

To: Council
Date: 20 March 2023
Report of: Head of Law and Governance
Title of Report: Questions on Notice from members of Council and responses from the Cabinet Members and Leader

Introduction

1. Questions submitted by members of Council to the Cabinet members and Leader of the Council, by the deadline in the Constitution are listed below in the order they will be taken at the meeting.
2. Responses are included where available.
3. Questioners can ask one supplementary question of the councillor answering the original question.
4. This report will be republished after the Council meeting to include supplementary questions and responses as part of the minutes pack.
5. Unfamiliar terms may be briefly explained in footnotes.

Questions and responses

Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships; Leader of the Council

SB1 From Cllr Landell Mills to Cllr Brown – City Centre Action Plan	
Question	Written Response
How are the measurable Key Performance Indicators and Budgets listed in the council’s City Centre Action Plan performing in practice?	<p>The City Council is overseeing and tracking the plan on behalf of multiple stakeholders – it is important to note that the City Centre Action Plan has been created by the Council on behalf of the whole city centre.</p> <p>Regarding Key Performance Indicators, these have been listed as a project outcome against each project with</p>

SB1 From Cllr Landell Mills to Cllr Brown – City Centre Action Plan

project start timelines noted.

An overall governance approach has been set up to monitor and assist the delivery of the projects in the Plan. The Plan is tracked by an overarching monitoring document and each project has an assigned project lead and defined actions. If a project is underway, the lead is asked for regular updates. Additionally, each quarter, officers from across the Council meet to discuss the Plan and support/add input to projects in hand. As new opportunities arise for the City, these projects are noted so that consideration, through the governance process, can be given to their addition. All of the projects due to start in 2022 have started, with some already delivered.

Regarding budget, there was no assigned budget for the majority of projects, and the aim is to have them close to ready so that funding opportunities can be applied for as they arise. Some projects don't require funding, just time resources and those resources are allocated as time allows.

SB2 From Cllr Jarvis to Cllr Brown – County Boundary Review**Question**

Is the City Council intending to create its own cross party working group to look at the County boundary review?

Written Response

Staff in Law and Governance will be setting up a cross party County Boundary Working Group. This follows the procedure that the Council has followed for the last few decades for boundary reviews that have covered Oxford. It will be politically balanced (three Labour, one Liberal Democrat and one Green Member) and will consider whether a scheme can be recommended and put to Council for approval.

Each political group has already been asked to put forward its nominees.

ET1 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Turner – ESG Policy for Investments

Question

What is the council’s environment, social and governance (ESG) policy for its investments in shares or bonds?

Written Response

The Council is not investing in shares or bonds and has no plans to do so. Treasury investments in shares is not permitted in the currently approved credit and counterparty list which was approved by Council at its meeting on 16th February 2023. The investment in bonds is permitted in line with the strategy, however no investments are held or are planned. That being said, if there were to be any investments in bonds then the Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Policy approved as part of the treasury strategy would apply. In accordance with the policy, ESG risks are considered to be an important overlay to the investment process, thereby improving future sustainability of investments. The Council, when holding meetings with counterparties, always has ESG as an agenda item and uses its investment capabilities to persuade and pressurise counterparties to improve their policies and deliverables in respect of ESG.

ET2 From Cllr Smowton to Cllr Turner – Companies’ Dividends

Question

Could you please list the (number and value of) dividends paid by the council’s companies to the council since they were founded?

Written Response

ODS has delivered 2 dividend amounts since incorporation in 2018, one in respect of 2018-19 in the amount of £1.247 million and one for £600k in respect of 2020-21. Their business, like most businesses, was severely affected by the impact of the COVID pandemic. The 2021-22 statement of accounts is still subject to external audit and no dividend has been declared in respect of this year although I understand that one will be, once the accounts have been

