.

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3. Address by Micaela Tuckwell – Representing: Save The Sheaf campaign organisers

Hello. My name is Micaela Tuckwell, and I am addressing you today on behalf of the organisers of the “Save the Wheatsheaf” campaign.

Our main goal is to raise awareness about the recent planning application to turn the established live music and comedy venue above The Wheatsheaf pub (off of the High Street) into student flats.

Whilst it is not appropriate in this meeting to discuss the details of the planning application that has been called-in to committee (we intend to speak at the meeting when this application is heard), I want to use this opportunity to talk more generally about local support for The Wheatsheaf and the local music scene.

The Wheatsheaf has been a vibrant venue and community arts hub for over 20 years and as the only purpose-built small gig venue left in the city, the strength of feeling locally about its possible loss is clear. In just under 2 weeks:

Over **1,823** people have signed the Save the Sheaf petition

2,572 people have joined the Save the Sheaf Facebook group

1,554 people have lodged objections to the planning application

It is no understatement that **Oxford is at a crisis point in terms of the erosion of the critical infrastructure that our city’s music scene needs for it to survive.**

In the next few minutes, I will talk about (1) the importance of small music venues, (2) The Wheatsheaf and the cultural and economic value it brings to the city, (3) how you can support us.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SMALL MUSIC VENUES

It cannot be understated how vital small music venues are for a city’s music scene to exist. Without small music venues homegrown talent doesn’t have a home to connect with audiences, develop performance skills and grow.

Uniquely they provide affordable spaces, essential equipment and support from professional sound engineers. They are the essential first-rung on the ladder for local amateur artists, without which local arena-filling acts like Radiohead, Foals and Supergrass would not have existed.

Without small music venues a city loses one of the few truly affordable and diverse entertainment options.

It is well known that the biggest barrier to participation in culture is cost and at an average entrance fee of £5-6, small music venues offer one of the most affordable entertainment options. They are also unique in terms of being safe, community spaces for people of all ages to meet people with shared interests, establish friendships and build communities. The loss in terms of health and well-being for residents would be irrefutable.

Without small music venues a city loses all of the benefits to its economy, tourism, and liveability that a thriving music scene brings.

Small music venues attract footfall from neighbouring localities and beyond into the city, with knock on benefits to local pubs and restaurants, and support jobs for hundreds of freelance musicians, promoters and events professionals each year.

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Over the last 10 years, Oxford has lost 7 small music venues including more recently The Cellar, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Centre. All of which had the infrastructure and were the right size to put on quality, regular and affordable gigs. We now only have one small music venue left in Oxford.

THE WHEATSHEAF

The Wheatsheaf has been running a live music and comedy venue for over **20** years.

Unlike any other venue in Oxford, The Wheatsheaf has a history of embracing a very broad scope of performance, from folk and jazz to rock and metal to electronica and hip hop, via all points in between, plus a deep link with the University of Oxford's comedy societies. No single venue in Oxford works with such a variety of artists.

The best way of sharing with you the value and impact that The Wheatsheaf brings to the city is by looking at the numbers from just one year... In 2019:

- Over **11,000** people came to a live music or comedy show at The Wheatsheaf.
- **475** bands plus **94** comedy acts performed across **281** shows produced by 15 regular, local promoters in partnership with venue staff.
- The Wheatsheaf provided - often paid - opportunities for just over **2,000** amateur and semi-professional, largely local, artists to perform and created regular work for **5** local freelance sound engineers as well as pub bar staff.

Audience members generally spend **2-3** hours at a show, spending an average of **£12** (£5 on the entrance fee and £7 on refreshments and merchandise). The majority of the money spent at Wheatsheaf shows goes to Oxford suppliers (the freelance musicians, promoters, technical staff and pub).

Total economic impact of The Wheatsheaf running a live music and comedy venue in 2019 was: £132,000.

ACTIONS

Without your help The Wheatsheaf will be lost and the 1,000s of Oxford residents, workers and small businesses that rely on it for income, entertainment and well-being will be left without a venue.

I am appealing to you today for your support to save The Wheatsheaf, but also, to help us create and drive a long-term strategy for the protection and creation of Oxford's small music venues.

