

To: Council

Date: 25 November 2024

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 from Margaret Simpson – support for Motion 19a (Making Oxford a Truly Walkable City)
2. Address from Colin Aldridge – support for Motion 19g (Drug Consumption Rooms)
3. Address from Kaddy Beck – Support for Bertie Place
4. Address from Chaka Artwell
5. Question from Chaka Artwell

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

1. **Address from Margaret Simpson – support for Motion 19a (Making Oxford a Truly Walkable City)**

Good evening.

I am Margaret Simpson, Chair of OXFORD 50+ NETWORK and Oxtalk Talking Newspaper for the Blind; organiser of Oxford's annual UN Older People's Day, held here in the Town Hall; this year's event being the 13th year. I have been a MyVision

Oxfordshire Trustee for over 10 years. I also engage with various social care, health and community groups, here in the City and with the two Universities.

The motion – **Making Oxford a Truly Walkable City** is one I wish to support on behalf of the groups and organisations mentioned.

WHY?

The Lord Mayor this year has walked and marked the City boundaries. Within these boundaries live 1000s of permanent Oxford residents and it is for these residents that Oxford should be a truly welcoming and walkable City. Residents who are of all ages, of varying physical abilities and needs irrespective of whether they pay council tax or not.

By welcoming I mean, that for all the residents who live in the area referred to as, the City of Oxford, they will find travelling about the City to be a pleasurable experience. That they find, whether they are walking, cycling or using their mobility aid, that they do so in the certain knowledge that whether their journey is short or long, either to or from work or for socialising and relaxation, it proves to be a good experience.

As Councillors you are endeavouring to establish Oxford as a leading e-City with clean air; with safe, clear, appropriate, pleasurable walkways; welcoming multi-use retail areas; with an increased number of charging points for e-vehicles in and around the localities.

In order to achieve this in a historic City which has already well established areas, you will obviously have to consider balancing the current needs of your residents with the needs of the future residents and future developmental needs.

Consideration must be given to the infrastructure of the future e-City and the localities individually, which form part of the whole. Can there be connecting uncluttered walkways and socialisation areas with varied and appropriate seating and locality hubs with toilets and drinking water facilities? Include if and where appropriate multi-use areas, which are used with consideration and respect by all users?

Residents in all localities need to feel safe, so they will be encouraged to visit and shop and socialise locally. So the need for open communal areas with clear sight lines is important.

As elected City Councillors you are responsible for the City as a whole, as well as being involved in the localities you have been elected to represent.

But you cannot make the WHOLE City the walkable City we wish for, immediately.

So the WHERE and HOW to start?

Suggestions for possible aims which could be considered: -

- consider the areas to be developed, as areas 'owned and shared' by the residents, areas which residents will be proud of and will wish to support continually into the future.
- ask for their help to assist you in planning and 'driving forward' the aims of a 'Truly Walkable Oxford'
- consider workable partnerships, with representation from all the various age groups in the locality, a mixed gender group, encouraging residents from the 'hidden' groups to be involved as well as parents of pre-school groups, young adults & students, older residents and include retailers

- a representative voluntary group working with the interested local Councillors, led by a community representative
- within Oxford there are many established interest groups which can be referred to for specific advice, as and when required - OPT, Oxford Pedestrian Association, Safer Pavements for All, Headington Action, Community Centres, Age Friendly Oxford, Unlimited, MyVision Oxfordshire and others, specific to the locality
- look at the area as it actually is – without access to large budgets you cannot go altering the physicality of the area; I am making the assumption that it will have to be accepted that what is currently in place, ie road layouts; pavements; commercial street uses, will have to remain, but they could be considered for improvement or adaptation?
- plan to improve the appearance and usage of the area and by that I mean improve pavement surfaces so they are safer for all to use; encourage attractive shop window displays and clean street shop frontages; reduce unnecessary non-fixed street furniture, such as A boards and other advertising materials and make the local area more socially
- aware with attractive social seating creating relaxation and rest areas and encourage pride in the local area with community planted areas of, for example, free to all herbs
- in the central area of Oxford City engage 'here to help' volunteers to assist the visitors who have the map the wrong way round or find the directional display boards not easy to understand
- promote the consideration and respect of all users in the multi-use areas; a priority responsibility for us all

On behalf of Oxford residents and visitors to Oxford I ask that you consider approving and accepting this motion and in so doing, you will invite members of the Oxford community to be involved.

