

**To: Council**

**Date: 29 November 2021**

**Report of: Head of Law and Governance**

**Title of Report: Public addresses and questions that relate to matters for decision at this meeting**

## **Introduction**

1. Addresses made by members of the public to the Council about matters for decision at this meeting, are below. Any available written responses provided by Cabinet Members are also included.
2. The text reproduces that sent in by the speakers and represents the views of the speakers. Their addresses are 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 1 of the agenda**

1. Address by Ciaran Walsh, Chairperson of East Oxford Community Association (EOCA) – on item 7: East Oxford Community Centre and Housing Development

## Addresses and questions to be taken in Part 1 of the agenda

### 1. Address by Ciaran Walsh, Chairperson of East Oxford Community Association (EOCA) – on item 7: East Oxford Community Centre and Housing Development

From the time the redevelopment of EOCC was proposed EOCA has had some objections to the way the programme developed. We were very disappointed in the small number of responses generated by the consultation procedure, which we considered inadequate in view of the fact that EOCC is an important space intended to serve the whole of the East Oxford parliamentary constituency and the wider city.

Subsequently, during the reference group meetings not enough attention was devoted to the future governance of EOCC which should have been the first item on the agenda before technical specifications if the redevelopment was aimed to serve the interests of the groups using EOCC and the wider community of stakeholders.

EOCA in all good conscience cannot acquiesce in the building of a block of housing units on the space of EOCC. We view this as the enclosure and privatisation of Public Space, intended for community use. Space which will be lost to future generations if this plan goes forward, a severe depletion of the legacy left for future generations in East Oxford.

We are concerned that there will not be sufficient space to house the current users of EOCC after the redevelopment, let alone offer space to the important community groups that we wished to see accommodated and given a home at EOCC, such as The Oxford Kurdish Association (OKA), The East Timor Association, East Oxford Fabricators, all factored out of the plan.

An important issue for EOCA is where will the Association and other community groups such as the Afrikan and Caribbean Kultural Heritage Initiative (ACKHI), Oxford Action Resource Centre (OARC) operate during the redevelopment. We have been told that the Cave Street facility which houses the EOCA and ACKHI temporary offices is also to be demolished and redeveloped simultaneously with EOCC thus making EOCA, ACKHI homeless. This shows scant regard to wishes and needs of local community groups, as did the whole process, with a real lack of genuine engagement.

EOCA has not been opposed to the idea of a redevelopment of EOCC but positively wanted an expansive inclusive plan that would cater to the needs of East Oxford's diverse communities in the future, unfortunately we do not think this plan will accomplish that.

### **Written Response from the Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, Housing Security and Housing the Homeless**

OCC has actively engaged with the East Oxford community and stakeholders throughout the proposed redevelopment of the community centre and undertaken a wide range of consultations from public events, reference group meetings (including with EOCA) and 1:1 meetings with individual user groups. This continual engagement over many years has been conducted working together with the reference group who have provided very helpful and valuable input. The consultation events were successful, with over 150 people attending the first event to share their views and comments on the proposals, with some of the local community groups providing

support to the event with items such as provision of food to those who attended. Throughout the design process, engagement with the user groups has helped develop a scheme which offers a modern and flexible space for both existing and future users of the centre.

The Council recognises that inclusive governance arrangements are key to the successful operation of the centre and this was discussed regularly at the reference group meetings. The Council has listened very carefully to the views and feedback from the various community groups and it is important that this is taken into consideration and ensuring that new and existing community groups are being welcomed back into the redeveloped centre. The Council is very much committed to this and continuing our work with community groups on the governance solutions and this is planned to re-commence once the centre has re-opened.

The project is also providing 26 much needed affordable housing for the residents of Oxford. The units adjacent to the community centre will offer 12 flats at social rent, c.40% of current open market rent, and it is through the provision of housing that funding for the refurbishment and extension to the community centre is possible. Providing housing is not a loss to the community but strengthens a community by enabling future generations to continue to live in their city and access the vibrant facilities in their neighbourhood.

Unfortunately with any large development of this scale there is a need to temporarily move community users and community tenants from the buildings whilst building work is ongoing. It is not safe for the building to remain operational during the build. We are currently talking to the various community tenants to understand their search for temporary accommodation and of course we would be more than happy to talk to EOCA again to offer our support where we can, if you or any of the other groups are having any issues with this.

This project is a significant investment by the council in East Oxford that will provide both new and existing community users with modern, sustainable, state of the art facilities fit for the 21 century for all the community to enjoy.

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