

To: Council

Date: 23 March 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. Emily Scaysbrook
2. Dr Vira Ameli

Addresses to be taken in Part 2 of the agenda

1. Emily Scaysbrook

A scooter rider was recently seriously injured after hitting a pothole on Oxford Road in Old Marston. Local residents stated that the same pothole had already been filled twice this year prior to the incident, and having visited the site myself since, I can see that the repair carried out after the accident is already beginning to fail.

This raises concerns that when potholes do materialise, they are not always being repaired in a durable way, but are instead being repeatedly patched, allowing the same defect to reappear within a short space of time and requiring further repair, wasting public money.

My understanding is that this road's maintenance is delivered through the council's contract with ODS.

With that in mind, could the apt Council Member please explain what contractual mechanisms the council has in place with ODS to ensure that pothole repairs are carried out to a good and long-lasting standard, and how the council is able to hold the contractor accountable - including through financial penalties - when the same defects require repeated repair within short periods of time?

Response from Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focussed Services and Council Companies

The Council is aware of the unfortunate accident involving the scooter rider George Balkwill in Old Marston last month and we all wish him a speedy recovery. Like many others, I watched the video of the accident and I feel every sympathy for what happened to George. In my view, citizens have every right to expect their roads are safe and that there are not potholes of the kind which featured in this accident present on our roads.

This winter's prolonged and heavy rainfall has significantly worsened the condition of our roads, contributing to an increase in potholes. Wet and cold conditions also make timely and durable repairs more challenging. I share everyone's frustration about this ongoing issue.

The County Council provides an annual budget and agrees a work plan directly with Oxford Direct Services for repairing minor roads and paths within Oxford. It sets down the standards of work it expects and the time frame in which that work will be carried out.

In the case of the pot hole which caused the accident in Marston, this was inspected and booked for repair but continued to deteriorate. It was repaired well within the timeframe the County Council expects for potholes as originally classified. ODS always aim to carry out repairs to the required standard and as quickly as possible. However, I fully recognise that this will be of little reassurance to the scooter rider affected, particularly given the timing.

ODS's approach is to deliver a durable, right-first-time repair of all potholes. Each defect is assessed to determine the appropriate treatment, considering factors such as size, depth, location, traffic loading, and underlying condition. Where a permanent repair is required, it ensures that the defect is properly prepared, cut out to sound material, cleaned, and reinstated using suitable materials and compaction techniques designed to achieve long-term performance, not a temporary fix.

Over recent weeks, ODS has increased the number of crews out repairing potholes to four. During February, the crews dealt with 719 defects on Oxford's minor roads. They also received 588 reports via Fix My Street – the most ever in a single month.

Oxfordshire County Council provides ODS with an annual budget to repair all Oxford's minor roads. This core budget has not increased in recent years whilst costs have gone up. This year, ODS has proactively sought and secured an additional one-off sum to help with the challenging situation.

We are in continued conversations with the County Council for additional funding to address wider needs, not just pothole repairs.

Given the scale of the problems we face including the underlying state of our roads and pavements, it is clear this budget is only scratching the surface. I know of minor roads in my own ward where they need root and branch renewal, not just pothole repairs. So I urge the County Council to see what it can do to increase this budget substantially.

Outside Oxford and on the city's trunk and classified roads (such as Botley Road, Cowley Road, Marston Ferry Road and the Ring Road), the county council has a contract with a private company to repair public roads and paths, including repairing potholes. ODS is not involved in this work.

Although ODS does have crews out spotting defects in Oxford's minor roads, you can help us by reporting issues to fixmystreet.com. This information makes everyone aware of where the potholes are and helps plan the repairs. And ODS will always do its best to respond as quickly as it can within the financial constraints it faces.

2. Dr Vira Ameli

My name is Vira Ameli. I am a researcher and lecturer at the University of Oxford, where I also completed my DPhil. I have been a resident of Oxford for almost a decade now. As a Social Scientist, I study how health systems can perform equitably and efficiently, and how societies build and sustain the structures that maintain life.

So I want to speak from experience, as an Iranian woman born and raised in Iran, as a resident of Oxford, and as a Social Scientist studying health systems.

The US-Israeli illegal aggression against Iran and Iranians, for a second time during negotiations and just before an agreement was within reach, as announced by the Omani Foreign Minister and mediator, cannot be understood only as a conflict between states or even people. It is an illegal act of aggression that targets Iran and Iranians in three layers:

Through the destruction of life.

Through the destruction of memory.

And through the narrowing of our futures.

First, it is the destruction of life.