	<p>signed off. It should be noted that in addition to the dividend return which is derived from surpluses and efficiencies from company operations, ODS pays the Council for support services provided, interest on vehicles purchased and depot rentals, which over the 6 year period of the contract are estimated to be around £30 million.</p> <p>OX Place have yet to achieve a surplus since their incorporation in 2016 although they are forecast to do so in 2022-23. The expectation of dividends from the company from surpluses in the next 4 years is estimated at £13.4 million and it is worth noting that up to 31-3-2023 accrued interest margin (i.e. the difference between the rate at which the Council borrows to the rate at which it lends to OX Place) is estimated at around £2.6 million. There are significant advantages to receiving income in this way.</p>
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ET3 From Cllr Smowton to Cllr Turner – Jericho Wharf	
Question	Written Response
<p>What lessons does the council take away from the planning committee having been overturned at appeal regarding the housing and community centre at Jericho Wharf [20/01276/FUL]? The result has been years of dereliction and then finally a permission granted with zero affordable housing – how can we avoid similar outcomes in future?</p>	<p>The application in question was not solely providing housing and a community centre at the former boatyard site. In accordance with the allocation policy, this was a mixed-use scheme that was seeking to provide residential uses, community centre, boatyard, public realm, and works to the canal. The range of uses within the mixed-use scheme make this a complex site in terms of delivery.</p> <p>Although the site has been derelict for some years, it is important to note that planning permissions for redevelopment have been granted in the past but none of these have been delivered.</p> <p>Any proposal for the site must be considered against National and Local Planning Policy unless material considerations state otherwise. The provision of affordable housing is a key</p>

	<p>objective for the Council, and the policies in the Local Plan set out what is required from qualifying sites such as this. However, as per paragraph 58 of the NPPF and Policy H2 in the Local Plan, where it can be robustly demonstrated through a viability appraisal that it is not possible to provide affordable housing within the scheme we have to consider these matters.</p> <p>In determining the application, officers felt it was sufficiently demonstrated through the viability appraisals that the scheme could not afford to deliver affordable housing along with all the other important uses that are being sought on the site, specifically the boatyard, new community centre, public space, bridge, public realm. It was on that basis that the application was put to committee with a recommendation to approve the application along with a review mechanism that would look to capture any additional value not envisaged in the viability work as a financial contribution towards affordable housing. The committee was not persuaded by the viability report conclusions and refused the application.</p> <p>Through defending the appeal, the Council commissioned a further review of the viability work submitted by the applicant and found it only to be marginally viable, albeit to a greater degree than the conclusions of the previous viability report. The Inspector however was not persuaded by this work and has allowed the appeal. The review mechanism has been retained which will secure affordable housing contributions in the event that the scheme achieves a greater value than envisaged in the viability work.</p> <p>In many respects this is how the planning system is meant to work, officers present a recommendation to Planning Committee, which then undertook a thorough and robust decision-making process and based its decision on a sound planning basis. The viability report</p>
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	<p>challenges some of the assumptions held regarding the profitability of development when there are multiple other requirements such as community centre, boat yards and so forth. However, as explained above, this is a unique site with unique challenges clearly not replicated on other sites.</p>
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Cabinet Member for Leisure and Parks; Deputy Leader of the Council

CM1 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Munkonge – Public Water Fountain Provision	
<p>Question</p> <p>How many public drinking water fountains are there in the city on city owned parks or land? Of the total number, how many are disused, and how many are functioning? Given the potential for extreme temperatures this summer and in future years, what plans does the council have to renovate or install additional public water fountains?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>There are three drinking water fountains in the city owned parks (at Florence, Bury Knowle and Cutteslowe Parks). The one at Cutteslowe is currently out of order, but we are working to get this back working as soon as possible. There are no additional funds identified at present to install further fountains.</p> <p>Several the city’s parks also have kiosks or nearby facilities such as leisure or community centres where people can access free drinking water. The city installed the drinking fountains as part of the ‘Refill’ campaign, which aimed to advertise places and spaces in which free drinking water could be accessed; this included restaurants and shops.</p>

CM2 From Cllr Roz Smith to Cllr Munkonge – Children’s Scooter Parking	
<p>Question</p> <p>How many children’s scooter parking stands are currently installed in City Council owned parks and what is their capacity?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>We do not currently have specific children’s scooter parking stands and have not seen any increased demand from our communities for these at this time. We do however have cycle parking at our parks that can sometimes be used for this purpose.</p>

SA1 From Cllr Jarvis to Cllr Aziz – Gender Neutral Toilet Provision

Question

Can the portfolio holder provide an update as to what steps have been taken to introduce gender neutral toilets in Council buildings following the passing of the ‘Becoming a trans inclusive Council’ motion in November 2021?

