

To: Council

Date: 17 July 2023

Report of: Head of Law and Governance

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 and questions to be taken in Part 2 of the agenda

1. Address by Danny Yee – 20 mph in the City Centre
2. Address by – Kaddy Beck – Save Bertie Park
3. Question from Chaka Artwell – Councillors revealing their domicile during local elections

Addresses and questions to be taken in Part 2 of the agenda

1. Address by Danny Yee – 20 mph in the City Centre

I am here to talk about 20mph speed limits and the traffic filters, and to urge you to push for the rapid introduction of 20mph speed limits on Oxford's main roads.

There are plenty of studies showing gains from 20mph speed limits -- reduced road danger, smoother traffic flows and lower emissions, less noise pollution, and so forth. And we can observe this firsthand on Iffley and Cowley Rds. Compliance with the 20mph speed limits there is not great, but speeds are significantly lower now than before the change, with hardly anyone driving faster than 30mph.

There are many gains from this. Pedestrians find zebra crossings easier to use, as they can assert themselves more easily, and driver compliance with signal crossings is

better. Cycling right-turns onto or off the main roads are much less stressful. It is easier to cross the road to get to or from bus stops. And so forth.

Lower speed limits are hugely important in making walking and cycling and public transport more accessible. They are also the cheapest big contribution to road danger reduction - making all of Oxford's main roads 20mph might avert three serious injuries a year and a fatality every decade. Both this, and the longer-term health gains from greater physical activity and social connectivity, are especially important for the more disadvantaged, who currently have the most limited mobility options and are worst affected by road violence.

Now the traffic filters. There are two reasons it is vitally important to have 20mph speed limits in place before the traffic filters go in.

Firstly, how well the traffic filters work will depend on modal shift, on people shifting from driving to walking, cycling, or catching the bus. Lower speeds will help make all of those easier and more accessible.

Secondly, without lower speed limits, the traffic filters will adversely affect road danger and walking and cycling safety.

The introduction of the congestion charge in London increased both collision rates and injury severities, because reduced congestion allowed for higher traffic speeds. If the traffic filters are successful in reducing congestion in Oxford, the same thing is likely to happen here.

What are the obstacles?

County decisions appear to be being made by officers concerned about the effects of lower speed limits on the bus companies.

But as the bus companies themselves realised in Abingdon when they sat down and looked at their data, the notional time gains from being able to do 30mph instead of 20mph are largely illusory on busy central roads with regular stops for passengers. (And it is the inner stretches of Oxford's main roads which have the largest numbers of people walking and cycling, so speed limit changes could start there rather than covering the whole city.)

And the other reason the county is lagging in Oxford is that their policy is to wait for requests from district and parish councils.

Of the eight million pounds the county has allocated to their 20mph programme, none has been spent so far in Oxford and it is possible that none will be. We are going to have the strange situation where there are 20mph speed limits on the Eynsham Rd in Botley -- as requested by the parish council there, and recently signed off on by the county -- but 30mph speed limits from there into Oxford, along the Botley Rd, despite the huge numbers of people walking and cycling there and its complex junctions.

So I urge you to ask the county council for 20mph speed limits in Oxford, with the aim of having those in place before the traffic filters go in next year. If it's not done within this round of county funding, it may never happen at all.

"Children residing in the most deprived areas were nearly three times more likely to be KSI as pedestrians than their peers in the least deprived areas."

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S2214140518300756>

The London Congestion Charge: "the marginal driver along congested roads decreases the risk and severity of traffic collisions for other road users by slowing others down"

<https://academic.oup.com/joeg/article/22/3/547/6276552?login=true>

Transport for London is making all main roads in central London 20mph
<https://www.transportxtra.com/publications/local-transport-today/news/70352/tfl-to-extend-20mph-across-main-roads-in-westminster/>

And that's reduced road danger: <https://tfl-newsroom.prgloo.com/news/tflpress-release-new-data-showsignificantimprovements-in-road-safety-inlondon-since-introduction-of20mphspeed-limits>

The county's £8 million 20mph project: <https://news.oxfordshire.gov.uk/8-million-approved-to-roll-out-20mph-project-across-oxfordshire-in-next-threeyears/>

Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for Planning and Healthier Communities:

Thank you for your address. The core issue you highlight, that of road safety, is one I'm sure every member here views as important. While we are not the highways authority, we work closely with Oxfordshire County Council, which holds that responsibility, along with other stakeholders such as the bus companies and pedestrian and cycling groups to seek to ensure our streets are as safe as possible for all road users. We also want them to be as attractive as possible for cyclists, walkers and bus passengers.

