

To: Council

Date: 26 January 2026

Report of: Director of Law, Governance and Strategy

Title of Report: Public addresses that 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 1 of the agenda

1. Address from Deborah Glass Woodin
2. Address from Martin Reed

Addresses and questions to be taken in Part 1 of the agenda

1. Address from Deborah Glass Woodin

When I arrived in Oxford in the early '90's, one of the first campaigns I was involved in was to oppose the demolition of the dozens of houses on the south side of Botley Rd – you heard right: houses – to make way for the 'out-of-town' retail warehouses. Those very buildings are now being demolished, just 30 years on. To build much needed homes? No, to build tech labs.

Since then, we have seen the expansion of Blackbird Leys, the building of Barton Park. Proposals for or delivery of, housing on precious pockets of open space and local parks – Spindleberry in Blackbird Leys; Bertie Park and Redbridge Meadow in South Oxford and the Horse Fields in Iffley, to name but a few.

The Local Plan has stated clearly over the years that housing will be the priority for this Council. Have we come even close to solving the housing crisis? Hmm...

Yet, acres of brownfield are still identified in this Plan for employment. Maybe housing 'could' go there too. As the Scrutiny committee was told last week. But it should be designated for housing?

Because this City and this County, is not short of jobs, quite the opposite. And it is blessed with full employment.

It is short on housing. Homes fit for the future, at prices local residents can afford. It is also short on local parks, play spaces and nature.

The wealth inequalities in this City aren't because there are hundreds of people looking for work. They are because people don't earn enough in the jobs they do.

Because if you can't afford your rent or mortgage payments, or find somewhere affordable to live, everything else suffers. As it does if you can't easily access open green space and nature.

But just playing the housing numbers game won't solve this problem – as we've seen for the last 30 years. The building of 250 homes, for e.g., on the Wolvercote Paper Mill site was great – if you had upwards of £1/2m to spare to buy one. You're unlikely to find Oxford teachers, nurses and lab technicians living there.

And where is the data, that should be informing the discussion today:

- What is the proposed balance between new jobs (on the one hand) & new housing & green spaces in the city (on the other) & how has this been reached?

In particular, has any of the land previously identified for employment-use been firmly re-allocated for housing? This was a promised policy change around a common theme in many responses in previous consultations. If the plan continues to prioritise a huge increase in employment and economic growth over better provision for housing for the existing population's needs, then Oxford's housing crisis will continue to worsen, as will the related infrastructure issues including flooding, sewage, water scarcity, congestion, pollution and loss of green space.

How can the 'more of the same' strategy this Plan contains, that created and exacerbated these very real challenges we need to solve – result in anything other than more of the same?

- where is the summary report of responses to the last consultation, that should have informed this stage and the explanation of changes made in light of that consultation or the reasons for ignoring it. That information needs to be provided before the plan can properly be considered. The lack of its availability once again undermines democratic process in this City. It reinforces residents' feelings that 'there's no point in participating, no-one listens' and undermining the stated corporate priority to support thriving communities.

And finally, how can you possibly be expected to give full, due consideration to this 900 page document in the time given? The fact that the summary of the responses to the previous consultation is proving to also be very long is simply not a good enough reason not to provide it, but rather suggests more time and attention needs to be given to this entire process. What's the rush?

Be visionary. Be creative. Be courageous. It is in your gift to request more time, or dare I suggest, a different, more democratically-generated Plan, that is genuinely fit for the future this City and its current residents.

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

The draft Local Plan 2045 does not prioritise employment over housing. It does not add any new employment sites; instead it seeks to ensure that the use of existing employment sites is intensified, in line with the NPPF and Government guidance. The draft Local Plan sets out in Policy E1 the employment strategy for the city which aims to meet the city's employment needs while also facilitating the delivery of much needed housing.

Both the current 2036 Local Plan and the proposed 2045 Local Plan make residential development possible – other planning policies such as flood zones and the like permitting – on every employment site in Oxford. The 2045 Local Plan indeed goes further, and allows for complete loss of a greater number of employment sites than the 2036 Local Plan

A Local Plan cannot force the owner of a particular site to remove their office or their factory and build housing instead. But it can make it clear that that option is available to them, and the current Local Plan and the proposed Local Plan do exactly that.

The Wolvercote Paper Mill site includes 95 units of affordable housing, of which 75 are social housing, the most affordable form of housing available, and the rest are shared ownership. This provides homes that are genuinely affordable to families of all ages, backgrounds and employment.

2. Address from Martin Reed

We are here to request that you remove Policy SPS8 Land at Meadow Lane from the draft new Local Plan and make the **full 2.5 acres** available as a local resource for outdoor education and nature connection, with the opportunity of a Heritage Lottery grant, to benefit children and young people and the future resilience of the city.

This ancient meadow is unsuitable for **any** housing:

It is now included in Oxfordshire's Local Nature Recovery Strategy and easily qualifies as a City Wildlife Site. It provides the beautiful rural setting for Iffley's Conservation Area and draws many residents and visitors along the quiet route for active travel bordering the meadow. The value it brings, environmentally, socially and economically, is reflected in the Council's own multifunctionality scoring system, where it would score 13 /17 and it should be protected as Core Green infrastructure.

