

# Gazette Supplement



## Voting on a Resolution relating to Castle Mill

The following is the text of the debate in Congregation at 2pm on 10 February on a resolution relating to Castle Mill.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: The business before Congregation is voting on a Resolution relating to Castle Mill. Would you please all be seated?

The resolution which comprises the business of today's meeting was placed on the agenda of this meeting in the *University Gazette*, first published on 15 January.

The procedure for today's meeting will be as follows. I shall begin by reading the resolution. I shall then invite Revd Professor Diarmaid MacCulloch to move the resolution and Professor Jane Caplan to second it. I shall next invite Professor Sally Mapstone, followed by Professor Ewan McKendrick, to speak on behalf of Council. The mover of the resolution has been asked to speak for no more than eight minutes and the seconder to speak for no more than five minutes. It is intended that today's meeting will end no later than 4.30pm.

A number of members of Congregation have indicated a wish to speak, and I will endeavour to call them all, but I cannot guarantee that I will do so. Priority will be given to those who have indicated in advance that they wish to speak. Additional speakers should rise from their seats to indicate their wish to speak; and I would ask that they speak only if they have new points to add which have not already been raised by other speakers. Speakers are also asked to confine their remarks to the themes relevant to the resolution.

Please could speakers come forward and speak into the microphone, first giving their name and college or department. Speakers are asked to follow the usual convention of not speaking for more than five minutes. Positioned to the side of the lectern is the

anti-loquitor device; the lights will change from green to amber once four minutes have elapsed; the amber light will then remain on for a further minute, after which it will be replaced by the red light, at which point speakers should conclude their remarks; otherwise I will have to interrupt and ask speakers to bring their remarks to an end.

At the end of the debate, I shall give Revd Professor Diarmaid MacCulloch the right of reply to the debate.

I shall then take a division on the resolution. This will be by paper ballot, for which members of Congregation should have received voting papers as they entered the theatre. Any members who have not received papers will have the opportunity to collect a paper at the exits as they leave.

Under the Congregation regulations a vote can only be taken at the close of the debate, and I regret that any members who cannot stay until I call the vote will therefore not be able to vote. This means that a member may not leave a completed voting paper with another member: the Proctors, Pro-Proctors and Bedels who will be collecting the papers at the close of the debate will accept only each member's single, personal voting paper. I shall explain the detailed voting arrangements when the vote is to be taken.

The stenographer who is helping us to transcribe today's proceedings is entitled to a break during the meeting. Therefore, if the meeting is still in progress at approximately 3.30pm, I shall call for a five-minute break.

A transcript of the meeting will appear as a *Gazette* supplement as soon as possible. The intention is to publish it in the *Gazette* of 19 February. It will also appear on the University website. Speakers have previously been asked to email copies of their speeches to the Congregation email address. If any speaker has not already done

that, I would be grateful if you could do so by 9am tomorrow morning, as this will help in preparing the text for the *Gazette*.

The following is the text of the resolution: '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.' I now call on Revd Professor Diarmaid MacCulloch to move the resolution.

### **The Revd Professor Diarmaid MacCulloch, Faculty of Theology and Religion, Fellow of St Cross**

Diarmaid MacCulloch, St Cross College. Mr Vice-Chancellor, colleagues: all of us here can start from some shared assumptions. We can all welcome a clear finding from the Environmental Impact Assessment on the buildings put up over the last two years at Castle Mill for graduate accommodation. The assessment concludes that they were badly designed, and are an aesthetic disaster.

None of us can be proud that this is so. It is very sad for the conscientious and competent officials of the University, who were charged with carrying out a bad building brief, and I think we must all feel sympathy for them. Nevertheless, it is welcome that the assessment has so unambiguously described the damage. Now we are charged with finding the best remedy for what has gone wrong. That is our focus today: not so much how or why things went wrong, but what to do next.