Written Response

Officers would consider this when we are undertaking any development works and a budget is identified.

In our main Council building, the Oxford Town Hall, officers will review options of if and how gender neutral toilets can be included in the next phase of development works.

For private events at the Town Hall when they are outside normal opening hours, we have been able to change the use of the current toilets for that event into gender neutral toilets, which were important for the success of the event.

SA2 From Cllr Pegg to Cllr Aziz – Asylum Seekers at Kassam Stadium

Question

Can the portfolio holder provide an update on the welfare of asylum seekers housed at the Kassam Stadium by the Home Office and the support being provided to them by the Council?

Written Response

The Council leads the multi-agency response and holds fortnightly meetings with partners and the management of the hotel, which is directed by the Home Office. There are currently no issues of concern regarding the welfare of the asylum seekers and the Council continues to work with local organisations, community groups and charities to provide education, advice, clothing and social activities, we extend our thanks and gratitude to everyone for their work. The Council is committed to its values of working towards Oxford being a city of sanctuary and a city where asylum seekers and refugees are welcome.

SA3 From Cllr Rawle to Cllr Aziz – Household Support Fund**Question**

In light of new guidance for the Household Support Fund that states cash grants can be used as part of support, will the council be issuing cash grants, as was advised by many organisations that gave evidence to the Child Poverty Review Group?

Written Response

We are constantly reviewing how we distribute the Household Support Fund with the County and neighbouring districts. We believe that our blended approach of using the City's advice centre network as well as direct support through our locality teams is performing well. We provide support through energy vouchers, food vouchers, essential items purchasing and other essentials covered by the criteria which minimises the need for cash payments.

Cabinet Member for Housing**LS1 From Cllr Fouweather to Cllr Linda Smith – Rental Property Licensing****Question**

Under the new Selective Licensing Scheme introduced in September 2022, what proportion of relevant properties in Oxford are now licensed by the Council? How many licences have been issued and how many applications have been rejected? What is the proportion of privately rented properties inspected and how many licences have been revoked as a result of inspection?

Written Response

We predicted we would receive 10,000 applications within the first year and we have already received 94% of the applications predicted (9,467 valid applications). Of those applications received, 560 final licences and 1,067 draft licences have been issued which is 17% of the total received. Once a valid application has been made, the application must be granted or refused (unless the applicant subsequently withdraws). We have issued 1 intention to refuse.

Since the scheme commenced, we have inspected 66 properties where housing health and safety rating system assessments have been made. No licences have been revoked as a result of these inspections as that has not been necessary, however we have taken enforcement action in 19 properties and served 29 notices under the Housing Act 2004.

LS2 From Cllr Rawle to Cllr Linda Smith – Selective Licensing Energy Efficiency

Question

Following the introduction of the Selective Licensing Scheme, how many private landlords have improved the energy efficiency of their properties following advice or recommendations from officers?

Written Response

Since the scheme began, investigations have commenced into 49 properties with regards to energy efficiency concerns and of these 23 have now taken action that improved the energy efficiency of the property. Of the remaining properties, 8 have been found to be exempt from the minimum energy efficiency regulations and investigations are continuing into the others. Grant funding for energy efficiency upgrades in the private sector will continue to be promoted to landlords.

LS3 From Cllr Pegg to Cllr Linda Smith – Homes for Ukraine Scheme

Question

Can the portfolio holder provide an update on the Homes for Ukraine scheme in Oxford?

Written Response

As of 03 March 2023, approximately 397 Ukraine individuals have arrived to Oxford under the Homes for Ukraine (HfU) scheme and there are currently 213 households in hosting arrangements. Re-matching is seen as a key approach to supporting guests to stay housed across the whole County and to avoid the pressures of homelessness within respective Districts. To date in Oxford, we have re-matched 43 households into a new hosting arrangement and moved 5 into alternative accommodation, with only one current case in emergency temporary accommodation under the HfU scheme. Our current key focus is to increase the supply of private rented tenancies. To support this work and ensure successful outcomes, we have secured additional resources to bolster capacity including 3 re-matching officers hosted by the City working across the County (as well as a prevention officer and 2 project officers).