We call on all councillors to pledge support for,

1. The development of a Thriving Communities strategy for the arts in Oxford to include music venues
2. To ask all Councillors to support the designation of The Wheatsheaf as an Asset of Community Value, and to seek other music venues to be added to the register
3. At the earliest opportunity, to strengthen the local plan to additionally protect music venues and facilitate the replacement of lost venues
4. To ask all Councillors to support the designation of The Wheatsheaf as a locally listed heritage asset, and to seek other music venues to be added to the register

Response

From the Cabinet Member, Cllr Clarkson,

I am not in a position to comment on points 2-4 in light of the current live planning application. However, given the private ownership of The Wheatsheaf, and irrespective of the outcome of the planning process, there is nothing the council can do to stop a private business closing a function room such as this.

Much research has shown that having a thriving grass roots arts scene is one of the key factors in making small cities like ours attractive and successful. Small music venues are a springboard for up and coming talent and have significant social and environmental as well as economic impact. They also offer inclusive space for sharing diverse cultural expression and interaction and help people to feel a sense of pride and belonging in their city. Delivery of the Arts Council Let's Create Strategy 2020-2030 will require a range of spaces to be available to support the creative journey for everyone in the city. The decline in venues in Oxford over recent years is very concerning.

The current Local Plan already has strong measures to prevent the loss of cultural assets such as music and arts venues through conversion to other uses: policy V7 – “The City Council will seek to protect and retain existing cultural and community facilities. Planning permission will not be granted for development that results in the loss of such facilities unless new or improved facilities can be provided at a location equally or more accessible by walking, cycling and public transport.” Equally the Local Plan encourages the creation of new cultural facilities: policy V6 – “Planning permission will be granted for proposals which add to the cultural and social scene of the city within the city and district centres provided the use is appropriate to the scale and function of the centre.” It also prevents threats to music and arts venues by including the ‘Agent of Change’ principle, making any neighbouring development responsible for the necessary soundproofing and vibration reduction works, not a pre-existing music venue. The Local Plan is therefore already strong enough in terms of a planning policy, and does not need revision.

But the issue is that planning policies can only prevent an unacceptable change of use. They cannot compel a building owner to keep their building open, or for a landlord to let their building to a particular tenant. As with the Cellar, where the Local Plan policies successfully prevented the conversion of the space to retail in planning terms, it was the failure of the landlord to agree a lease on terms acceptable to the tenant that led to the closure of the venue.

Officers can advise on ACV status, but essentially it provides a “right to bid” if the property is put for sale, and while it can be a material consideration it won't offer any more protection than the existing Local Plan policy.

The Thriving Communities Strategy is currently in the process of being drafted. I strongly support the inclusion of grass-root music/performance spaces within the strategy and, in particular, Oxford City Council reviewing options to increase available space for this. This may be as part of our property portfolio or in partnership with those who manage other suitable assets in the city.

4. Address by Fiona Steel – Representing: Good Food Oxford – on developing a Food Strategy (supporting Motions a and h on the agenda)

By way of introduction I am Fiona Steel, and I work for Good Food Oxford, the sustainable food network for Oxfordshire. Good Food Oxford has worked in Oxford City since 2014 to support and promote a local food system that is Good for People, Good for the Planet and Good for Communities. Since the start of COVID-19 our work on Food Poverty has become a major focus and we have worked with the council and over 40 community groups such as Oxford Mutual Aid, Oxford Community Action, OX4 Free Food Crew and the Community Larders whose response to the pandemic has provided essential food support to thousands in need.

I would like to thank the Council for showing leadership in considering a Food Strategy, encompassing the key area of food poverty, for which I know there is cross-party support. Naturally in times of crisis putting food on people's plates is a priority but food alone does not solve food poverty. A food strategy will go beyond the emergency response and look at ways to build resilience into our communities, and ultimately to prevent food poverty arising. Work to address the underlying causes of food poverty is already underway in the City - a Food Strategy will ensure this is fully aligned with and will further enhance the already excellent work done by the Council on the Living Wage, Net Zero, Community Wealth Building, and Public Health agendas.

Talking about strategies can sometimes lose sight of the individuals they are trying to benefit, so before going any further I would like to share the story of some of our citizens.

