

**To:** Council

**Date:** 14 July 2025

**Report of:** Director of Law, Governance and Strategy

**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. Question from Naomi Gann
2. Address from Richard Parnham
3. Address from Jack Abraham
4. Address from Kaddy Beck

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

### 1. Question from Naomi Gann

I am from ACORN, a community union representing tenants. Members of our union here in Oxford have been victims of illegal behaviour from landlords. They've been made to live in dangerous homes and had their complaints ignored, and have also been harassed and revenge-evicted. The experience of our members is reflected in research by housing charity Shelter, which found that 45% of renters in the South East are victims of illegal behaviour from landlords. So we are really concerned that Oxford City Council has only prosecuted 1 landlord in the past five years. Why won't you take a zero tolerance approach to rogue landlords, and commit to increasing prosecutions?

## 2. Address from Richard Parnham

I'm here today to speak in favour of council motion 17a "Oppose the County Council Congestion Charge Scheme". In fact, I don't think you should just "resolve" to oppose the congestion charge, I think you should go further. Perhaps even consider legal action against Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) for dreaming up a scheme that, objective, bonkers.

Let me give you a few examples of why I regard the congestion charge plan as bonkers. If you were out walking near the Plain just two-three weeks ago during the morning rush hour, you'd see that Iffley Road was rammed with cars as far as the eye could see<sup>1</sup>. By contrast, St Clements was busy (ish), but fundamentally free flowing<sup>2</sup>. So which road is OCC proposing to put a £5 congestion charge on? St Clements obviously<sup>3</sup>, not Iffley Road. The quieter road, not the busier one.

And it's a similar picture up in Marston. During the morning rush hour, traffic flows freely on Marston Ferry Road<sup>4</sup>. Meanwhile, the nearby Marsh Lane – a residential road – is absolutely rammed<sup>5</sup>. So which road gets the congestion charge camera? Marston Ferry Road, obviously. And, to make matters worse, the already busy Marsh Lane is predicted to get hundreds of more cars a day as result<sup>6</sup>, according to OCC modelling data.

And, to top it off, a safety report produced by OCC as part of the related traffic filters scheme, predicts "shunts, pedestrian trips and falls or pedestrian / vehicle collisions" are likely to occur outside the Swan School as a direct result of this scheme being introduced<sup>7</sup>. (Not so) fun fact: the officers' recommendation to move the camera site was overruled. So much for vision zero.

It gets crazier. If you walk along St Cross Road during the morning rush hour<sup>8</sup>, even during term time<sup>9</sup>, the road is practically empty. Despite a lack of any objective justification for a congestion charge on this road, it's getting one anyway. A quiet road getting quieter. Again.

Not that you'd know that from the Ricardo report, which failed to include this key congestion charge location in its modelling report. Oops.

If displaced traffic from the (non-residential) St Cross Road and Marston Ferry Road ripples out to cause extra congestion and pollution at the top of the already busy Woodstock and Banbury Roads<sup>10</sup>, then bad luck to those who live there. The university district gets even clearer air: residents in the outer suburbs don't, across both North and East Oxford<sup>11</sup>. How very gown versus town.

This, then, is the insanity of a transport policy that is wilfully blind to the evidence staring it in the face.

Now imagine an alternative reality, where facts drive policy responses.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://x.com/ReconnectingOx/status/1939947119873274232>

<sup>2</sup> <https://x.com/ReconnectingOx/status/1933061016436306233>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/transport-and-travel/connecting-oxfordshire/temporary-congestion-charge>

<sup>4</sup> <https://x.com/ReconnectingOx/status/1935243498648748411>

<sup>5</sup> <https://x.com/ReconnectingOx/status/1937407180895850969>

<sup>6</sup> Ricardo. Oxford Traffic Filters Interim Scheme, 13 June. Table 3.1.

<sup>7</sup> Oxfordshire County Council. Road Safety Audit response for RSA Stage 1 (DMRB GG119). 18 August 2022. Available [here](#).

<sup>8</sup> <https://x.com/ReconnectingOx/status/1942128932322509056>

<sup>9</sup> <https://x.com/ReconnectingOx/status/1932697594305917312>

<sup>10</sup> Ricardo, as above. Also. Steer. Traffic filters Temporary Road Charging Scheme – Modelling and Income Forecasting Report. June 2024. Available [here](#).

<sup>11</sup> Ricardo, as above.

In that magical reality, someone at OCC would have realised that morning traffic jams on Iffley Road traffic evaporate the moment the private – not state schools – go on holiday<sup>12</sup>. If councillor officers would finally recognise this obvious fact, then maybe a targeted intervention, involving private school traffic, might be trialled. Maybe open up park and rides to become school bus pick-up and dropping off points – which what they're designed to do anyway? A simple idea, which OCC is only now vaguely pondering. Why wasn't this idea trialled first, at practically no cost to anyone?

