



Council

Monday 16 December 2019

Agenda Item 9 (a), Written Questions¹

Question From: Councillor Mark Cherry

Question To: Leader of the Council, Councillor Barry Wood

Topic: Bradley Arcade, Bretch Hill

Question

“Would the leader of Cherwell District Council inform Ruscote ward councillors what plans do Cherwell District Council have to fill the empty spaces left at Bradley Arcade, Bretch Hill. When the new build Hill community fully centre opens whilst noting the Pizza shop at Bradley arcade has also been shut for some weeks.”

Response

“Banbury Community Church (BCC) were temporarily ‘re-homed’ into a vacant shop unit within Bradley Arcade to facilitate the development of the new Hill Community building. Now that the construction of the new Hill has completed BCC are in the process of taking a lease in the new building and moving out of the unit they occupy in Bradley Arcade. It is anticipated that the Bradley Arcade unit will be finally handed back to the Council by the end of the year.

In anticipation of the Bradley Arcade shop unit becoming available in the early new year, its future use is currently under consideration. The shop forms part of the local shopping parade serving the local neighbourhood. Local letting agents have confirmed there would be demand from potential occupiers for the space and we have been in discussion with them about potential new tenants.

Appropriate alternative uses are also considered within the confines of the permitted planning use of the premises and the benefit they derive to the Council and to the residents. Once all options are identified the appropriate governance and democratic process will be followed to ratify any decision. This is standard practice when any property that we own is likely to become vacant.

The adjoining pizza takeaway is subject to a lease and the tenant is paying rent to CDC, however they are temporarily closed due to a proposed refurbishment of their unit.”

¹ Updated 10 December 2019 with two questions submitted by the deadline but after agenda publication



Question From: Councillor Conrad Copeland

Question To: Leader of the Council, Councillor Barry Wood

Topic: Communication with MHCLG

Question

“Has any member formally acting on behalf of Cherwell District Council, or any officer authorised to represent the Council, spoken with MHCLG officials, ministers, or the Secretary of State regarding the holding decision that currently applies to South Oxfordshire District Council and what was the subject matter of those discussions.”

Response

“I can confirm that no Councillor or officer formally acting on behalf of Cherwell District Council, has spoken with MHCLG officials, ministers, or the Secretary of State regarding the holding decision that currently applies to South Oxfordshire District Council.”

Question From: Councillor Ian Middleton

Question To: Leader of the Council, Councillor Barry Wood

Topic: Oxfordshire Pension Fund Motion to July Council

Question

“At the last full council meeting, I and my group brought a motion calling on this council to press the Oxfordshire Pension Fund to divest funds from fossil fuel investments in view of our adoption of a climate change emergency motion. This motion fell.

I understand that a Climate Change Workshop was subsequently held on 8th November to discuss how the Oxfordshire Pension Fund could play a part in tackling the climate crisis, during which the Oxfordshire Pension Fund committee suggested that it was ready to move more of its assets into carbon-emission friendly funds at its next asset allocation meeting.

The meeting included the Oxfordshire Pension Fund committee and board members, senior Brunel Pension Partnership executives, fund managers with expertise in low carbon funds, a leading climate scientist, an Oxford University student climate campaign representative, Oxfordshire District councillors holding senior environment positions, and members of the Fossil Free Oxfordshire group. All participants agreed that the Pension Fund should support the Paris Agreement goal of limiting global warming to 2 degrees. Moreover, the fund management representatives who spoke at the workshop assured participants that Pension



Fund performance would not be affected if assets were transferred into zero or low carbon investment funds. Indeed, they argued that a move away from fossil fuels could be a source of superior Pension Fund returns.

These were exactly the arguments that I and my colleagues, including professional economist Cllr Copeland, made during the debate on our motion. Yet we were told by Conservative members that we were completely wrong, before every single one of them voted against the motion.

Would the leader now like to take the opportunity to express agreement with the Oxfordshire Pension Fund that divestment is in fact a prudent move, in terms of the future health of the fund and the planet, and that the arguments advanced by myself and the Progressive Oxfordshire Group during the motion debate supporting divestment should have been taken more seriously at the time?"

Response

"The outcomes of the Climate Change Workshop were reported to the meeting of the "Pension Fund Committee on 6 December 2020. Cllr Middleton is correct that there was consensus around the need to align future investment strategy with the Paris Treaty, but the debate around disinvestment from fossil fuel companies was much wider than highlighted, reflecting the complexity of the issues.

A blanket approach of disinvesting from all fossil fuel companies was not agreed, with questions raised by the expert external speakers on the effectiveness of such a strategy in delivering the long term change across all companies required to achieve a sustainable future. The role of disinvestment was accepted as part of an overall strategy which includes engagement with all companies with clear objectives from that engagement. Disinvestment is an option alongside voting against Board members where companies are not seen as making sufficient progress.

The Pension Fund Committee have agreed to establish a Working Group to take forward the discussions from the Workshop with an aim to develop a first draft Climate Change Policy to be presented to the March 2020 meeting of the Committee. Any draft Policy agreed by the Committee will be subject to formal consultation with all stakeholders before it is adopted."