A City community truly engaged in working together.

Margaret A Simpson MBE

11th November 2024

Response from Councillor Susan Brown, Leader, and Cabinet Member for Partnership Working:

Many thanks for your address Margaret and for the really important work you continue to do for older people in our city.

Walking and of course cycling are the best ways of getting around our city - and often the quickest too!

The County Council is of course the highways authority and takes lead responsibility for managing Oxford's roads and pavements. However, this council has always supported both walking and cycling wherever we can. We're also keen to ensure the parks and other outdoor spaces we are responsible for are attractive and appealing places for people of all ages to enjoy.

I know that you have been involved on a project around safer pavements with one of our former Older People's Champions, something that benefits residents and visitors of

all ages. Alongside this, I know you are also working with Council officers to see how we may be able to support Oxford to qualify as an age-friendly city. Making Oxford a place more people want to - and are able to - walk around safely and easily is one of the ways of achieving that.

2. Address from Colin Aldridge – support for Motion 19g (Drug Consumption Rooms)

Hello

I came here about 3 years ago with an address about Drug Consumption rooms. When I did this a Labour councillor replied with “we will not get anywhere with this until this shower in Government has gone” Well, that shower has now gone so I am back with the same idea.

While I believe illegal drug taking is detrimental to someone health, I also realise some will still choose to do so.

Criminalising drug use is not working. There are many in our society who now realise this course of action needs to change and become a health challenge. Forcing people into rehab through the criminal justice system does not work for the majority as they are not willing participants. We can only improve the situation by having people wanting to change their actions.

DCRs have been used in several countries with varying amounts of success but always with success.

I have 2 quotes from website with addresses which are

The rate of drug-poisoning deaths in 2023 (93.0 deaths per million) was double the rate in 2012 (46.5 deaths per million). The rate has increased every year since 2012, after remaining relatively stable over the preceding two decades.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsrelatedtodrugpoisoninginenglandandwales/2023registrations>

In summary, the benefits of providing supervised drug consumption facilities may include improvements in safe, hygienic drug use, especially among regular clients, increased access to health and social services, and reduced public drug use and associated nuisance. There is no evidence to suggest that the availability of safer injecting facilities increases drug use or frequency of injecting. These services facilitate rather than delay treatment entry and do not result in higher rates of local drug-related crime.

https://www.euda.europa.eu/topics/pods/drug-consumption-rooms_en

And 2 more links to a trial in Glasgow showing how they work.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-66929385>

https://www.itv.com/watch/news/uks-first-drug-consumption-room-enabling-supervised-injections-to-open-in-glasgow/vj2cgrk?qad_source=5&qclid=EAAlQobChMI9_nBibviiQMVWaRQBh0jDwaPEAAAYAiAAEgIZRvD_BwE

I would like all Oxford City Councillors to come together to write a cross-party letter to the government asking for a change in the law, at the very least permission for a trial in Oxford City.

I hope you can get behind this idea and finally make a difference in so many lives.

Thank you for listening.

Response from Councillor Lubna Arshad, Cabinet Member for a Safer Oxford:

Thank you for your address. While I am aware that research does suggest that drug consumption rooms can help to reduce harm and deaths among drug users, the implementation of this policy remains controversial, not least in the medical profession and is not currently proposed.

3. Address from Kaddy Beck – Support for Bertie Place

I'm here to express my opposition to the appropriation of Bertie Park, and to highlight OCC

cabinet's failure to consider the law governing appropriation.

The local government lawyer website states:

“Local authorities frequently use powers to appropriate land from one statutory purpose to another. This is often treated purely as an administrative matter, but there are some instances where local authorities should exercise a significant degree of caution.... a well- advised council will always take care to ensure that all the proper procedures are followed....”

Councillors have indeed told us that appropriation is a paper exercise, that the land is simply being moved from one budget to another. But s122 of the 1972 Local Government Act states that “a principal council may appropriate ... any land which belongs to the council and is no

longer required for the purpose for which it is held immediately before the appropriation.”

You say that Bertie Park is "no longer required for its present purpose" as “all current functions of the site ... will continue to be available following the development.”
(Cabinet report)

Your lawyers state:

“It is not the Council's assertion that the land to be appropriated in this case is surplus to requirements but that it is no longer needed for its present use as alternative facilities will be made available. These facilities will be provided within Site A.” Appendix 1B p110

You want to appropriate 80% of our recreation ground, and re-provide the facilities on a postage stamp within the remaining 20%.

