

*A flysheet in support of the motion* ‘Congregation welcomes the conclusions of the Environmental Impact Assessment, resolves that of the three options that it offers for mitigation of the environmental damage caused by the Castle Mill Development, Option 3 is the only one that offers substantial mitigation, and therefore instructs Council to proceed with mitigation work according to the recommendations of Option 3.’

It may seem strange to call a postal vote after what might be considered an emphatic vote at the Tuesday 10 February debate, in which the Registrar made a frank and generous admission that ‘we can, and we should do better’. However, consulting widely, we were persuaded by urgent representations from colleagues who for good reasons, such as teaching or clinical duties, could not attend, and wished to make their opinions heard. We are also conscious that despite the large turnout on 10 February, it represented only around a sixth of the potential electorate. We invite you to consider these points, some familiar, some new:

1. We were very heartened by *the almost uniform condemnation* of the buildings in their present form.
2. What a long way we have come from studied silence and refusal to admit any great problem, which for two years characterised the central administration’s response to the Castle Mill situation.
3. Nevertheless, the biggest problem of many afflicting the Castle Mill flats remains: *they are too tall, by at least a storey*. They break a convention, observed by other developers, that new development around Port Meadow does not rise above the treeline. Castle Mill blots out celebrated views of Oxford’s ‘Dreaming Spires’ from the Thames towpath and the Meadow, itself a Scheduled Ancient Monument. We recommend viewing ‘before and after’ pictures on the *Save Port Meadow* website.
4. *Option 1 for remedial work is expensive and achieves nothing* in restoring protected heritage sites, leaving ‘substantially adverse’ damage on numerous viewpoints. *Option 3 is more expensive but achieves a real result*. Removing top storeys, painting buildings and planting trees (Option 3) could cost only £9m - little more than option 1 (cladding, planting trees).
5. We are sad that apparently some students still think that adopting Option 3 would put current students or their families out on the street. *The timing for closing down of sections of the building can be flexible*. Phased closures were achieved when the Summertown graduate flats were modernised recently, a major project completed without great inconvenience to students, or apparent student protest.
6. University housing stock comprises *thousands of units*, and constantly expands. Current City Council statistics reveal that the number of students in private accommodation is *not* near the threshold which the City permits. In fact there should be NO net loss of units, only a brief transitional period: insignificant compared to the project’s eighty-year life.
7. Phased closure of parts of the building will inevitably be disruptive. But in any case Castle Mill will suffer major disruption as *Network Rail creates new sidings immediately behind the flats: a very big new project*. The University will be obliged to find ways of helping Castle Mill residents cope with this, whatever else is done to the building.

8. We were disappointed that so much of the case presented by our opponents was *still a narrative of fear*, based on repeating an uncosted figure of £30 million to implement Option 3. It was noticeable that speakers against the motion were (nervously) revising this figure down to £22 million during the course of the debate.
9. It could be much lower. The £30 million estimate includes costs for building elsewhere 33 flats containing 38 bedrooms: allegedly £7.5 million, three times as much as they cost in the first place. The estimate *also* includes loss of rent over a 25-year period. That would be made up elsewhere, so is not admissible.
10. When the opponents of the motion list all the other things that could be done with £XX millions, they do not pause to say that we could only do one, not all of them.
11. *For these and other reasons, we do not believe discredited figures intended to frighten.* Thus much of the 'fear narrative' falls away: anger from donors, disapproval from government, detriment to student welfare and housing. We would be pleased to discuss likely costs with the University central authorities. Why not appeal to environmentally-minded, socially responsible benefactors to fund Option 3 to preserve Oxford's visual heritage?
12. Although Option 3 is not perfect, *it is a basis to work from.* We welcome the exciting ideas for re-presenting the buildings mooted in the Debate. Why not hold an architectural competition sponsored by the University?
13. *What will the flats look like in ten years' time?* Option 3 would restore views across the Meadow and show that the University recognises that it must not ride roughshod over the feelings of our fellow citizens. *Option 1 will leave relationships between Town and Gown soured for the future, and the blot on historic landscapes will exist for future generations.* And what of the costs, whatever they might be? They will have been absorbed and long forgotten.
14. The expressions of contrition in the Debate will have begun a process of redeeming the University's reputation in the city. *But contrition must be followed by making amends to be effective.* Only imaginative development of Option 3 achieves that.

### ***Vote for the motion***

We should build on the hopes which we glimpsed on both sides in the 10 February debate and help our University *create buildings on the edge of Port Meadow of which we can be proud.* On these grounds, we ask that you ignore opposition, based on the premise that there is 'No Alternative', and vote for the motion as the most promising way forward.

Signatories to the flysheet:

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