Likewise, if everyone acknowledged that hospitals were likely to be a significant source of traffic in outer Oxford<sup>13</sup>, maybe we could do something about it? Maybe a car park could be built along the A40 near Barton Park, with a shuttle bus provided to the hospital through the "secret"<sup>14</sup> bus gate linking the A40 with Meadon Hill in Northway? If it's quick and easy to hop on a shuttle bus to the JR from a new car park at Barton Park, why wouldn't you? Carrots, not sticks.

Maybe also try to persuade Oxford's main hospitals to spread out their clinic days, so hundreds of outpatients aren't trying to get to the same location on the same day. Really, really, simple ideas to trial. But no.

But, of course, this is all just crazy talk. Because what's driving this whole proposal is not a plan to fix actual congestion hotspots, or to propose solutions that are likely to make tangible difference.

Instead the congestion charge scheme is proposed in a desperate attempt to meet an arbitrary target that OCC committed to when bidding for the electric bus grant<sup>15</sup>. And, of course, OCC can't lose face by doing something that would improve bus reliability, such removing the LTNs. The LTNs, if anyone needs reminding "caused an immediate and profound collapse in service reliability and bus productivity across East Oxford" .. and "have been a failure in almost all respects"<sup>16</sup> – according to the bus companies.

As a result, OCC will – if not challenged – will approve this scheme, to help it meet its bus company KPIs, while also making a few million pounds in revenue and fines<sup>17</sup>. And it will do so, no matter what damage the congestion charge inflicts on the city.

In light of OCC's intransigence in the face of appeals to reason, Oxford City Council should oppose the congestion charge proposals with all the powers at its disposal.

### **3. Address from Jack Abraham**

Thank you councillors for giving me the time, on behalf of The Smartphone Free Childhood Campaign, to speak with you today.

First and foremost we are parents. Many of you will be parents as well. Some of you will have older children and perhaps some of you are regretting choices that you made around how to integrate technology into your family. If that is you then forgive yourself. It has always been hard to raise children and now it is perhaps the hardest it has ever been.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://x.com/ReconnectingOx/status/1942118990244892793>

<sup>13</sup> <https://x.com/ReconnectingOx/status/1941443251212607774>

<sup>14</sup> <https://maps.app.goo.gl/zj8z6AxoSPBoeSyR8>

<sup>15</sup> <https://x.com/ReconnectingOx/status/1934883235814883644/photo/1>

<sup>16</sup> Additional East Oxford LTNs cabinet documents 17 October 2023, Annex 12. Available [here](#).

<sup>17</sup> Steer report, above.

This is precisely why we urgently need a coalition of parents, educators and policy makers to come together and co-create the environment in which our young people can flourish.

I want to draw your attention to the fifth aim of your motion. Where you articulate the council's intention to offer support and encouragement to continue to develop policies addressing concerns related to smartphone and social media use in schools.

You have read the statistics for yourself. Educators need support. Educators need encouragement and educators need tools to be able to make the necessary changes on behalf of young people and their families within their communities.

Our politicians and civic leaders must step in. You must help make the space to enable parents and educators to ask the hard questions of one another that need to be asked. To hold meaningful open discussions. To explore solutions together to be better able to navigate the myriad and highly individual circumstances in which they are living and working and help to provide the framework to create the solutions that work for them in light of the unhappy facts we are all faced with.

Of the many group action problems humanity faces today the question of allowing our children access to the internet, and - a more terrifying thought - allowing the internet access to our children, is one that is being addressed but by individual school leaders.

Leaders such as Louise Cowley here in Oxford at Spires Academy, however many schools in our county who are already struggling for resources do not have the time and wherewithal to take the step that she did and ban mobile phones.

There is a huge risk that if leadership on this issue is not provided then we will see more schools struggle to deliver the educational values and concepts they strive so hard to deliver every day.

We will see more children suffer both physically and mentally.

We will see an ever greater gap in attainment between children who are lucky enough, due to location or resources, to attend schools who have banned phones and those children who, through no fault of their own, do not attend schools who have enacted a ban on mobile phones.

Children who do not attend schools where the responsibility to manage the immense effects of smartphones, social media, notifications and apps has been taken back from them and placed in the hands of responsible adults.

The word "ban" is loaded. Conjuring images of Puritanism and condemnation and hides what is a nuanced issue. So we understand that the implementation of a ban could be seen by some as being a backward or even regressive step.

Yet you have heard and read the statistics of the havoc on young people that the combination of smartphones and the internet is wreaking. Many of you will see the impact with your own eyes in your day to day life with your own children, family members and your clinics.

The truth then is exactly the opposite. For what could be more progressive than to reflect with humility on the new information we have learned and make change.

We did not know what we now know. We did not know that our children, young people and all of us in this room would be impacted in the ways we have been by this powerful technology.

It is now our duty to respond to this emergent and unignorable issue and take the necessary steps to protect our children and enable them to discover themselves, each other and the world around them without these seductive devices until they are ready.