AH1 From Cllr Smowton to Cllr Hollingsworth – Loss of Social Housing

Question

Is the council content with government figures showing that the number of social houses in Oxford went down by 132 over the last ten years? What is the breakdown of the 140 social housing units demolished and 532 sold over that time (e.g. lost to Right To Buy, demolished for replacement by residential development, demolished for replacement by non-residential development, etc)?

Written Response

The figures quoted in the question, which appear to be taken from media coverage of a press release issued by Shelter that related to England overall, do not match data provided to the Government by Oxford City Council, or figures in the Government data tables cited by the press release.

Figures provided by Oxford City Council to the Government, and included in Table 116 of the Government’s tables of housing data, show that the overall number of Local Authority owned social housing units was 7,624 in 2013, and 7,613 in 2022, a net decline of 11 units. Within those figures the biggest decline was 73 net units in 2014 and the biggest increase was 107 net units in 2022.

Table 691b of the Government’s data set on housing shows that over the same ten year period from 2012-13 to 2021-22 a total of 292 homes were sold under Right to Buy. Three further properties were sold by the Council because they were uneconomic to repair.

There are two demolitions during this period: Bradlands (2014), when 30 units were demolished and replaced by 49 units, and Cumberlege House (2016) when 15 unsuitable sheltered accommodation flats were replaced with 9 houses as part of the linked scheme with the Elsfield Way site.

Table 115 of the Government data set relates to returns from Registered Providers (Housing Associations) and shows the total combined figure for homes and bed spaces. Over the same ten year period as Table 116 there is a net reduction of 622 units/bedspaces. This seems to be almost entirely related

AH1 From Cllr Smowton to Cllr Hollingsworth – Loss of Social Housing

to a single change in the return from A2/Dominion between 2015 and 2016, when 548 general needs bedspaces were dropped from their annual report, as part of an overall reduction in units/bedspaces in that year of 749. Officers believe that this was most likely to be due to a change in reporting methodology for Housing Associations, as there is no closure or demolition that appears to relate to a change of that magnitude, and are investigating further.

The current Council Four Year Plan targets for the period from 2022/23 to 2025/26 are to deliver 1,600 affordable homes of all tenures, of which 850 will be at social rents. While the figures are provisional because we are not yet at the year end and schemes are counted at practical completion stage and some schemes are under the control of Registered Providers rather than the Council, we currently believe that the outcome for this financial year will be around 400 new units of affordable housing, and around 200 new units of social housing.

AH2 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Hollingsworth – Car Free Developments

Question

Despite the County Council's parking standards, why is the City Council still proposing the development of 'nearly car free' developments rather than 'car free' developments by council owned housing companies? What steps has the council taken to obtain lessons learned about car free developments in the UK and in Europe (e.g. in Utrecht in the Netherlands)?

Written Response

Parking standards are set by Local Plans, in Oxford and elsewhere in Oxfordshire. In Oxford, the policy is set out clearly in the Oxford Local Plan 2036, policy M3, which says that developments should be zero car where there is a CPZ and specified facilities are within particular distances of the development. For developments where these two tests are not met, the parking standard is specified in Appendix 7.3 of the Local Plan.