We see that medical centres have been targeted and damaged, that schools have been struck directly, that hundreds of innocent schoolgirls and boys were among the very first victims of this war. Civilians, women, and children are being killed by the US and Israeli missiles and bombs every day across the region and now in Iran.

We then report numbers. But any one number is already too large.

By last week, according to the Iranian Red Crescent, 67,414 civilian buildings were destroyed, 236 medical centres and 498 schools were targeted and damaged. More than 1400 people, including over 400 women and children were killed. Sixteen medical personnel and one paramedics were killed.

But numbers can obscure as much as they reveal.

Because what is being lost is not only what is visible in the moment of impact, it is the system that maintains life and makes survival possible.

When health workers are killed, when hospitals are struck, the violence does not end there. It continues, quietly, in the patient who cannot be treated, in the delayed surgery, in the chronic condition that becomes fatal only because existing treatment is no longer accessible.

A health system is not only infrastructure. It is the thin line that stands between illness and death.

And when that line is broken, it is not broken equally. It is the most vulnerable who fall first.

Second, it is the destruction of memory.

We now know that museums and historical sites across Iran have been targeted and damaged, including sites marked by UNESCO as World Heritage sites, places where history has not been preserved in isolation but layered across centuries, belonging not just to Iranians, but to humanity.

By last week, the Ministry of Cultural Heritage reported serious damage to more than 56 museums and historical buildings across the country. In Tehran alone, 19 sites were damaged, including the beautiful Golestan palace and the Hall of Mirrors. In historic cities, such as Isfahan, Shiraz, and Semnan cultural heritage was severely damaged.

These are the heritage from the Achaemenid and Sassanian worlds, through the Seljuk and Safavid periods, these are not simply magnificent structures. They are the record of continuity, of a civilisation that has endured for more than two and a half thousand years.

And that endurance has not been built on expansion. It has been built on preservation, on the ability of a people to remain alive in their language, in their memory, in their resistance, and in their understanding of themselves.

So when these sites are targeted, what is struck is not only stone. It is that continuity. It is the link between past and present. It is our national heritage, but also World Heritage.

And here, in Oxford, this cannot be unfamiliar.

This is a city that has made a life out of preservation. It understands that history is not decoration. It is what allows a society to recognise itself across time.

So when heritage is damaged elsewhere, Oxford is not untouched by it. It is implicated in the question of what we choose to value, and what we are willing to let disappear.

Third, it is the destruction of the future.

Because what is being dismantled now is not only what exists, but what could exist.

Hospitals, schools, bridges, roads, systems built over decades by a nation under constraint, under pressure, under sanctions and economic strangulation.

To destroy them is not only to wound the present. It is to reach forward and make the future smaller.

It is to leave fewer possibilities, weaker systems, and a longer shadow of harm. And so the question returns, inevitably, to us.

Oxford calls itself a City of Sanctuary.

But sanctuary is not a word that can survive contradiction.

It cannot mean welcome in principle and restriction in practice. It cannot mean openness when it is easy, and withdrawal when it is difficult.

Because it is precisely at moments like this, when the conditions of life are being dismantled elsewhere, that the meaning of sanctuary is decided.

And there is something else that must be said, without evasion.

The country that is now under attack, Iran, is also one that has, for decades, hosted one of the largest refugee populations in the world. More than 3.5 million people have sought refuge and live in Iran.

So we are faced with a reversal that should give us pause. A place that has offered refuge is itself made unsafe.

This is not a complicated question.

It is a question of whether we are willing to recognise what is being destroyed. Not pretending for a second that any of this can bring any good for anyone – not for Iranians, not for Americans, and not for Jewish people.

And whether we are willing to speak in a way that is equal to that reality.

Because if a city like Oxford, a city that claims to stand for knowledge, for history, and for human dignity, cannot speak clearly at a moment like this, then it becomes difficult to know what those claims mean.

I urge you to support this motion, and speak against the destruction of:

Life.

Memory.

Future.

Thank you.

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

Firstly, I would like to sincerely thank you for giving up your time to come and speak to us today. Our hearts go out to you, your family and all other Iranians facing the current aggression, as well as to the many people across the region who are finding themselves drawn into this escalating war.

I am very relieved that our Government are not engaged in this aggression and are resisting calls to do so, only participating in defensive actions.

I would like to express on behalf of the city council our absolute sympathies with the plight of the people of Iran, who are victims both of the repressive Iranian regime and now also of the unjustified war led by President Trump and the Israeli government.

I should however warn Dr Ameli, that unfortunately it is unlikely that we will get to this motion tonight.

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