So we support the County Council's Vision Zero ambition to end traffic fatalities in Oxford, we're signing up to the CLOCS (Construction Logistics and Community Safety) standard for construction vehicles to reduce collisions between HGVs and other road users, and we are supporting the County Council to introduce traffic filters which will reduce traffic levels and free up road-space for cyclists.

But we also need to get the buses moving as they are the lifeblood of our transport system and they are in crisis. Indeed at the moment the issue is not buses travelling too fast, it is the opposite. The average speed of buses on many routes in the city is now below 10 miles per hour throughout the day.

Slow journey times is impacting on passenger numbers and route viability. Together with the County Council - we have committed to the bus companies that we will work to improve journey times by at least 10%. That was the basis for them making the huge investment in a new fully electric bus fleet.

So, we would want to understand from the bus companies what the impact of a global change in speed limits to 20mph would have in terms of their operations. Clearly, in some places it would make very little difference, on say Thames Street, with all of its traffic intersections and bus stops where a 20mph limit would almost certainly be desirable. But would it make sense on Marston Ferry Road, which has a long stretch with no bus stops and a completely segregated cycle track?

Ultimately, I doubt we will be able to make such judgements until the traffic filters are in place. We will explore this in consultation with the bus companies, as more 20mph areas, in conjunction with the traffic filters That should help deliver what I think is a shared vision of a city with safe roads, fewer car journeys, more cyclists, and really good public transport running buses. A 20mph speed limit may be part of that vision, but whether it is appropriate everywhere needs more detailed consideration.

2. Address by – Kaddy Beck – Save Bertie Park

I coordinate the campaign to save Bertie Park, a medium-sized recreation ground in South Oxford where young people can run around, shout, scream, and let off steam.

This is the planning notice you posted in May. It says: NOTICE OF APPLICATION FOR PLANNING PERMISSION NOT IN ACCORDANCE WITH DEVELOPMENT PLAN.

Who decided to ignore the local plan? Did you, the Council, make that decision, or did OX Place? And if a developer decides not to follow the agreed local plan, why would council officers and members bend over backwards to help them?

In November '22, OX Place described Bertie Park as well-used. Now, they say they aim "to upgrade a currently underused site". Your Green Spaces Strategy aims to *improve* access to green space; people should not have to walk more than 750m to their nearest medium park like Bertie. Who decided to scrap this policy?

You are turbo-charging the housing market across Oxford by creating more jobs than housing. Will you build on the rest of Oxford's 87 parks and recreation grounds or, just Bertie?

Oxford Civic Society usefully summarise the council's viewpoint: "while the recreation ground is going to be *reduced* to accommodate Oxford's urgent housing need, an element of it is being retained and partial loss (is) worth the sacrifice for much needed housing"

This is balderdash for 2 reasons

The first is that Bertie Park will not be reduced, but obliterated.

- OX Place want to replace the recreation ground itself with a nature trail. But we already have one. Kendall Copse is 10 minutes away.
- Their plans leave a small area of grass, sloping down to a stream. Not for kids to run around on, but for the required 10% biodiversity gain. It won't be mown, and you'll need to prevent high levels of access.
- Our current playground has 13 items of equipment for kids of all ages. The new play area will have 4. It is for kids aged 0-6 within a 1 minute's walk. Of course, we will still have access, but it's designed for toddlers. The new climbing frame has a critical fall height of 60 cm - so low, it won't need safety surface. You say families with kids over 6 will just have to walk 15 minutes to Hinksey Park.
- The *only* element to be retained is the Multi-Use-Games Area. Currently 40m away from housing, the new one will be 11. OX Place say they'll sink it by 30cm from street level to reduce noise problems. But, hidden in the Noise Assessment Report they suggest that, if there are complaints, the council should provide a simple way to report them, and consider restricting operational hours. The new MUGA also looks unusable. But that's another story.

Another reason the civic society statement is balderdash is that Government guidance (NPPF 8) recommends councils "support strong, vibrant and healthy communities" by BOTH providing "a sufficient number and range of homes" AND "accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being".

We have 2 community amenities, Bertie Park and Tesco's. Although your plans to build across this area will increase need, you want to destroy our park.

Lastly, whose responsibility it is to ensure that a scheme complies with the law?