#### **4. Address from Kaddy Beck**

The last time we spoke, we explained that we wanted to challenge your decision to appropriate Bertie Park on the grounds that our recreation ground is obviously “still required for the purpose for which it (was) held immediately before the appropriation.” (S122 LGA 1972)

Your documentation used data from the Local Insight Profile for Hinksey Park Ward (like the lower quartile house price and the % of households living in social rented homes) to show that there is “a significant need for affordable housing in the area.” Most would use this same data to conclude that there is also a significant need for recreation space.

In the cabinet meeting last October, Cllr Hollingsworth described your plans for Bertie Park as “a re-provision of open space, in a slightly different place/form and the provision of 2 new play areas in a slightly smaller form.”

“Slightly” was understatement of the year. At a time when you want to build hundreds more homes in this area, your documentation makes it clear that your proposed re-provision will not even meet the needs of existing users. But still you decided to proceed with appropriation.

Our lawyers advised us that we could not argue that this was wrong. We had to argue that no rational person could make this decision. Yet here we have a Labour council who argues, in the face of your own research and policies AND national policies, that areas that need social housing don't also need proper recreation grounds.

So, our lawyers advised us to wait and challenge any award of planning permission.

It is nearly 2 years since the Environment Agency first objected to your plans for Bertie Park. In October 2023 Cllr Upton told us that you were considering amendments to “respond to the concerns expressed by the EA,” and that “any such amended plans (would) be re-consulted on .... ahead of any report to Planning Committee.” (Cllr Upton)

After 4 more letters from the Environment Agency, little has changed. One of their biggest objections is to a massive bridge that the EA say “is entirely inappropriate within the landscape and threatens the area's ecological functionality and ultimately value.” They also say that “it increases the risk of flooding both onsite and elsewhere”

You hold that this bridge is compensation for the significant downgrading of our recreation space because it improves access to the land behind Wytham Street. We would just like to point out that, some years ago, OCC installed bars at the entrance to the current bridge in response to complaints it received about joyriding. You now want to spend who knows how much money building a bridge to improve access to a 250m footpath/race track on land that the police say is not suitable for unaccompanied children. If the EA object to your bridge, we don't think it makes much sense either!

So, would the council be able to tell us:

Whether you intend to meet all of the EA's objections or to refer the application to the Secretary of State for Housing?

Whether you intend to hold a second consultation? If so, when?

And, because you have told us time and again that ALL of your proposals for replacement recreation facilities are only "indicative", do you intend to clarify what your intentions really are before you apply for planning permission?

In responding to this, please don't tell us that the site has been on the plan for 20 years.

While this is true, the plans, which you consulted on, complied with both local and national policies. Your current proposals do not.

call ..... and that nobody in this area wants.

Our recreation ground is central to our community, and with 200 extra homes Redbridge Paddock, Bertie Park will be needed even more. The Local Insight Profile for Hinksey Park Ward

We have a community area where .....

- 0.8 per cent of households suffer multiple deprivation compared with an England average of 0.5 per cent

#### **Housing tenure and affordability**

47.4% of homes are owner-occupied against an England average of 64.1%. Of these 1.3% are shared ownership properties against the England average of 0.8%. 17.8% of households live in social rented homes almost in line with an England average of 17.7%.

The average house price to August 2020 is £401,360 where the England average is £304,430. The Lower Quartile house price ('affordable housing') is £125,321 against an England average of £39,328. The total ratio of years to earnings in Hinksey Ward is 6.89 compared to the England average of 3.57 years and the total ratio of years of earnings for a house is 8.3 against an England average of 5.5 (Source: ONS House Price Statistics for Small Areas Oct 16-17; ONS earnings data 2015/16).

There is therefore significant need for affordable housing in the area.

Date taken from [Local Insight profile for Hinksey Park Ward](#)

Disability	Attendance Allowance claimants (paid to people over the aged of 65 who are severely disabled. Physically or mentally and need a great deal of help) - claimants is 10.4%, compared to 12.5% in England	Impact: negative (immediate)	In the longer term the redevelopment is likely to have a positive impact re age and disability – creating more inclusive and accessible access to green space: A new accessible footbridge to Site B and a quality footpath for the nature trail are proposed facilitating pedestrian and wheelchair movement.
	Personal Independence Payment (PIP) (helps with some of the extra costs caused by long-term disability, ill-health, terminal ill-health)- 3.4%, compared to 6.0% in England	Lower than average number of residents with disabilities and or long term/terminal ill-health.	

The documentation you submitted with your application the social profile of our area meant that our need for social housing out-weighed our need for a recreation ground.

We were advised that we could not argue that this was so unreasonable that ... . This is what Cllr Hollingsworth believes. But we think that it is very surprising for a Labour council to argue that working class areas don't need recreation grounds. Especially when they are supporting pop up play areas for under fives in town. What about

.... Years ago, residents in this area pressured the council to restrict access across the current bridge across the Redbridge stream to prevent joy riding on the land behind Wytham Street. You have now decided that our community needs a totally new bridge to provide better access to a 250m footpath on this land. The community don't want this bridge. You have received 5 letters from the EA say that the bridge is totally out of ... with the surroundings and likely to increase flooding across the area. Will you alter the design.

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