Also common ground is that we wish to act on the Environmental Impact Assessment. The disagreement is between minimum

action and action which will actually achieve something. The opponents of the motion, following Council, have unambiguously opted for Option 1, the proponents Option 3. The clarity is good: let us not discuss Option 2. Mr Vice-Chancellor, you have said in your recent open letter that the EIA, I quote: 'concludes that the best option is to carry out additional landscaping and exterior work to help the buildings blend in more.' In other words, you claim that it recommends Option 1.

That claim is only possible by selecting particular phrases from the EIA, rather as publicity agents construct blurbs for the back covers of thrillers. No, the EIA gives us three options available for choice. Option 1 achieves nothing significant. It does not affect the single most deplorable feature of the Castle Mill buildings: they are simply too high, by at least one storey – among their other violations of the skyline, they breach the convention observed in recent development on respecting the treeline around the meadow. Their height disfigures an ancient landscape of international significance; literally from miles away. Nothing which does not alter that is of any use. In other words, it is the **opponents** of the motion who are being deeply irresponsible by wanting the University to spend a great deal of money achieving nothing. The choice is between Option 1, which is expensive and achieves virtually nothing, and Option 3, which is more expensive and achieves a substantial result.

Let us instead be positive. The opponents of the motion have created a narrative of fear; and we will hear a great deal more of that this afternoon. They have seized on back-of-the-envelope estimates of cost for Option 3 made in the EIA and turned this into a fixed figure: £30 million. They admit that this figure includes some substantial double counting and is therefore far too high; it includes costs which are inadmissible as part of the total. They claim also that the only way presently of financing this is from money which otherwise would be devoted to student support and welfare. Our opponents have, in fact, no real idea what the true figure is. Yet they go on quoting £30 million.

Our opponents also suggest that we who **propose** the motion want the work done right away, and to be done in a single gulp. None of this is true. We can be creative. We can time remedial work as we like and when we like. We can identify funds or seek funds which will pay for it. We may be able to learn from doing only some of the work at one time, to find out how it is done best

and most economically; and indeed, it may be that the City Council would insist on a phased implementation of Option 3. We can make sure that no student on a current occupancy of Castle Mill has to move before the agreed term of that occupancy is complete.

Another part of the fear narrative from our opponents is to do with donors. Donors, our opponents say, will not give to a university which adopts Option 3. Well, I wonder whether donors will give to a university that behaves in a cavalier fashion towards its ethical obligations or to its neighbours. There has been at least one occasion in Oxford that a donor only gave on condition that a particularly obnoxious building by a distinguished architect was partially demolished. A creative appeal might well indeed find a donor who relished the role of being the saviour of Port Meadow in funding a version of Option 3.

This is going to be an adversarial occasion. Opponents on both sides may say hurtful things to each other; that is the nature of debate. The motion which I seek to move is intended to carry us to a new, more creative, more generous phase in this business: where we use our collective wits to undo the tangle in which we find ourselves, on the basis of an agreement to remove the main harm which Castle Mill embodies. Colleagues, have faith in yourselves and faith in each other, and vote for this motion I am moving.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: I call upon Professor Jane Caplan to second the resolution.

### **Professor Jane Caplan, Emeritus Fellow of St Antony's**

Mr Vice-Chancellor, colleagues: I have three points to add in my seconding of the resolution.

First of all, the scope of the protests. I have a humiliating confession to make: I do not live in North Oxford. Some people may think that this disqualifies me from registering my despair at what the Castle Mill development has done to Port Meadow. They believe that the objections to these buildings have been nurtured by a self-interested community of North Oxford residents, who would rather save a local view than help the University to house its graduate students.

Well, I can assure you that the modest view from my house in South Oxford has just been blocked by the new development on Oxpens Road. I am sad about this, but have I objected to it? No, of course not, because it's only my accidental amenity as

a householder that has been compromised. But the Castle Mill flats have degraded the landscape and a cityscape that are the common property of this entire city and the whole country. That is why we object to them in their present form.

