

**To:** Council

**Date:** 26 January 2026

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

**Title of Report:** Public addresses 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 put to the Cabinet members or Leader, registered by the deadline in the Constitution, are 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 to be taken in Part 2 of the agenda

1. Shavonne Allen
2. Kaddy Beck
3. Chaka Artwell
4. Dan Glazebrook

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

### 1. Shavonne Allen

Madam Mayor, Councillors, thank you for hearing me today.

I am here to propose a county-wide Youth Council and Youth Mayor programme. For many centuries, Oxford has been known for its growth and innovation in multiple areas, such as education; however, we currently lack a modern, county-wide youth voice system.

This is why I am proposing today the establishment of a Youth Council and a Youth Mayor programme to enable young people across the county to become politically involved. By launching a Youth Council and a democratically elected Youth Mayor, Oxford would enrich its democracy as a whole.

This initiative would allow passionate individuals to become politically involved by representing the youth of Oxford in their own form of council, while also collaborating with both Oxford City and County Councils on decision-making and sharing their perspectives. This would enhance younger generations' understanding of politics across schools, communities, and alternative provisions throughout Oxford.

It would also allow young people to become involved in the wider community not just the one in which they live, but communities across Oxford as a whole. This would help break down socio-economic imbalances by bringing together young people from different backgrounds.

Oxford would be following the example of modern councils, such as Bristol and Lewisham, which already involve young people in decision-making through the formation of youth councils. By establishing a Youth Council, Oxford would further reflect itself as a diverse, forward-thinking city.

Thank you for hearing me today.

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

Thank you so much, we really appreciate you coming and we're so sorry you've had to wait for so long, it doesn't normally take quite that long to come to public speakers, we've had a very busy meeting this evening.

I really welcome your proposals, but I think we probably need to have some further discussions about how to take them forward because you may not be aware, we're in the process of Local Government Reorganisation at the moment which means until July, we don't really know what the future for this Council will be, it won't be this Council as such, we do now that much, there are three proposals on the table. So I think What we would very much like to do, speaking personally, to put some ideas forward for the new Council, whatever that might look like which could include some serious youth representatives as part of that structure going forward. Realistically, it going to be proposals for the new Councils rather than proposals for our existing Council that I think we will need to focus on, so really welcome the start of the conversation, I'm really happy to meet with you and to talk about it further so we can put forward sensible proposals as part of our working which we will be doing over the next two years to out together the proposals for the new Councils.

Thank you very much indeed.

## **2. Kaddy Beck**

I coordinate the campaign to save Bertie Park recreation ground in South Oxford. We have spoken many times about the loss of open space which this development would involve. This time, we'd like to talk about the planning process itself, and highlight objections raised by Thames Valley Police.

You have told us many times you want to build on Bertie Park because it's been on local plans for 20 years. So, we thought it was OK to cut and paste a policy from one plan to another.

When your principal planner said: "For reassurance, a site wouldn't automatically be carried over from one Local Plan to the next but would be subject to a new review of the current planning position and any constraints / opportunities," .... it was a light bulb moment!

The plan policy states “planning permission will only be granted ... if the existing Bertie Place recreation ground, including a replacement Multi Use Games Area (MUGA), is re-provided on land in plot B” behind Wytham Street.

The current plan was submitted in March 2019, but by that November it was already clear you had no intention of re-providing the recreation ground as required. You announced instead: “a smaller but more modern play area which would be open to the public,” the land behind Wytham St was to become “a nicer environment for the community.” I.e. you decided to depart from the plan policy before the current plan was even agreed in June 2020. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires that plan policies be both up to date and deliverable. It is obvious that the submitted plan policy for Bertie Park was neither.

Your planning application was validated in May 2023. It normally takes 13 weeks for proposals to reach planning committee. The first date we were given was that August. For 2½ years you have drilled holes and held meetings. This is just such a waste of council tax money.

We have known for a long time that Thames Valley Police thought the land behind Wytham Street unsuitable for unaccompanied children. They have now officially submitted their advice.

The police say:

“Site B does not have any clear function or purpose, and significantly lacks surveillance, creating significant concern that there will be opportunities for crime and antisocial behaviour to flourish in this area... This space is very difficult to activate and is highly likely to be a significant attractor for crime and antisocial behaviour. ...Careful consideration needs to be evidenced how legitimate activities will be promoted in this space and crime/ASB prevented/discouraged. This has not been achieved in the current application.”

They also say:

“The MUGA is located very close to residential properties creating a risk of noise having a negative impact on residents, neighbour disturbances and community tension. This space is a very challenging location for development, with no clear solution. I appreciate the community wish to retain this youth recreation facility, however if houses are to be built here then neither the current location or the previously suggested location in site B are appropriate locations for such a facility.”

The council has not listened to the voices of local residents. We hope that it will listen to the police.

