

To: Council

Date: 26 July 2021

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 to be taken in Part 2 of the agenda

1. Address by Linda Booker – in support of petition ‘stop the so called regeneration of Blackbird Leys
2. Address by Evelyn Sanderson, Friends of the Fields Iffley - The Value of the Meadows in Iffley Conservation Area as a Community Asset
3. Address by Roger Crisp, Friends of Old Marston – development in Old Marston

Addresses to be taken in Part 2 of the agenda

1. Address by Linda Booker – in support of petition ‘stop the so called regeneration of Blackbird Leys’ (Spindleberry Park)

Do the most deprived people in Oxford really need more housing, or do they require alternative investment with access to employment and income, access to education, skills and training, and access to health and disability services as well as crime prevention investment?

We as residents from within Blackbird Leys are calling on Government to interject and stop the development of almost 300 homes within Blackbird Leys and Northfield Brook Wards, which form Blackbird Leys Parish. We do of course have many reasons as to why this project should NOT go ahead. There are over 5000 homes situated in the parish with almost 14000 residents, the residents

have one doctors surgery, 3 primary schools and 1 college, along with a secondary school placed just outside of the parish boundaries in Littlemore.

Firstly, the people of Blackbird Leys and Northfield Brook suffer immense amounts of deprivation in many ways. The residents of Northfield Brook are positioned as the most deprived people in the whole of Oxford, whilst also sitting in the top 10% of most deprived across the country. The people of Blackbird Leys follow shortly behind in the top 20% bracket of most deprived in the country.

Residents of Northfield Brook and Blackbird Leys wards combined, have 5 from 8 of their Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) within the top 10% bracket and 2 from 8 within the top 20% bracket of most deprived across the country when it comes to the deprivation of Education, Skills and Training.

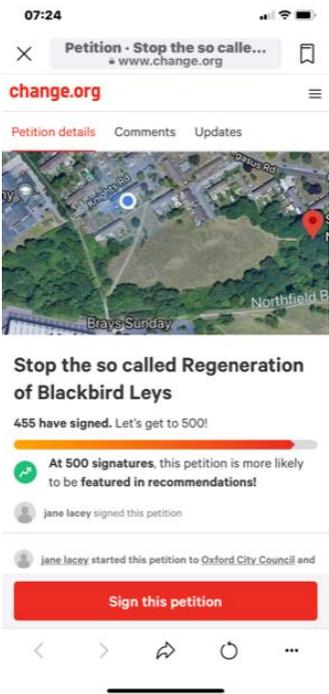
Secondly, when it comes to Crime, Income, Employment and Health Deprivation in Blackbird Leys. Residents across 3 out of the 4 LSOAs are within the top 30% nationally, of being deprived across the board, with at least 1 area being within the top 20%.

Thirdly, residents in 5 from 8 of LSOAs, across both Northfield Brook and Blackbird Leys wards, are rated at 40% most deprived or better, when it comes to deprivation with Barriers to Housing and Services.

Furthermore, statistics from End Child Poverty, estimate that 45.2% of children are living in poverty in Blackbird Leys, as well as 44.6% within Northfield Brook, calculated after housing costs.

Lastly, this project is set to sacrifice recreational land, to form housing. As well as an immense reduction in the size of the community centre. With such an increase in property numbers leading to an increase in residential population, this project also seeks to further reduce the community opportunity. At the same time, this project is set to bring NO direct employment opportunities for the local community, NO educational investment for children nor adults, NO investment into the local health services and finally NO investment into the prevention of local crime rates.

Bearing all of this in mind, it appears that there is a severe lack of investment within the communities that already exist. It would therefore be unreasonable and completely unnecessary if Oxford City Council were to go ahead with the plans, to squeeze almost 300 homes into an area whereby investment is clearly needed in people rather than in market sale and 'affordable' rented Catalyst property.



Written Response from the Cabinet Member, Councillor Hollingsworth

More homes are needed across the whole of Oxford. Alongside new homes must come access to employment, education, training, health services for all. That is why the council is working, both using its own resources and together with partners like the County Council and the NHS, to deliver all of these alongside new homes.

The Blackbird Leys scheme itself will deliver wider benefits in the local area. For example, we are working with our development partner Catalyst, Job Centre Plus, local schools and in particular the City of Oxford College to ensure that it will generate local employment during its construction, including through the delivery of apprenticeships, traineeships, reskilling, mentoring and support for local people.

The scheme is delivering a new public square and enhanced cycle and pedestrian facilities. The square will be integrated with the new community centre to broaden the range of activities on offer and include active play spaces and areas for community events to take place.