Planning assures us that the OX Place report to the planning committee, which will be published for all to see in the run up to the committee, will "clearly outline the relevant issues": BUT:

1. Their planning statement does not even mention s123 of the 1972 Local Government Act concerning disposal of recreation grounds.
2. It neither identifies nor discusses the material considerations supporting its decision to depart from the local plan SP32.

3. It concludes that the Proposed Development accords with policies in the Oxford Local Plan, whereas the planning notice says it doesn't.
4. It says that the Proposed Development fully complies with the requirements of national and local planning policies without even discussing them.

If I had not spent weeks going through the documentation, who else would have done it?

Who is responsible for carrying out due diligence when a developer decides to ignore the local plan?

If this gets planning permission, there is a good case for judicial review, which will involve more expense. As rate payers, we think your determination to pursue building on our recreation ground is a huge waste of public money.

Councillor Linda Smith Cabinet Member for Housing response:

The planning application for the proposed housing development at Bertie Place was submitted in May 2023 and has yet to be determined.

The application is likely to be brought to Planning Committee in the Autumn for a decision, and this matter will be considered in full at that time.

It would be premature to comment on the detail of that application at this time, other than to say that the Council seeks to balance many competing demands for space in the city.

Oxford needs more affordable housing, and has an insufficient supply of land within the city boundary to meet the assessed level of housing need, so difficult decisions often have to be made.

This site has been identified for housing development in successive Local Plans since 2013. Both the current and previous Local Plans were adopted after extensive public consultation and rigorous examination at a public inquiry.

The proposed development – to build 31 affordable homes on part of this site – seeks to do so sympathetically, and to provide high quality homes, in a sustainable, low carbon, car free scheme. Pedestrian and cyclist access will be retained, and the proposal is to re-provide both the multi-use games area (MUGA), and a children's play area for use by new and existing residents, as well as improving pedestrian access to the 'Site B' meadow area, whilst improving the biodiversity and habitats in this area.

The existing MUGA and play area have been designed in consultation with local residents. Access to sports and play spaces will promote physical activity for all ages. The play area will be designed as a garden-like space with play equipment to encourage active play, particularly among children below 5 years. Low railings and hedge boundary surrounding the play area will give the space character, while helping to ensure children's safety, with improved modern equipment like a rock 'n' bowl, cygnet with slide, pick up sticks and single bay Viking basket swing, all suggestions made by the young people when we consulted with them earlier in the year. There will be further opportunity in the future for the community to make additional suggestions on what play equipment they would like. Child safety is of high importance to the Council. Along with improved soft landscaping and seating areas for parents, the play area will have a permeable surface with a rubber bound safety surface.

A Cabinet report on the proposals is to be considered at Cabinet in August. That report will set out further considerations in relation to any appropriation of this land for a different purpose.

Should Cabinet agree to the recommendations in the report, a further Cabinet decision will be required in the Autumn, and Council will be asked to appropriate the land, as necessary, for housing, at a later date.

3. Question from Chaka Artwell – Councillors revealing their domicile

Constituents contacting Elected Oxford City Councillors are required to identify themselves, and their domicile; whilst Oxford City Council, and the Political Parties, encourage their publicly Elected Councillors to ignore the transparency, and local accountable tradition of Elected Councillors by making their domicile known to their local constituents and voters.

The Oxford City Council supported policy of assisting Elected Councillors to conceal their domicile is discriminatory against Constituents who prefer to use the post to contact their Elected Councillors; and an unacceptable, and unequal disparity that favours men and women in Public Office; which also transgresses Oxford City Council's claim of being Politically Correct, and "progressive."

Will Oxford City Council correct this disparity by requiring all who place themselves as a candidate for public position in Local Elections, reveal and make available their domicile publicly available?

Written Response from the Councillor Susan Brown, Leader and Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships

Since a law change in 2019, all candidates for election have the right to ask that their home address is not published when standing as a candidate. This change follows the *Committee for Standards in Public Life's* review of intimidation in public life for elected politicians, following the attack on Stephen Timms MP in 2010, and the murder of Jo Cox MP in 2016. It is not a matter for Oxford City Council, or even any single political party. Each candidate will make their own decision and the Returning Officer would process their nomination paper as completed. I'm sorry to say that the intimidation and threats to politicians locally and nationally actively encourage candidates to protect themselves and their families in this way. Any constituent wishing to write to their elected councillor is still able to do so as for any councillor who does not publish their address, the council will pass on post addressed to them at the Town Hall. The full postal address of the Town Hall is given on the council website for all councillors who do not publish their home address.