At the time of the drafting and adoption of the Local Plan 2036, these standards

	<p>were significantly more advanced than those set down in the County Council's parking standard document. However since then the County Council has adopted a new parking standard, which now has the same tests for car free development as the City Council's Local Plan. These are set out in paragraph 4.12 of the County Council document, and are identical to the existing Oxford Local Plan policy M3.</p> <p>Furthermore, the newly adopted County Council parking standard then includes the entirety of the City Council's Local Plan parking standard as Section 5 of their document. In other words, the new County Council parking has come into line with, and has not altered, the City Council's Local Plan policies on parking.</p> <p>The City Council and OX Place have taken extensive advice on the delivery of car free and low car developments, and the impacts of those on values and on desirability for tenants. While there is substantial evidence supporting city and district centre zero car developments, there is considerably less relating to edge of town developments. Both the Council and the housing company will continue to monitor best practice and experience both within and outside the UK.</p>
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AH3 From Cllr Morris to Cllr Hollingsworth – Improved Amenities in Marston	
<p>Question</p> <p>Does the portfolio holder agree that given the desirability of 15 minute neighbourhoods, Marston would benefit substantially from improved amenities, such as a doctor's surgery, dentist and community centre? What steps are the Council taking to improve the proximity of key amenities to residents in Marston?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>The fifteen minute neighbourhood concept, which has been at the heart of good planning for at least a century, is being used as part of the Local Plan 2040 process to identify where particular amenities might be under-provided for across the city. While not wanting to pre-empt that work, Marston may well be one of the areas where particular amenities are further away than is desirable from people's home.</p> <p>It is important to bear in mind that the</p>

	<p>Local Plan is only one part of the process, and that for many facilities we are reliant on organisations outside the City Council to support both in principle and sometimes with funding the provision of a new amenity.</p> <p>For example, the NHS – through the Integrated Care Board – would need to give its support for the provision of a doctors’ surgery and ensure that GPs and other health staff were ready to occupy it. The City Council is in close contact with the ICB and has made clear to it the importance of a clear strategy for primary health care facilities in Oxford and Oxfordshire so that we – and the other planning authorities in the county – can include appropriate site designations in our Local Plans.</p>
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Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services

NC1 From Cllr Pegg to Cllr Chapman – Tree Removal	
<p>Question</p> <p>Can the cabinet member set out the process taken by the tree team and other officers when a tree is to be removed, including when the local members and residents may be consulted?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>The below is taken from the Oxford City Council Tree Management Policy. Tree works and the associated notifications are undertaken by ODS:</p> <p><i>“The Council will inform Ward Councillors and appropriate ‘Friends Groups’ of any major tree works such as pollarding or felling <u>before</u> any works are carried out in their ward/park. This gives councillors the opportunity to raise concerns about the proposed works. If there are a large number of trees to fell in one location, the Council may also erect notices to inform the public of the proposed works.</i></p> <p><i>In the event of <u>emergency safety work</u> that must be carried out immediately (e.g. storm damage), the Council will notify Ward Councillors retrospectively.”</i></p> <p>Felling is the last resort and will only be</p>

	carried out when deemed necessary by the Tree Team. However, public safety is paramount and for this reason it is sometimes necessary to act quickly and inform councillors and the public after the event.
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NC2 From Cllr Jarvis to Cllr Chapman – Town Hall Toilet Facilities	
Question Will the works planned on the Town Hall include the introduction of gender neutral toilet facilities?	Written Response Phase Two of the Town Hall project is currently being scoped and we will consider the introduction of gender neutral toilets within this. A Member workshop on future options for the Town Hall will be held in due course.

NC3 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Chapman – Bike Access for Recycling	
Question What provision does the city council make for residents to access the city council recycling centres by bike?	Written Response Oxford City Council provides a comprehensive kerbside collection recycling service, a bulky items collection service and a garden waste service all delivered through ODS. We would encourage residents to use these services in the first instance for recycling. However, there may be occasions where residents may want to take some items for recycling to the Redbridge Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) – which is operated by Oxfordshire County Council. Pedestrian access is not permitted onto any of Oxfordshire’s HWRCs as there are currently no segregated walkways to enable pedestrians to safely enter and exit the sites. However, the County Council does not state any restrictions on access by cycle. Oxford City Council also currently operates a number of Community Recycling Centres or bring banks across the city, typically in car parks or on other council land. All are accessible by cycle. However, the Council is planned to

	remove the majority of these as we have expanded the range of items that can be collected from people's homes, and some of these bring banks have become focal points for fly-tipping.
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Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford and Climate Justice