Both the shopping and community centre buildings are nearing the end of their life and their existing layout and design does not work well for current users. Replacing these with new spaces that work better for retailers and for users of the community centre alike will be significant benefit for the community. We know from the feedback we have received that the current community centre design is restrictive and inefficient. As well as being more flexible and therefore more open for a wider range of uses and groups, the new community centre is being designed to be zero carbon which will make it more affordable to run. We have appointed a team that is dedicated to working with local people to develop the design and use of the community centre to ensure it is as local people want and need it.

The scheme is delivering a range of new homes to address the need for affordable housing. Over 50% will be for social rent to those on the Council's housing register in greatest need and a further 25% will be for shared ownership to help local people onto the housing ladder. At present there are 3,165 households on our housing register and 16% of these are from Blackbird Leys and Northfield Brook wards – double the average for each ward across the city. It is local people in the Leys who stand to benefit most from the new housing.

This scheme is locally extremely important in delivering long term changes to support the community. The new community centre, public square, shops and homes are an opportunity for real change and also aim to encourage wider investment in the future.

2. Address by Evelyn Sanderson, Friends of the Fields Iffley - The Value of the Meadows in Iffley Conservation Area as a Community Asset

1. Let the Community fundraise to buy the Meadows; 2. Review land use in the 2036 Local Plan

Over the summer, shoppers in Broad Street can enjoy Broad Meadow, courtesy of Oxford City Council. But Broad Meadow is a fake, fast-food meadow for rapid consumption. In September it will be gone.

So how might we value the **real meadows** in the **Iffley Conservation area**:

The ones that are full of wildlife and protected species?

The ones that soak up rainwater and capture carbon?

The ones that form a nature corridor along the Thames as well as a corridor for people who walk and cycle along the rural lanes that border the fields. A designated quiet route for active travel for up to 900 people every day.

The meadows that once had public access and were at the heart of a village community?

The ones that are a heritage, Oxford-wide resource in a rural conservation area?

The permanent, living, evolving meadows, nourishing humans as well as nature at a time of crisis for both?

These real meadows, the Horse Fields, are in Iffley - which means "Meadows of Gifts" in Anglo Saxon. They have been giving, as unploughed wildflower meadows, since the Domesday book. They are the **last remaining ancient meadows in the village. In the UK, only 3% of the wildflower meadows**. Yet the Council have allocated them for 30 houses and bought them for £4.5 million.

Planning policy dictates that any development should conserve and enhance this rural Conservation Area. Building here is clearly contrary to the Council's own policy.

We agree that **Oxford urgently needs more genuinely affordable housing**. That is why people in Iffley are **not** opposed to the 84 houses planned for Iffley, **just 200m away from the Horse Fields**, on former Iffley Mead Playing Field. We want them **ALL to be for social housing**.

But where should development stop? Where is the destructive threshold that means we lose what is of value in terms of heritage, biodiversity and community?

Although Oxford's housing need is given as the reason given for destroying the meadows in Iffley. with the promise of only 12 houses promised for social rents, this does not add up. The real reason for development of this **high value land is for profit**.

The Council Leader Susan Brown has written to us to say that it is acceptable to **make money out of green spaces in the city**. NO, this is **unacceptable, unsustainable, short-term exploitation** of irreplaceable green spaces, which in Iffley are also heritage assets.

We and **the 9000 people who signed our petition to save the meadows from development**, think they have much greater value as a resource for community and nature.

In March 2021, we wrote to put this idea to the Shareholders and Joint Ventures Committee, who oversee Oxford City Housing Ltd, and to ask them **to allow the community time to fundraise to buy the land**.

This request fits with the **Conditions of Sale** in which the Council are required to make

*'reasonable endeavours to **take into consideration the views of the local community** and that the development **meets local need**.'*

But the Councillors on the committee **did not reply**. They did **not take the views of the local community into account** or consider a community resource that would **meet local need** for many more people than 12 homes for social rents.

- It is ironic that Councillor Tom Hayes' statement about the **Broad Street Meadow** could so easily apply to **the Meadows in Iffley**: *'Within a year we want to be in a position to give [the meadows in Iffley] back to the people and we need to hear from everyone about how [these meadows] have met their needs. As a listening council, we want to extend our discussions with 60 local stakeholders out to the whole of the city of Oxford.'*

A listening Council is what all communities hope for. We hope that they see the communities of Iffley, Rose Hill, Donnington, local schools, mental health programmes, social ventures and wildlife groups as stakeholders in the Iffley Community Fields project.

