

CABINET – 21 OCTOBER 2025

ITEM 4 – QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

Questions are listed in the order in which they were received. Should any questioner not have received an answer in that time, a written answer will be provided.

1. COUNCILLOR ANDREW CRICHTON	COUNCILLOR BEN HIGGINS, CABINET MEMBER FOR FUTURE ECONOMY AND INNOVATION
<p>Item 10 – Get Oxfordshire Working Plan</p> <p>One of the issues mentioned in the report is limited connectivity and public transport. I see nothing in this plan that will help. How is this issue going to be addressed by the County Council?</p>	<p>The "Oxfordshire Works" Plan has been developed in accordance with the Department for Work & Pensions guidance and provides an appraisal of the Oxfordshire labour market, its key barriers and challenges, and opportunities to make changes to the health & wellbeing and employment & skills systems to deliver better outcomes for residents and communities.</p> <p>One of the key structural challenges the Plan highlights is that, across the Oxfordshire labour market, the places people live are not always well-connected to economic opportunity. While it is beyond the scope of the Oxfordshire Works Plan to address public transport connectivity directly, the adoption of the Plan will ensure that the need to connect residents and communities to economic opportunity is a clear priority going forward.</p> <p>With regards to bus franchising, the rationale and benefits of pursuing an Enhanced Partnership Plus model are set out in the report before Cabinet. At this stage, Cabinet is being asked to approve the <u>development</u> of such a model and therefore there is no detail on what this may consist of.</p> <p>The key issue is funding – whatever model is pursued, provision of additional services (particularly in rural areas) costs money. The Council awaits a</p>

	<p>Government decision on our bus funding allocation for the next three years, which should be made by the end of 2025.</p> <p>Beyond this, the Council has extensive plans to enhance connectivity through the implementation of our Local Transport & Connectivity Plan, including investment in mobility hubs, in active travel options, and plans to reduce congestion. Two great examples are our prioritisation of active travel and rail for Enterprise Zone funding which Cabinet has before it on 21 September, and the ambitious and deliverable rail plan which will be coming to Cabinet in November following an extensive consultation.</p>
<p>2. COUNCILLOR SUSANNA PRESSEL</p> <p>Item 19 – Capital Programme and Monitoring Report</p> <p>Please can the Cabinet Member tell us why the essential work on the Kennington Railway Bridge (on the A423 section of the ring road) was not started long ago? Why have we waited until the condition of the bridge has worsened considerably and the cost has doubled?!</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR ANDREW GANT, CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT MANAGEMENT</p> <p>It is not a case of waiting, this is a very complex and hugely important project which has to be coordinated with the Environment Agency's Oxford flood alleviation scheme, and needs careful planning, permissions and full funding before it can begin. When complete it will provide improved active travel experiences, help protect homes from flooding and retain a key road link currently used by 50,000 vehicles per day.</p> <p>Work to apply for planning permission had to be undertaken and planning approval was granted in October 2024. Since then, officers have been working to finalise the detailed design, construction methodologies and plan utility diversions along with other preparatory work. They is a lot to navigate and work through – including the need for complex temporary work to ensure the existing structure remains stable and the road can stay open while we replace the bridge. We've also identified the need for complicated utility diversions while work takes place that have had to be worked through and require agreement with utility providers.</p> <p>Officers are now focused on securing the extra £71 million needed for the project so that work can begin as soon as possible. The Department for Transport's</p>