A word now on the allegedly deterrent effect on donors. Let me just remind you that the donor knife cuts both ways. Let me cite a signatory to the 2013 petition, objecting to the development: 'I'm shocked by this. I will write to my old college... and if I find out that any of its fellows were involved I will cancel my endowments and change the (currently favourable) terms of my will.' You know who you are.

Other alumni are reaching the same conclusion and are refusing to make any further donations until this wrong has been righted. Now, it is true that big donors give in millions of pounds, but surely we must also weigh in the value of the multiple connections that bind alumni to their university?

I now speak about the planning balance. The University administration has made much of the claim that the public benefits of the development outweigh the harms that it has generated in terms of planning policy. The planning dimensions of this case are as serious as its financial implications. In some ways they are even more serious, since planning decisions permanently affect the entire Oxford community, whereas financial costs, however painful, are sectoral and temporary. We need therefore to judge the administration's claim attentively.

The government's 2012 *National Planning Policy Framework* sets a very high bar for permitting 'substantial' harm to listed buildings on what they call 'heritage assets'. Paragraph 132 states unequivocally that: 'As heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification.'

Now, section 6 of the Environmental Impact Assessment concludes only that the planning issues are 'finely balanced' – surely a far cry from the criterion of 'clear and convincing'. It goes on to state that 'the public benefits of the mitigated development [that's with Option 1] would justify the harm assessed in relation to the heritage, landscape character, and views of Oxford.' These public benefits are the provision of accommodation that will remove students from the city's private rental market. But let us remind ourselves that Option 1 preserves no more than 38 rooms, or a mere 0.23% of the University's total stock of accommodation. That is all.

So let us look at the other side of the planning balance: in terms of what is lost. Option 1 will mitigate none of the 'high adverse effects' of the Castle Mill buildings on St Barnabas Church, the Oxford skyline, Port Meadow, and the River Thames and the towpath: a long list. Of a further ten effects judged 'medium adverse', Option 1 would mitigate no more than one; one out of ten. For this paltry outcome, the administration plans to spend a whopping £6 million, simply because this action is the least that they can get away with.

As a university, we now have a chance to remedy one of the most publicly condemned planning failures in the history of the city. Now, public institutions are fond of saying that they will 'learn the lessons' of various policy failures, most of which are, of course, unfortunately irremediable. Well, this one is *not* irremediable, and we have no right as members of the University to turn our backs on it. We now have a golden opportunity not only to 'learn lessons' for the future, but to apply their precepts immediately. How many of us are lucky enough to be able to reverse history in this way? I urge you to vote for the resolution before you.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: I call on Professor Sally Mapstone, who will speak on behalf of Council.

**Professor Sally Mapstone, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), Faculty of English Language and Literature, Fellow of St Hilda's**

Sally Mapstone, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education), St Hilda's. Mr Vice-Chancellor, colleagues. I am speaking as Deputy Chair of Council to explain the background as to why Council has decided to oppose the resolution.

The resolution which Congregation is being asked to approve today is based on a major report about Castle Mill published last autumn. The report in question is the Environmental Statement, which provides a lengthy, wide-ranging and independent assessment of the impact of the graduate student housing at the heart of our debate.

The Environmental Statement was commissioned voluntarily by the University, requested by opponents of the development, and carried out by independent experts. The resolution before us this afternoon focuses hard on one aspect of the report: the physical impact of the housing when viewed from Port Meadow. That is a significant element in the report's assessment and the report concludes that the impact is negative, as you have heard.

That judgement is not disputed, certainly not by Council members.

But the Environmental Statement is also about much more than that. It examines the impact of the student housing at Castle Mill under nine major headings, including social and economic impact. In other words it looks at the buildings not only from the perspective of Port Meadow but also from the wider perspectives of the needs of the University and its students, and those who live and work elsewhere in the city of Oxford. It takes seriously the impact on all of them.