This particularly sensitive site is identified by the Council's own surveys as unsustainable. With 15 constraints in the Sustainability Appraisal (which is an underestimate, given all the errors and omissions) is the most constrained of any SPS site in this Local Plan. In particular, the site policy fails to recognise that the meadow itself is an essential part of the rural Conservation area and any building here would cause significant harm to the Conservation Area and fail to meet the heritage requirements of the NPPF.

The reduction in the minimum housing number from 29 to effectively ZERO confirms the site is **wholly unsuitable for any housing**. Keeping SPS 8 risks the **soundness of the entire plan**.

The Council needs to get the balance right: the benefits of any housing here would be far outweighed by the multiple harms of any development on this irreplaceable site.

I was born in Iffley and have wonderful memories of childhood. I grew up surrounded by open fields.

I believe a Meadow School on the Horse Fields would bring all the things I enjoyed in my childhood. The teachers from local schools within walking distance of the Horse Fields say this too, with benefits to:

1. mental and physical health
2. learning, social and practical skills and job opportunities
3. Connection between children and communities of different background
4. A feeling of belonging in the local landscape

They also say that it would address the high levels of disadvantage of the children in their catchment areas.

I am who I am because of the childhood experiences I had in nature.

The fields allowed me to be a child, unjudged by adults. I made camps, climbed trees, played games, and explored. I saw birds' nests with eggs in, watched ants' nests. I ran freely racing and laughing with other children of all backgrounds. We appreciated nature and were healthy and happy. We weren't Vitamin D deficient!

As a result of enjoying the outside, I have made lifelong friends.

I attribute my health to early physical activity.

I return mentally to these places that no longer exist, when I need space and peace and wish to remember these lovely times.

I still get artistic inspiration from childhood visions of these places and from the birds and animals I saw, which formed my early imagination.

I became a professional gardener as a result of enjoying the outside.

I was lucky: virtually everything apart from the Horse Fields has now gone.

I feel every child should have the opportunities I did.

The size of the Horse Fields meadow is **just large enough** at 2.5 acres to take managed footfall while protecting and nurturing the wildlife here.

And now we have the support from the local wildlife trust to make this a reality.

BBOWT are leading the submission of Reconnecting Bernwood, Otmoor and the Ray (which we call RBOR), a £4.1 million National Lottery Heritage Fund bid with 12 partners across the landscape between Oxford, Bicester, Aylesbury. Our focus is nature, communities, and heritage, with a specific focus on reconnection, which aligns perfectly with the Meadow School Iffley proposal.

We are working with the organising committee of FOFI to pilot Meadow School sessions with Greyfriars Catholic School and draw up a proposal for working with them for our bid. Should our bid be successful, we can offer some funds to set-up and run the Meadow School, extra capacity, and expertise from our twelve partners and wider RBOR stakeholder network.

We are very excited to be involved in supporting the development of the meadow school, and are confident in FOFI's commitment and ability to develop a brilliant community resource that will last long after our five-year funding is up.

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

Delivery of housing is a priority for the City Council, and the Local Plan's strategy is to maximise housing delivery while balancing protection of other important assets such as biodiversity, open space and functional floodplain. The minimum housing need figure for Oxford has been calculated by using the Government's Standard Method as set out in National Planning Policy and guidance. The housing need in Oxford is for 1,087 new dwellings per annum over 20 years, a total of 21,740. This housing need is clearly greater than the capacity of the city to deliver it. The assessment of capacity (set out in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment 2026) is 9,267 homes over the Local Plan period, or 463 dwellings per annum, meaning that there is an unmet housing need of well over 10,000 dwellings, which this Council will need to look towards our neighbouring District Councils to meet, as before. It is therefore a clear requirements that the Local Plan identify all viable housing sites to contribute towards meeting the housing need within the City's boundaries.

The Meadow Lane site has been an allocated site for residential development since the adoption of the Oxford Local Plan 2036 and it is proposed that this continue to be the case for the Local Plan 2045. The sensitivity of the site is acknowledged in the draft allocation policy, including its siting within the designated Iffley Conservation Area and within the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) But there is considered to be potential for a scheme that responds appropriately to this setting which delivering much needed housing. This site allocation was drafted with reference to the LNRS. The LNRS is not identified in the draft policy as having the intention of preventing development. The LNRS itself makes this clear: "In these circumstances [where allocations for alternative uses overlap with the mapped extent of the LNRS], Local Planning Authorities should seek to plan positively for the delivery of the potential measures identified in the LNRS within the proposed development..."

In relation to the impact on the Conservation Area, it is entirely acceptable and commonplace for development to occur within conservation areas, especially in historic cities such as Oxford. The principal of developing within a conservation area is acceptable; whether proposals result in harm to heritage assets is something that can only be properly assessed by Development Management officers when a planning application is submitted.

The site did not meet the criteria to be part of the Core Green Infrastructure Network. Although the site is within a conservation area, this in itself does not make it part of the core network. It is not a designated wildlife site, there is only a small area of flood risk, and it appears separated from the main green corridor, which is likely to limit its main corridor function.

When considering whether to allocate a site, officers have considered what the capacity of the site is for housing delivery; a process that was informed by the most up-to-date information available at the time of drafting. It is clear that the site has sensitivities and biodiversity interest, but there is still potential for a development of the site that responds to this appropriately. Given the current understanding of the wildlife value of the site the minimum number of dwellings has been removed from the site allocation policy, allowing a free response to the sensitivities of the site. That is not to

say a scheme bringing forward the previous minimum would not be suitable, but leaves that to be determined in the decision making process for a planning application on the site.