	<p>anticipated structures fund is a strong fit and we have already made contact with the relevant government contacts in advance of the fund becoming available.</p> <p>You have pointed out the worsening condition of the bridge and I agree that it is imperative that we move towards construction as soon as possible. In the meantime, the bridge remains safe to use and is regularly surveyed and monitored.</p>
<p>3. COUNCILLOR BRAD BAINES</p> <p>Item 19 - Capital Programme Update and Monitoring Report:</p> <p>To ask the Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation, why the Cabinet decided to move forward with the sale of County Hall prior to securing planning permission for the required increase in floorspace at Speedwell House?</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR DAN LEVY, CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, PROPERTY AND TRANSFORMATION</p> <p>The Property and Assets Strategy, agreed in 2022, outlined several priorities, including creating a roadmap for Oxford city accommodation, rationalising the operational portfolio countywide, developing a costed business case, utilising or disposing of underutilised properties, and advancing our decarbonisation programme. PwC was appointed to advise on available options. Working with the cross-party CAG group, they concluded that a decision on the future of the Council's city centre office accommodation was urgent. They recognised a market opportunity to maximise the Council's assets to support financial sustainability and boost the city's economic development.</p> <p>It was noted that no decision on County Hall and Speedwell House had been made in over a decade, delaying significant investments. Retaining offices that are only 35% occupied at peak times was deemed unsustainable. The move to Agile working necessitates a responsive and collaborative workplace to meet long-term workforce needs and DTFT objectives.</p> <p>The Council had deferred decisions on County Hall, making current investment needs unaffordable. The mechanical and electrical systems are at the end of their life, posing operational failures. Additionally, County Hall's current configuration severely limits its contribution to the Net Zero Carbon target. The report</p>

	<p>highlighted that inaction was not an option due to the scale of investment required.</p> <p>The recommendation to consolidate in Speedwell House and dispose of County Hall was approved aftermarket engagement. This decision was to be progressed through the Council's capital governance processes, considering the financial position and market interest in the County Hall properties.</p> <p>Please note that our position and agreed actions remain firm. We have consistently maintained that the entire programme, including the transition from County Hall to Speedwell House, will be fully funded by the sale of County Hall. This objective is steadfast and will be achieved as planned.</p>
<p>4. COUNCILLOR BRAD BAINES</p> <p>Item 19 - Capital Programme Update and Monitoring Report:</p> <p>To ask the Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation, what the financial implications are anticipated to be of (a) delays to the granting of planning permission for the expansion of Speedwell House or alternatively (b) of the inability of the Council to increase the floorplan of Speedwell House as previously envisaged?</p>	<p>COUNCILLOR DAN LEVY, CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE, PROPERTY AND TRANSFORMATION</p> <p>With the delays caused by the archaeological finds we have carefully reviewed our options available and have decided to proceed with redeveloping Speedwell House as our city centre hub, maintaining its current footprint rather than expanding it as initially intended. We believe this decision not only benefits us but also adds value to our residents, which is always in front of mind. The transformed Speedwell House will offer a high-quality modern, flexible space for staff and councilors to work, meet, and with our residents to attend meetings, events, and use our facilities. It will also significantly contribute to the regeneration of the southern end of the city. Which is so desperately needed.</p> <p>A smaller building and a less complicated construction project will mean that the overall cost of Speedwell House will be reduced.</p> <p>It should be remembered that the original design for Speedwell House reflected the space required of OCC prior to the knowledge of Local Government reorganisation and Devolution. As a result, the future requirements for Speedwell</p>

needed to be reconsidered. The anticipated LGR decision in the spring or early summer of 2026 has been taken into consideration and final building designs. More details will be provided as our plans evolve and finalise.

Our revised proposal contains key elements and meets all our base requirements from the original plan, including office space and touch down points and collaboration areas, meeting rooms, council chamber/conference facilities, the coroner's court, and inviting public to indoor and outdoor spaces. The primary change involves a reduction of desk space, positioning Speedwell as a city centre hub that complements our other properties within our portfolio in serving our residents.

The redeveloped Speedwell House is set to open in April 2028. As we plan to vacate County Hall by the end of 2026, we have already identified sufficient accommodation within our existing portfolio. If necessary, we will collaborate with our sister organisations to meet the needs of our staff and councillors across the county. This approach minimises interim costs while ensuring a seamless transition. We will share further details as we finalise our plans in the coming months, our focus remains on supporting our staff and councillors' well-being, fostering collaboration, and delivering uninterrupted services to our residents during this period.