None of these needs is more imperative for both the University and the city than the need for housing within a pressured rental market. At present, Castle Mill is providing purpose-built homes for more than 300 of our graduate students, some with young families and some with disabilities (the building has rooms for students with disabilities). It does so on a brown-field site, in a city where both pressure on space for building, and competition for scarce rental accommodation, is intense; so intense that the city authorities impose a ceiling on the number of students who can live out in non-University housing, a ceiling that we struggle to meet.

It is in this much wider context that the Environmental Statement makes its overall assessment and seeks to strike a balance for the future. Where it sets that balance is not by destroying parts of the housing, as the resolution requires, but by a range of interventions to help the appearance of the buildings when they are viewed from Port Meadow. It describes this as Option 1. And it says the following:

'With the improvements proposed in the design mitigation strategy (Option 1), the advantages of the development would outweigh any residual harm.' And it goes on to say: '... for economic and social reasons anything more than the minimum required to achieve a measure of environmental improvements would have a disproportionate effect and should not be pursued on these grounds.'

Council members, including those elected by Congregation, believe that this balanced approach advocated in the Environmental Statement is the right one. It acknowledges that more needs to be done to address the physical impact of the housing but it advocates doing so in a way that does not create major new problems elsewhere. It is also consistent with our duty of care for our students and the conditions in which they live and study.

The use of the word 'minimum' might encourage some people to characterise this as an easy or cut-price option. It isn't easy, involving as it does a range of interventions on site – but, crucially, Option 1 avoids the possibility of turning hundreds of students and their families out of their homes for at least a 12-month period and releasing them into the crowded student housing market, which the option favoured in the resolution would require.

With a cost estimated by the experts at £6 million, Option 1 isn't cheap. But it amounts to one-fifth of the independent experts' estimate of the cost of implementing the demands of the resolution. That is the present estimate; *pace* Professor MacCulloch it would be a mistake, I think, to imagine that delaying or phasing implementing Option 3, if that were the decision taken, would do anything other than add to the expense of that option.

Members of Congregation, this in brief is the background against which Council has decided to oppose the resolution. Not because Council believes there are no issues to be addressed – there are – but because it believes the resolution fails to address them in a way that best serves the overall needs and interests of the University and the city of which we are all a part. There is a better way, as I have outlined, and we should follow it. Thank you.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: I call on Professor Ewan McKendrick, who will also speak on behalf of Council.

**Professor Ewan McKendrick, Registrar, Fellow of Lady Margaret Hall**

Mr Vice-Chancellor, colleagues. On behalf of Council and my senior colleagues in the University administration, I want to recognise clearly and openly today that we should have engaged with you more effectively on Castle Mill. While we have always sought to act in good faith and to follow the correct procedures, what I will call the 'human factor' has been deficient; and I sincerely regret that.

We did not do enough, soon enough, to engage in or to listen over Castle Mill. We can and we should do better and we are committed to doing so. Of course, effective communication is a perennial challenge in such a complex and dispersed institutional structure. I suspect we may never get a system that satisfies everyone, given the widely disparate views of what constitutes too much or too little information on any given topic. But we do need to tackle head on the perception that, despite our best intentions, we can sometimes seem



remote and aloof, and that is not in anyone's interests.

We have begun to learn the lessons. We have already changed the way in which we discharge our responsibilities when designing, building or refurbishing buildings. All of the land, property and construction expertise in the University has since been joined in one department, Estates Services, under the leadership of a new Director of Estates, Mr Paul Goffin. This reorganisation has significantly strengthened our ability to ensure that projects are carried out consistently with best practice. A number of important appointments have been made to bring in-house appropriate professional expertise that enables us to improve our management of projects and processes and the work of those instructed to act on our behalf. A new planning procedure has been introduced, which has been shared with the City Council. For larger projects we now develop detailed communication plans to identify key neighbours to invite, we hand-deliver leaflets advertising consultation events and we hold them at times which, we understand, are convenient to those likely to want to attend. Two recent examples of these new processes and of compliance with best practice procedures are the consultations for the Big Data Institute and the Amenities Building, both at the Old Road Campus. Of course, there remains room for improvement. But it would not be true to say we have not learned lessons. We have. Today we would prepare a development such as Castle Mill differently, even though the process we adopted then was compliant with our obligations.

