

To: Cabinet
Date: 10 November 2021
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: East Oxford Community Centre and Housing Development

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations concerning the Cabinet East Oxford Community Centre and Housing Development report
Key decision:	Yes
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Liz Wade, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Cabinet Members:	Councillors Shaista Aziz, Cabinet Member for Inclusive Communities, and Diko Blackings, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, Housing Security and Homelessness
Corporate Priority:	Support Thriving Communities; Deliver More, Affordable Housing
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020-24; Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018-21
Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.	

Appendices
None

Introduction and overview

1. At its meeting on 02 November 2021, the Scrutiny Committee considered the Cabinet East Oxford Community Centre and Housing Development report.
2. The Panel would like to thank Councillor Shaista Aziz, Cabinet Member for Inclusive Communities, for attending the meeting and presenting the report, Hagan Lewisman, Active Communities Manager, for authoring the report and supporting the meeting in responding to questions, and Deborah Wyatt,

Affordable Housing Supply Senior Project Officer, also for supporting the meeting.

Summary and recommendations

3. Councillor Shaista Aziz, Cabinet Member for a Inclusive Communities introduced the report, which brought forward proposals for redevelopment which had been worked on since 2014. This major scheme and investment would provide an important, sustainable cultural hub as well as some much needed affordable housing. The East Oxford Cultural Centre had strong emotional connections for many residents and much of the preparatory work had focused on positive and constructive discussions with the many and various groups and organisations which use it or have used it in the past.
4. Hagan Lewisman, Active Communities Manager, said a considerable amount of work had preceded the report including consultations with users and a number of detailed feasibility studies. The necessary planning permissions and budget were in place. Deb Wyatt, Affordable Housing Supply Officer said the scheme would provide 26 affordable, low carbon and highly energy efficient homes.
5. The areas of discussion for the Committee included focus on governance and the future running of the community centre, interim plans during the build phase, recent criticisms of the proposed plans by a number of stakeholders, sustainability, and the steps being taken to ensure the new community centre is a vibrant and valued community hub.
6. The Committee makes four recommendations, which relate to building sustainability, project risks and future management and governance structures.

Building Sustainability

7. The Committee welcomes the plans to build the community centre extension to nearly carbon zero, and 70% improvement on Building Regulations for the houses. Given that the community centre extension is likely, in particular, to present opportunities for new carbon-reducing approaches and technologies the Committee sees value in capturing the learning of the effectiveness and cost-efficiency of such measures in order to feed into future projects.

Recommendation 1: That the Council sets down plans for measuring and assessing the effectiveness of carbon-saving measures delivered on the East Oxford Community Centre development, and their cost efficiency in reducing carbon emissions.

8. Although the greatest contribution to reducing carbon emissions related to the buildings is from long-term improvements to energy efficiency, it is not the only one. There is also an opportunity to reduce the embedded carbon cost of the proposed demolition through the recycling of its materials. The Committee has been informed that there may be possible challenges to doing so; potential contamination of materials may render them unrecyclable. It asks, therefore, that the Council attempts to set a positive example by recycling, wood and steel particularly, where it is possible to do so.

Recommendation 2: That the Council, where possible, recycles materials recovered from the demolition of the East Oxford Community Centre site, particularly steel and wood.

Community Centre Governance

9. The Committee held fairly extensive discussion over the future management and operation of the community centre, with a number of different positions put forward. Whilst there was not a general consensus on the precise details of who should run the community centre, there was a general recognition that the issue of long-term governance and management is extremely important. The Committee agrees with the current proposals that the Council run it for a year, which will enable more accurate understanding over costs and usage to be established. However, it is keen that notwithstanding the delicacy of the decision, a decision is made and implemented, and that issue is not allowed to drift. The Committee recommends, therefore, that the Council agrees to within two years of identifying, three years after opening, its preferred management and governance structure. It is felt that this is sufficient time to allow new potential parties to arise, for the practical details of the offer to be better understood, for discussions with stakeholders to take place, and for a new structure to be established.

Recommendation 3: That the Council implements within three years of the new community centre being opened the preferred option for its management and operation.

Managing Risk

10. A small point, but the Committee noted that the report references in paragraph 52 potential risks to land values arising from external factors, such as the pandemic and Brexit. These risks warrant mitigations but are not included in the risk register. The Committee suggests that this be corrected.

Recommendation 4: That the Council includes within the risk register for this project those external risks to land values referenced in paragraph 52 of the Cabinet report.

Further Consideration

11. The Scrutiny Committee is unlikely to consider this item directly again during the civic year.

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Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee made on 02/11/2021 concerning the Cabinet East Oxford Community Centre and Housing Development report

Provided by the Cabinet Member for Inclusive Communities, Councillor Shaista Aziz

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1) That the Council sets down plans for measuring and assessing the effectiveness of carbon-saving measures delivered on the East Oxford Community Centre development, and their cost efficiency in reducing carbon emissions.	Yes	
2) That the Council, where possible, recycles materials recovered from the demolition of the East Oxford Community Centre site, particularly steel and wood.	Partially	We would recommend an action for us to develop a waste and recycling plan for demolition and look to recycle in line with this. However we also need to be careful to balance this recognising how recyclable some materials are and that we need to avoid high costs that are unaffordable within the approved budget
3) That the Council implements within three years of the new community centre being opened the preferred option for its management and operation	Yes	
4) That the Council includes within the risk register for this project those external risks to land values referenced in paragraph 52 of the Cabinet report	Yes	

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