Please listen to our two requests, which have **widespread community support**:

1. Iffley Community Fields.

Allow us to fund raise to buy **both** the Horse Field and the Memorial Field as a community asset: the "Iffley Community Fields" project, to provide **educational opportunities and promote wellbeing and regenerate this rare habitat**. We know that the Council is proposing to turn the unallocated Memorial Field into a resource for *'heavy community use'*. This would be a travesty. **Both fields** are required to ensure a **careful and sustainable balance between people and nature**.

2. Review the 2036 Local Plan

Reassess land use following **COVID** and in keeping with your declaration of **Climate Emergency**. Release and regenerate brownfield sites currently ring-fenced for employment, to build **the right homes in the right places**.

Do councillors wish for a legacy that concretes over our city irrespective of the wishes and needs of local people and of our planet? There is **ONLY ONE OXFORD** and many other groups are fighting **both individually and together for the green spaces we need and value in our City**.

Or will **you choose** to review land use in the 2036 Local Plan **and** empower the community in Iffley, to provide an inclusive and equitable resource for education and wellbeing and help to restore the natural world on which we all depend? **Thank you**.

Written Response from the Cabinet Member, Cllr Hollingsworth

The site at Meadow Lane in Iffley was allocated for housing in the Oxford Local Plan 2036 after an extensive process of development of the evidence base, repeated rounds of consultation, and an exhaustive Public Examination process. The site was proposed for allocation by its then owners, and was assessed carefully using objective criteria that were applied to all potential sites in Oxford, and was found to be suitable for careful development. The same objective processes of assessment were used by neighbouring Councils before they assigned sites in their Local Plans for housing to meet the need for new homes that could not be wholly met in Oxford; well over 50% of Oxford's unmet housing need is being provided for on sites outside Oxford, something that involves decisions for the local authorities involved that are just as difficult as for allocations in Oxford.

The land at Meadow Lane having been allocated for development the owners decided to sell it, and the successful bidder was Oxford City Homes Limited, the City Council's wholly owned housing development company. Had OCHL not been successful then a private developer would have acquired the land, and developed it themselves. While we cannot know if they would have pursued the same high environmental standards for the new homes as OCHL, or the same proportion of affordable and social housing, we do know one thing - that any profit that they would have made would have gone to private shareholders and not, as with OCHL, to support the continuation of vital front-line services for the people of Oxford. As the question makes clear, the main financial beneficiary of the allocation of the site has been the former landowner, who has sold it for £4.5m. Any return that OCHL

makes will be a fraction of that, and given the choice, I would rather that return went to the City Council to pay for services than to private shareholders of a commercial developer.

The need for new homes demonstrated in the evidence base for Oxford's Local Plan 2036 was more than double the capacity of the city to provide sites for it, even with policies to increase densities and building heights in district centres. The sole driver for that need was the need for affordable and social housing. The City Council has started work on its Local Plan 2040, and will of course be reviewing the evidence base for housing need as part of that process. But I don't believe that it is in any way plausible that the need for affordable and social housing will suddenly and inexplicably have dropped by such an extent that Oxford will be able to accommodate all its housing needs without calling on its neighbours for help. In the circumstances where other local authorities are having to make difficult decisions to allocate sites for development in their areas to meet Oxford's needs, I cannot see any justification for applying one rule for assessing a site's suitability for development in Oxford while asking for a different standard outside.

3. Address by Roger Crisp, Friends of Old Marston – development in Old Marston

Good evening, Councillors. My name is Roger Crisp, and I represent the Friends of Old Marston, a group of residents and visitors which aims to preserve the unique qualities of this village. If you don't know Old Marston already, I do hope you will come to see it. As the Council's own appraisal of the Conservation Area said in 2012, its isolation until the building of the Marston Ferry Road in the 1970s has enabled it to keep much of its green and rural character, at least as far as its surroundings and buildings go. Many old fields remain, and it has a good number of historic buildings, including several which played an important role in the Civil War.

But over the last few decades, living in our village has become increasingly dangerous, unhealthy, and unpleasant, because of the thousands of rat-running drivers who ignore the 'access only' signs. Especially during rush hours, long queues of traffic build up through the whole village. Accidents are frequent, and sometimes serious, especially to cyclists and pedestrians, who have to weave their way through cars and lorries trying to pass on the narrow pavements and roads, made narrower by parked cars as well as the chicanes, which are of course currently necessary to keep speeds down.

Given the existing traffic problems, we were surprised that the Council's 2036 Local Plan allocated land for building down one of the narrowest and most dangerous roads in Oxford, Mill Lane. As some of you will know, it is effectively single track from its junction with the main through road until a double blind bend right in the middle of the Conservation Area. We know that the County Council told the City before the plan was finalized that such building would be, as far as transport is concerned, unsustainable. At least the Local Plan did require that permission depended on its being shown that two cars could pass along Mill Lane.