Finally, in October last year, OCC published its Green Spaces Technical Advice note 9. This says if you want to argue that an open space (like Bertie Park) is surplus you would need to “demonstrate a long-term lack of public access and/or use.” You have not done this. It also says that in Oxford, there is no spare pitch capacity, and that, with the population of Oxford growing. if pitches (like our MUGA) are “lost without compensation then so is that opportunity.”

Our recreation ground sits at the heart of our community because it is a physical space where families meet and kids play together. If you build on it, it is gone forever. And so is the heart of our community.

### **Response from Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Culture**

This site is allocated for development in the current Local Plan 2036, and there is a extant planning application for the site that will be determined in due course by the

Planning Committee, who will need to take into account in reaching their decision the Local Plan and all other relevant material considerations, in line with the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, section 38 (6).

All councillors sitting on the Planning Committee must retain an open mind on all applications to be decided by that Committee, including this application.

### **3. Chaka Artwell**

Does Oxford City Council believe it is right, correct, and just, for illegal migrants, and asylum seekers, are prioritised for housing, and welfare needs, by the Home Office and Local Councils, above native English men and women's housing needs?

#### **Response from Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities**

It is not the case that illegal migrants and asylum seekers are prioritised for housing. Persons from abroad who are claiming asylum are not eligible for inclusion on housing registers when by virtue of their immigration status they are ineligible for an allocation of housing.

Only housing applicants who are eligible and have a qualifying local connection to Oxford (with some exceptions such as domestic abuse survivors and armed forces veterans), will normally qualify for inclusion on our Housing Register and a possible offer of housing.

The Home Office has responsibility for providing accommodation for asylum seekers while their claims are assessed. The previous government stopped processing asylum claims and allowed the number of asylum seekers left in limbo to rise, necessitating the use of asylum hotels, the current Labour government has committed to speed up decisions and end the use of hotels.

As an accredited Local Authority of Sanctuary, the Council has a proud history of supporting households who have settled in Oxford from abroad, including those who have arrived via government back resettlement and visa schemes, with the Council predominantly providing support into private rented accommodation for these groups.

### **4. Dan Glazebrook**

The motion put forward by councillors Jupp and Miles rightly points out what the Friends of Grandpont Nature Park have been saying for some time - that the Oxpens bridge would not provide the floodproof route required for student housing at Osney Mead (rendering it a pointless replication of the existing two bridges in the same area) - and the incredible £14million price tag for the bridge would be far better spent elsewhere. For example - it is surely only a matter of time before there is a serious casualty on the A40 at Barton Park, where there have been several nasty accidents already as residents are forced to dodge speeding traffic every time they want to reach shops, schools or the doctor's surgery. The Council's building of the estate without a bridge or subway was directly counter to both the police's recommendations and County-wide traffic regulations.

Likewise, the lack of a crossing from South to East Oxford at Jackdaw Lane means residents of New Hinksey are forced instead on a long diversion round the Plain, the most dangerous cycling spot in Oxford, where there have already been fatalities. It

would even be useful to have a bridge across the river directly from Osney Mead, to ensure users do not have to cross the flooded towpath under the railway bridge, where a man tragically drowned just last winter. The one place a bridge is not needed is from Grandpont Nature Park to Oxpens Meadow, two sites already linked by an excellent, wide and well-used cycle and foot bridge just 100m from the proposed new one. Yet it seems the Labour Council prefer to use public money to pointlessly augment the private commercial developments of Oxford University than to address the safety and wellbeing of their own constituents.

When the residents of Grandpont and Osney started their campaign in 2024 they were told by a Labour cabinet member that it would not be possible to use Growth Deal funding for projects such as those being put forward today. They were told, quote, that “we couldn’t spend it elsewhere in the city. It can only be spent on infrastructure that enables new development or new housing.” And it is true that this is the usual criteria for projects receiving Oxfordshire Growth Deal funding. But Oxford City Council, unique amongst all the Councils in Oxfordshire, had by then managed to wangle itself an exemption from these criteria. Unlike all the other Councils, the City Council was and is allowed to use Growth Deal funding for projects that do not directly enable new development or new housing. So the funds could have - and can be - used for other projects.

Furthermore, it is now clear that the Oxpens River Bridge as currently conceived does not *itself* enable any new housing or development, whether directly or indirectly. When the bridge went to planning, Council officers were at pains to point out that, quote, “the future developments [at Osney Mead and Oxpens] could go ahead *without* the bridge”, that “The bridge is a standalone development that can be delivered on its own without the need for the Oxpens or Osney Mead allocations to be delivered *and vice versa*”; that “the Osney Mead development could still come forward [without the bridge]”; and that “if the bridge doesn’t go ahead then both the proposed developments [Osney Mead and Oxpens] could come ahead *on their own*.”

There you have it, in black and white: the bridge is not necessary, either for the Oxpens development or for Osney Mead. This is truer than ever since the Environment Agency vetoed the Council’s plans to floodproof the towpath between Osney Mead and Grandpont Nature Park in November 2021. The Council, to this day, don’t have the faintest idea how to floodproof this path, which means that to reach the new floodproof bridge from Osney Mead, users will have to cross a section of towpath that regularly floods - and, where, as I mentioned, someone tragically drowned just last year.

