

Education funding for Oxford North

Background information to letter to Oxford Times 17/12/20 “Council Clash Brewing”

It will cost £2.62m to expand Wolvercote School and provide the school places needed by the 480 homes planned for Oxford North. The County Council, responsible for the provision of education, was clear that it would object to the planning application for the development unless the funding was secured. The City Council has now chosen to ignore the County Council’s objection and approve the application without making any provision for education funding.

In other developments, the developers have been expected to provide the extra funding needed for education. In the case of Oxford North, the developer Thomas White Oxford (TWO), has argued that to provide this money would make the development not viable. In other words, it would not provide sufficient profit. As a consequence, one suggestion from the City Council is that the funding should come from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), money intended not to facilitate development, but to mitigate its consequences. The argument that the site would not produce enough profit has already meant that the City has let the developer off substantial amounts of CIL. One might therefore expect the Council’s target of 50% affordable housing to be achieved, but with all this help the site is apparently still only viable, that means profitable, if the target is reduced to 30%. It would seem that TWO was spectacularly bad at estimating its costs and profits before submitting its planning application.

The City Council proposal that funding for school expansion should come from the portion of the Community Infrastructure Levy allocated to the local community is a surprise. This is the first indication the Wolvercote Neighbourhood Forum has had that education funding will be sought from the neighbourhood portion, despite several meetings which have taken place to discuss the management of CIL with City officers over the past year. The Neighbourhood CIL is intended to protect and enhance the ward, but instead it would protect the profits of the Oxford North developers. Local residents will have to bear the brunt of the development – thousands of new jobs, nearly 500 new households, increased traffic and car parking in our ward, without any funds to mitigate the effect.

The whole Oxford North site is estimated to yield £11.7m in Community Infrastructure Levy, 25% of which is the ‘parish portion’ when there is a Neighbourhood Plan. If the whole of the education funding were taken from the neighbourhood, only £105k would be left. If this were to happen, the City and County would have plundered the CIL money intended to benefit Wolvercote residents.