

This is a statement of the position of the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum as planning permission has been granted for Oxford North and the Neighbourhood Forum is now part of the planning process. The statement has been sent to Thomas White Oxford.

Christopher Hardman, 31/3/21

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The concerns we expressed at the enquiry on the AAP and on subsequent planning applications remain. We will monitor the development to ensure that all the undertakings made by TWO are fulfilled. One issue that is especially concerning is the funding that may be required to mitigate the impact of the development on school places. In other developments, developers have acknowledged this and provided funding. The 106 recognises that this funding is required to support the development. However, all that is funded in the 106 agreement is safe access to Wolvercote Primary School, where there will be no secured money for expansion. If this is not a concern for TWO, it should be for St John's, which is an educational charity. It does of course, like other colleges, support outreach and access for young people, but it would be as well if it attended to the future local educational need, in particular the pressure on school places, created by its own profitable development.

St John's and TWO are aware of local concerns from recent demonstrations. These will not go away now that the development has planning permission. There are some aspects of the development that St John's may wish to reconsider over the long time the development will take to complete. The disruption from the development will continue for many years, and unless efforts are made to improve relations there will undoubtedly be more protests and potential reputational damage. It would therefore be appropriate for St John's to demonstrate what 'local projects identified by the local community' will be 'integrated into (the) local community'. I have asked TWO to let me know if this refers to new funding or just to the CIL agreed with City officers.

Local concerns have not been helped by the usual practice of developers to clear trees and vegetation while promising future improvements in biodiversity from planting, some of which will be off-site, and all of which will take some time to mature. TWO stated that 'the hedgerows along Joe White's Lane will remain untouched', but it is evident to residents who walk the Lane that the hedge has been badly affected. It might do something to reassure people that TWO meant what it said if there were an effort to protect the hedge from further damage and to try to restore it. The Lane is probably very ancient and the hedge, by the number of species, is late Saxon or older.

There is still a great deal of concern about the architectural quality and obtrusiveness of some of the proposed buildings and this is shared, I know, by some members of the College. It is a pity that a college with a splendid new library designed by internationally celebrated architects cannot do better than the Red Hall.

Of course there are benefits from the development that are welcomed by local residents: the provision of affordable homes. Unfortunately, the number of these homes at 35% falls short of the 50% required by the City Council.