

## Members Question & Response for Council – 26 February 2025

Question	Raised By	Executive Member	Response
I. Can the Executive Member confirm when the draft housing site proposals that will be considered as part of the Local Plan review will be made public?	Councillor Liam Walker	Councillor Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning	<p>The emerging draft West Oxfordshire Plan is currently at the Regulation 18 ‘plan preparation’ stage with two major public consultations having already been undertaken.</p> <p>As part of both consultations, a large number of potential site options were put forward for consideration by landowners and developers. Details of these were included in the two consultation summary reports prepared by Officers and published online.</p> <p>The next stage of Regulation 18 which is scheduled to take place in May 2025, will comprise a ‘preferred options’ consultation. This will set out a series of draft policies and will include potential areas/sites which the Council considers to be potentially suitable for development.</p> <p>The May consultation will be accompanied by a comprehensive site assessment which outlines which sites are considered to be suitable and why and conversely, which sites are considered to be unsuitable and why.</p> <p>The list of proposed areas/sites will then be refined as the plan reaches the Regulation 19 publication stage later in the year taking account of consultation responses received and supporting technical evidence.</p>

Supplementary question – Is there a reason why the next stage of the regulation 18 is conveniently taking place after the local elections in May?	Councillor Liam Walker	Councillor Hugo Ashton, Executive Member for Planning	The timing goes along with the timing of the drafting of the various papers that need to support that. Those were in turn delayed due to the policy changes that took place over the last year.
2. At the full-council meeting on 25th September 2024, you agreed to undertake a review of the council's Tree Management Policy during 2025 after a number of members, from all sides of the chamber, expressed concerns about the current policy, which a previous Conservative administration imposed some years ago. At the time the previous administration didn't take on board the concerns raised by the then Environment overview & scrutiny committee. The concerns members have subsequently expressed is that the existing policy isn't meeting the needs of residents or providing best practice for West Oxfordshire. Could the Executive Member please outline when the review will take place and in what form the review will take?	Councillor Andrew Coles	Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment	<p>At the meeting in September I undertook to review the policy position over the next year in light of the comments made at Overview and Scrutiny.</p> <p>There is currently no in house specialist to undertake this review, the previous document having been put together by the Estates Team. A dedicated Tree Officer is in the process of being recruited. This post will have responsibility for planning work and also the management of council owned trees. The job description specifies ownership of the Tree Management Policy.</p> <p>This post will be advertised in the next two weeks and, if recruitment is successful, we would hope to have someone in post by the end of May, so a review of the document by a qualified practitioner could take place in June.</p>
Supplementary question – I am sure you will agree that it is the duty and responsibility of Elected Members to determine policy. With that in mind, could I suggest that you liaise with the Chair of Scrutiny and ask whether	Councillor Andrew Coles	Councillor Lidia Arciszewska, Executive Member for Environment	<p><u>Written response provided</u></p> <p>The Development Manager will be meeting with Councillor Coles to discuss the Tree Management Policy. The Tree Officer role is currently being advertised.</p>

that committee can review the Tree Management Policy and it gives that view, so that when the new Tree Officer is appointed he or she will have a clear steer from Elected Members as to their concerns and recommendations so that the Policy is fit for purpose in meeting the needs of residents.			
3. What is the latest with the Knights Court site in Oxford?	Councillor Liam Walker	Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Welfare	Officers are currently undertaking an asset review of the site so that the Council can determine the best use for the site moving forward. The building is currently being marketed for lettings whilst the review is being undertaken. A report is intended to be presented to the Executive in June 2025 to consider options.
Supplementary question – We were informed over a year ago that this building will be used towards tackling homelessness in Oxford, and it still remains empty. How much has it cost this Council in lost revenue?	Councillor Liam Walker	Councillor Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Welfare	<p>In terms of actual cost of lost revenue if any I would need to come back to you with a written response having discussed that with Officers.</p> <p>I would point out that in terms of our temporary accommodation needs, we are aiming to provide those in District and that is our priority. Regarding Knights Court, there is a considerable amount of due diligence that needs to be completed in order to get the best result for the Council and there are other parties involved.</p> <p><u>Written response provided</u></p> <p>Whilst Knights Court is unoccupied the costs of holding the property fall to the council as freeholder as is normal</p>

			<p>in a property portfolio. This has the result of reducing the overall yield on the councils investment return on its portfolio and is assumed in the budget for 2025/26.</p> <p>The specific annual holding costs for Knights Court are :-</p> <table><tr><td>Empty Business Rates</td><td>£134,000</td></tr><tr><td>Security</td><td>£12,240</td></tr><tr><td>Utilities costs</td><td>£25,000</td></tr></table> <p>As stated in my previous answer the property is on the market for letting purposes whilst a twin track exploration of alternate uses is being considered. A business case is anticipated to be brought to June Cabinet to consider all the options.</p>	Empty Business Rates	£134,000	Security	£12,240	Utilities costs	£25,000
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