The appropriated land consists of a Multi Use Games Area, or MUGA, which is used for five- a-side football, basketball etc, a small strip of the existing playground, and the grassed area used for free play.

You say the MUGA will be 24% smaller, “but still offers the facilities to local people to access space for free-play and court games.” (EqIA)

If the MUGA is being used for court games, there will be nowhere for free play at all. This means a 100% reduction in space for free play. And nobody has been able to reassure us that the smaller MUGA will be suitable for either football or basketball. Your 2040 plan suggested that the MUGA could disappear altogether.

In the cabinet meeting on the 16th October, we argued that the assertion that the new, smaller MUGA could fulfil current needs for court games and free play was Wednesday unreasonable i.e. barking mad.

As a council, you are obliged to follow the law. Cabinet members were not asked to consider whether a “reasonable authority” could hold that a 344 m2 MUGA could fulfil these needs.

Instead, you argued that it would be more unreasonable not to appropriate the land because this would prevent the construction of any housing on the site.

You want to build 300 homes on Redbridge paddock, 31 homes on Bertie Park ... there will be other developments across our area. At the same time, you want to downgrade facilities for young adults, and downgrade our only community amenity. You claim that the “loss” will be “offset” by providing better access to an area that Thames Valley Police say is unsafe for unaccompanied children.

Our community thinks that this is unreasonable. This is why people are so angry.

The law is not an inconvenience. In this case, it is there to protect recreational facilities, like ours, which you agree are needed. We have asked for a judicial review of your decision to appropriate the land on Bertie Park. We ask you, as councillors, to decide whether you will gamble ratepayers’ money on winning this case.

Angela Rayner recently assured us that the UK government is not considering building on recreation grounds in its efforts to solve the UK housing crisis. So why are you so determined to build on ours?

Response from Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory), and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management:

Thank you for your address. Cabinet approved the appropriation of part of the land at Bertie Place Recreation Ground on 16th October 2024 and did so properly and lawfully.

As there has been legal correspondence on this issue we are advised that we are not able to comment on this further at this point. We note the comments made.

4. Address from Chaka Artwell

Following on from the conclusions from the 2011 Thames Valley Police Constabulary’s Operation “Bullfinch,” public enquiry, and as method of publicly marking the harm which was allowed to occur against 373 Caucasian Christian heritage female pupils; some of which were vulnerable and in Local Authority care.

Will the Elected Oxford City Councillors support my call for a monument to be placed in Oxford, to atone for allowing harm to occur to the children of Oxfordshire.

Response from Councillor Susan Brown, Leader, and Cabinet Member for Partnership Working

Child Sexual Exploitation is a heinous crime. I have read the full Safeguarding Report into the Bullfinch cases many times because it is important that we fully understand the issues that led to this abuse not being challenged for so long. There were important lessons to be learned from the report, not least the importance of listening to people raising concerns whether professionals or victims.

However, what is not required is for you to make yet another attempt to stir up issues around race and culture in a way that seeks to undermine community cohesion in our

city. There are assumptions made about the ethnicity and even the religion of the victims in your statement which none of us can know - nor do I see the relevance.

What happened in the Bullfinch case a decade ago was truly awful. Thankfully many lessons have been learned by the police, the County Council's children services team and indeed our own council. The most important legacy from Bullfinch is the improvements made by all those involved in child safeguarding in Oxfordshire. I would hope that the priority of keeping our children and young people safe from harm would be a matter of concern that could unite us all. It should not be a political football with which to create division.

5. Question from Chaka Artwell

Oxford specifically, and England's noble centuries of Free Critical Speech, and lampooning traditions have been copied by most of the parliaments of the world.

Will Oxford City Council continue to uphold England's 1215 Magna Carta granted Free Critical Speech tradition; a noble Free Speech Tradition, which can conflict with today's Politically Correct creed?

Response from Councillor Susan Brown, Leader, and Cabinet Member for Partnership Working

I found that somewhat difficult to follow, but if you're asking if this Council upholds free speech, then the fact that this is the ninth time you've addressed this chamber in the past three years would indicate that we certainly do.

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