Isobel (not her real name) had not previously accessed emergency food provision, prior to Covid-19. Covid-19 caused Isobel to lose half of her working hours. This loss of income combined with the additional pressure of having their three dependents at home due to closure of schools caused her to access OX4FreeFoodCrew services. This was compounded by unforeseen changes to the amount of benefits being received. The provision of fresh food by OX4FFC was vital in meeting basic food needs as well as ensuring 5 a day.

Stories such as these are widespread nationally and across Oxford City. Nationally four million people including 2.3 million children reported experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity in the last 6 months (1)

In Oxfordshire we have seen a 3-fold increase in the numbers of people accessing community food (2). In Oxford City, we estimate 4,000 people regularly access food assistance and this is only set to increase as furlough ends and unemployment continues to rise (3). Research shows significant increases in usage from families with children, and 89% of respondents cited finances as the main reason for accessing services (4).

Throughout the pandemic, the sense of community and shared endeavour has been humbling to see – with volunteers in many services working 80-hour weeks. Oxford Mutual Aid alone support 800 people every week with food parcels and over 650 families access Community larders on a weekly basis. Services have not only delivered food parcels, they have supported people to access a range of support including financial, housing and mental health services. I simply cannot commend their efforts highly enough and it has been a privilege to work alongside these amazing people.

Partnership working between the council, the voluntary sector, local businesses, colleges and schools has been exemplary and the support of the council in engaging with communities, working on a case-by-case basis with the most vulnerable and channelling emergency funds has been vital to facilitate this response.

Working together the council and voluntary sector have already started to look to the mid-long term and we need to support and guide this transition . Through programmes such as Play:Full – to address holiday hunger, and Edible Cutteslowe, partnerships are now looking beyond emergency support to engage communities in nutrition, cooking and growing projects – with the co-benefits of community engagement and wellbeing support that such programmes offer. Beyond this a food strategy would consider ways engage our local food producers and retailers in a sustainable local food system that ensures that healthy food is affordable and accessible for all and that links into plans to support a vibrant local food economy.

So to sum up why Oxford needs a Food Strategy. Since the start of the pandemic the Voluntary Sector and Councils have responded to the food needs of our communities by moving to a 'whatever-it-takes' war footing. However, as we converge on a post-pandemic 'new normal' of higher food poverty, we need to find a way of capturing the positive momentum of the community response in a long-term sustainable way that is integrated with existing programmes to address poverty and most urgently ensures that no-one in our city experiences food poverty.

Your support for this motion is vital to ensure these outcomes.

Thank you

- (1) Source: Food Foundation (2020)
- (2) Source: Good Food Oxford (2020)
- (3) Source: Oxford University (2020)
- (4) Source: Good Food Oxford (2020)

Response

From the Cabinet Member, Cllr Tidball

I would like to thank Fiona and Good Food Oxford for taking the time to make this address about such an important matter. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank Good Food Oxford and our voluntary and community partners within the community food system for their exceptional work to date within the City. They have and continue to work tirelessly together with the Council to ensure that nobody goes hungry.

As part of the Council's work to try and tackle food poverty, the Council has been looking to tackle root causal issues both through its own services and also through working with its partners such as the advice centres within the City. We recognise that due to the pandemic, some of these issues will continue to grow and that there is a need to continue this vital area of work and to work with people such as Isabel in a coordinated and joined-up way.

To that end, we are very supportive of a Countywide Food Strategy that addresses the needs of the City in particular. In doing so, we will work with our partners, including Good Food Oxford, the County Council, District Council's and community and voluntary partners, to develop this over the coming months. We also want to bring together the views and knowledge of our food network partners, including Good Food Oxford, to

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better understand the current root causes of food poverty, and a shared action plan to implement meaningful solutions. Tackling child food poverty by campaigning to address holiday hunger, increasing take up of free school meals and access to food larders for families with children will be another important strand of this work. We will also continue to use relationships with supermarkets to divert surplus food to those in need and minimise waste to help eliminate Oxford's contribution to climate change by 2040 or sooner, in line with the Zero Carbon Oxford Charter and recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change.