Nevertheless, despite that condition's not having been met, and despite the County's view that developments here are unsustainable, the City Council's own planning committee recently voted to accept - albeit by only one vote - an application for a new estate of 159 houses at Hill View Farm.

While the case officer who presented the development to the committee had participated in meetings with the developer, we have never been properly consulted, and the developer and the committee members refused to meet us. Because of Covid, all we were offered were two short internet meetings, which many elderly and poorer people in the village could not attend. We pointed out that the development would extend by nearly a hectare into unallocated Green Belt, but were ignored. This is poor governance, and we are continuing to look into all possible avenues to protect residents, especially children, cyclists, older people, and the many disabled wheelchair and mobility scooter users from Bradlands and elsewhere.

Had we been consulted, we would have said very clearly that we do *not* object to new homes being built in Old Marston. But only homes that don't add significant traffic, are affordable, and are designed for workers in the City who currently have to commute in, especially keyworkers at local schools and hospitals.

The Council itself has now applied for permission for another estate, this time of 80 homes, again accessible only from Mill Lane. But there is *still* no transport solution. Time is running out for all of us, as the terrible flooding in Germany showed, and it is certainly running out in Old Marston. We are now appealing to you all, a newly formed Council with forward-looking ideas, to review these planning decisions on grounds of unsustainability, and to encourage the developer at Hill View Farm to put in another proposal more in line with the values of the Council and those whom it represents, as well as a public transport plan for residents which would also help those at Bradlands and make it a place people actually want to live.

The Council has a chance here to do something imaginative and positive, something which it can be proud of now rather than ashamed of in the future.

Written Response from the Cabinet Member, Cllr Hollingsworth

The address raises a number of issues that I will try to address in turn.

Following concerns raised by the County Council, planning officers worked with the applicant and the County Council to explore the options regarding two vehicles passing on Mill Lane during the life of the application. After much investigation it was accepted that the main impacts would be during the construction phase of the development and that this could be dealt with through a Construction Traffic Management Plan. As a result the County Council did NOT make an objection to the planning application as presented to the Planning Committee on 26th May 2021; a representative from County Highways attended the Committee which considered this application, and addressed at some length questions raised by members on this issue.

Clearly the COVID-19 pandemic had an effect on the applicant's ability to engage with the wider community. However Officers were satisfied that the actions taken by the applicant met the required legal standard, including engagement in writing with bodies such as Oxford Civic Society and Old Marston Parish Council. The application was accompanied by a Statement of Community Involvement which sets this out in full. The Council also undertook its statutory duty of advertising the application as it was originally submitted and once it had been amended. All comments received as a result of that publicity were taken into consideration, summarised and addressed within the Committee report, including a representation from Friends of Old Marston amongst others. Members of the public also had the opportunity to address the Committee and those who took that opportunity were Friends of Old Marston, Marston Parish Council and Elsfeld Road, Oxford Road and Old Marston Resident's Association.

The report to the Planning Committee clearly set out the assessment of the impact upon the Green Belt. The development itself is contained within the application site's 'red line', including the necessary public open space provision as required by policy SP25 of the Oxford Local Plan 2036. The land outside the red line does not form part of the development itself, and instead provides the Green Belt compensation measures required by national and local policy. Any Green Belt compensation measures would by definition need to be off site and as the applicant owns the adjoining land, it was considered an acceptable approach. The development does not encroach onto unallocated Green Belt land, as was made clear at the Planning Committee.

The application complies with the relevant Oxford Local Plan policies in terms of the provision of affordable housing. There is no compulsion for any development under those policies to be solely for affordable housing, solely for current residents or solely keyworker housing only. Nonetheless it provides much needed housing and affordable housing at the level required under the Oxford Local Plan policies.

The application referred to at Mill Lane (ref: 21/01217/FUL) is currently being considered by planning officers. The application has been consulted on publicly in accordance with the statutory requirements, and will be reported to the Planning Committee in due course.

The Planning Committee has already resolved to grant the application at Hill View Farm planning permission subject to the completion of a S106 legal agreement. There are no grounds or mechanisms to revisit that decision unless there is a material change in planning policy, which there has not been nor likely to be. The Council cannot require the applicant to resubmit another scheme.

Both of these application sites were allocating for housing in the Oxford Local Plan 2036, which underwent rigorous testing, several rounds of consultation and was then found to be sound at the Local Plan Examination, and adopted by the City Council. Contrary to the suggestion in the address, the County Council as the Highways Authority did not make a formal objection to the inclusion of these sites in the Local Plan.