Last time I stood here, the Cabinet Member responsible responded with a long list of outdated documents referring to plans for the bridge. All of these were made redundant by the EA’s ruling in 2021.

The Council are now in breach of Homes England’s funding requirements, which, unlike the Growth Deal, the Council have not wangled an exception from, which state that funds can only be used for infrastructure that unlocks housing developments. The £1.5million they were awarded by that body for the bridge was provided specifically for a path that their application claimed would provide the floodproof exit out of Osney Mead required for residential planning permission to be granted on the site. In fact it will do nothing of the sort. You may, in the coming discussion, seek to ask council leaders how they expect to get millions more from this body for a project which it is not lawfully allowed to fund, as it will not - by their own admission - enable any housing.

Now the Council have diverted a further £3.7million from the local budget for the bridge, including £1million from the maintenance fund, which is supposed to be used to repair council homes. Enough is enough. It’s time to stop throwing good money after bad, and to start addressing the safety and wellbeing of the town’s working class residents rather

than simply subsidising the wealthiest institution in the city with a pointless ornament for their commercial developments.

### **Response from Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Culture**

This address says: “Last time I stood here, the Cabinet Member responsible responded with a long list of outdated documents referring to plans for the bridge. All of these were made redundant by the EA’s ruling in 2021.”

This is attempting to recreate a claim that was rejected by the Judge in last year’s failed attempt to overturn the planning permission granted for this bridge - that the purpose of the bridge is solely to connect the Oxpens and Osney Mead development sites. This was not the purpose when this bridge was first proposed 20 years ago, and it is still not the case. The documents in question may in some instances have existed for some time, but what they say remains entirely relevant, as the judge made clear in his reference to the 2013 Oxpens SPD, for example.

It may be helpful to remind Council of some of these documents, and what they say, and when they said it. And who supported them at the time. All were consulted on widely and at length, debated in Full Council, and then adopted as formal documents.

**The West End Area Action Plan**, adopted by the City Council in June 2008, sought “A new pedestrian and cycle bridge across the Thames to join Oxpens Field to the Thames towpath is proposed. This would link the West End to Osney Mead and the West Oxford Cycle Route. Improvements will also be made to the route running east from the pedestrian bridge.”

This document, with the detail of this bridge being set out in the context and wording of proposed Policy WE2, was finalised by the Executive Board – as the Cabinet was then called – on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2007 after four years of public consultation and preparation. It was then approved - complete with this bridge - by a special Full Council meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> May 2007. The then leader of Oxford City Council, Cllr John Goddard, was responsible for the policy and proposed it - complete with this bridge. This Council had the change to oppose the bridge, or to attempt to delete that policy from the plans. The record of the meeting show that no one did so.

When the Council submitted this plan after four years of preparation and consultation to the Government for approval on 15<sup>th</sup> June 2007, the Oxford Mail reported the enthusiasm for the plans – which included this bridge - of Cllr Goddard. He was reported as saying that “there had also been widespread backing within the city” for the plans submitted.

In November 2013 the **Oxpens SPD** was adopted by the City Council. This explains in detail what is proposed and what the objectives are for the new bridge.

“A new bridge crossing the Thames (Isis) should be provided to enhance opportunities to move between Oxpens and the wider area, notably the Grandpont Nature Reserve, and residential areas up/down stream on the opposite side of the river. Indicative locations for the proposed bridge crossing are illustrated on the Development Framework Plan and Illustrative Masterplan.”

The maps that are the Development Framework Plan and the Illustrative Masterplan in the 2013 **Oxpens SPD** include the proposed bridge in almost exactly the location for which planning permission was submitted and approved.

The other bridges across the Thames will remain. The potential to improve the Gasworks Rail bridge was considered by the County Council in 2016-17 and discounted as a workable option. Further review has highlighted considerable challenges, particularly with the footpath alongside Castle Mill Stream which is too narrow to accommodate cycling and the alternative route over the Castle Mill Stream bridge which would require alterations to create a hardened path and altered levels across the protected Meadow.

This bridge will be delivered entirely by external funding, but this is funding which if not used for the bridge will have to be returned to the different funding bodies. The City Council is not able to reallocate it to other projects. Funding from the Growth Deal for Oxfordshire was allocated to this scheme with the support of both Oxfordshire County Council, the responsible body, and Homes England who provided the funding to the County Council.

The proposed bridge provides the opportunity for a new and convenient route across the river, designed specifically for the location and to support the placemaking that will support the development of the West End as a vibrant quarter of the city and connect to other parts of Oxford to the south and west of the city centre.

These are the objectives now, and they were also the objectives of the bridge first proposed by this Council – and its then Leader and his fellow councillors, of different parties - 20 years ago.

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