AR1 From Cllr Miles to Cllr Railton – Grass Verge Damage by Vehicles

Question	Written Response
On Morrell Avenue, vehicle owners accessing their repurposed front gardens as car parking are currently driving over the verges and destroying the grass and new spring bulbs. What steps are being taken by the City Council to prevent the destruction of its grass verges?	<p>In general, maintenance of the carriageway, pavements and verges, together with parking and other highway enforcement activities are the responsibility of the Local Transport Authority – Oxfordshire County Council.</p> <p>The County Council procures ODS and other operators to undertake works – which in some areas of the city, eg. Marsh Lane, have included the installation of kick rails to protect verges from people parking vehicles.</p>

AR2 From Cllr Pegg to Cllr Railton – Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Question	Written Response
Can the portfolio holder provide an update on the Council's involvement with developing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy, and when we can expect such a strategy to be published?	It is expected that Oxfordshire County Council will be appointed local lead for the development of a LNRS by Government. We are working closely with them in the preparation for this and have in partnership with the other Oxfordshire local authorities developed a Nature Recovery Network which will form a key part of a future LNRS.

AR3 From Cllr Kerr to Cllr Railton – Oxford's Smoke Control Areas

Question	Written Response
<p>We know that PM 2.5 caused by wood burning is a huge health issue in Oxford, as highlighted in the City's autumn Do You Fuel Good campaign. Is there currently any further detail on the plans for extending Oxford's Smoke Control Areas, as referenced in the Air Quality Action Plan?</p>	<p>Oxford City Council has committed, under measure 22 of its current Air Quality Action Plan to "Review of Smoke Controlled Zones and implement revised government legislation for smoke nuisance". With updated legislation on SCAs very recently published by government we are currently in the process of assessing how the new powers can assist us in reaching our targets of reduced particulate matter.</p>

Cabinet Member for Health and Transport

LU1 From Cllr Muddiman to Cllr Upton – Encouraging Walking and Cycling on Botley Road	
Question	Written Response
<p>What plans does the council have to encourage more residents to walk and/or cycle on the Botley Road, whilst it is closed at the train station?</p>	<p>During the periods of closure of Botley Road at the train station, pedestrians and cyclists will continue to be able to pass under the railway. Therefore, walking and cycling will automatically be even more attractive options.</p> <p>The City Council has continually encouraged Network Rail and the County Council (the organisations responsible for the railway and highway works) to produce as robust a set of mitigation measures as possible. Network Rail have promised to provide marshals to ensure that people walking and wheeling interact smoothly as they pass under the bridge.</p> <p>The periods where access under the bridge is restricted will be particularly disruptive for those with disabilities. The City Council's Inclusive Transport & Movement Focus Group continues to engage with Network Rail, the bus operators and both councils in order to mitigate the impacts of this period of works on those with impairments.</p> <p>One piece of good news is that the King George's Field Active Travel route, just to</p>

	<p>the south of Botley Road, is due to open the week before the Botley Road closure begins. The new path, designed for both pedestrians and cyclists, will provide a direct, convenient and visually pleasing off-road connection between Botley and the city centre.</p> <p>King George's Playing Field Cycle Improvements King George's Playing Field Cycle Improvements Oxford City Council</p>
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<p>LU2 From Cllr Morris to Cllr Upton – Local, Sustainable and Resilient Food Production</p>	
<p>Question</p> <p>What is the City Council currently doing to encourage more local, sustainable and resilient food production, such as through helping residents to set up food growing schemes, supporting street food growing, and community gardening groups in public spaces and allotment sites? Does the Council plan to further develop its support in this area?</p>	<p>Written Response</p> <p>Oxford City Council has signed up to the Oxfordshire Food Strategy. We are an integral part of the Food Action Working Group for Oxford (I chair it, and several city officers attend) which is developing the Action Plan to underlie the Food Strategy for the city.</p> <p>Fellow Cabinet Members Cllrs Aziz and Munkonge and I are working with the Communities team to produce some ambitious and achievable actions that we can put into the Food Action Plan to be produced later this year.</p> <p>I would like to thank Cllr Morris for the fantastic work he has done with Marston Community Gardening to develop community allotments – this is an excellent example of the kind of thing we will look at supporting.</p>

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