We will learn similar lessons about listening and engaging more attentively. But we should not attempt to address the issue of communication and engagement, if that is what the issue is, by spending £30 million as an act of atonement which visits the consequences on our students while leaving the real issues unanswered. We are tackling the issue of engagement. We have learnt – and will continue to learn – our lessons. If you vote against the resolution you are not thereby vindicating the way in which we have handled this issue. We have recognised and we do recognise that we did not do enough to engage with you over Castle Mill. But we are committed to doing better.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: The debate on the resolution is now open to the house. Please could the speakers come forward and speak into the microphone, first giving their name and the college or department? I call first on Professor Avner Offer.

### Professor Avner Offer, Emeritus Fellow of All Souls

Vice-Chancellor and colleagues, I will speak to Option 3. There are two costs in question: one is the cost to the University budget; the other is the cost to the larger community. Castle Mill inflicts visual pollution on a glorious vista, which forms part of the heritage and identity of both the city and the University. The VC's letter does not acknowledge this harm, and expresses no regret about it; indeed, until today, I have not heard any expression of regret about it. In law, and also in economics, it is accepted that the party which inflicts harm has an obligation to make it good. It is no defence for the offender to say that he would like to use his money for something else. Restitution comes first. The reputational damage to the University is not the *accusation* of wrongdoing, but the possibility that it might be *true*. If the University executive has made an error, Congregation, which is above the executive, now has an opportunity to redress it.

Port Meadow gives pleasure to many hundreds, perhaps thousands every week. Those who benefit are a diffuse group of people; it is hard for them to combine against a single resolute transgressor. Vistas are precious even in terms of cash. The frugal Victorians expressed this by voluntarily giving up expensive urban land for public parks. Imagine our cities without them. Think of Oxford without Port Meadow, the extensive riversides, South Park, and also the meadows and parks cared for so well by the colleges and the University, and so differently from this Castle Mill project.

What is the impact of Option 3 on the University budget? The VC's letter mixes up two categories. £30 million is the *capital* cost; the cost of the fix over the life of this project. It is a single figure which is meant to capture the cost over time, next year, the year after that, spread over the life of the asset. But the VC's letter compares this lifetime cost with the benefit of research funding lost *in one year only*, and comes up with the preposterous figure of 6% or 8 professors in perpetuity. The estimate contains some other mix-ups. It includes a cost of rebuilding the lost rooms, but omits the £8 million flow of rents that they would produce. If this is taken into account we are down to a cost of £22 million and 5½ professors. Two other inconsistencies that I don't have time to discuss, unfortunately, would bring the cost and a number of professorships a good deal lower. Just for example, the 33 new units are projected to

cost three times as much as the ones they replace.

Now, if research income is also capitalised on the same basis as the cost of Option 3, on the recurrent year-to-year basis, then the cost to the University of mitigation, of Option 3, is not 6% of its annual research income, but less than half of 1%. As a percentage of the capitalised income of the University as a whole, it is less than 0.2%. In other words, when calculated consistently, properly and correctly, it barely registers at all. The University and city have been fortunate to inherit intact the grand vistas of Port Meadow from previous generations. But the executive intends to despoil the pearl of Port Meadow forever, in order to add 5½ professors to the hundreds we already have. It may feel tough-minded and responsible, but it is just the opposite. Future generations, and I hope that members of Congregation as well, will find this short-sighted myopia impossible to accept. Thank you.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Louis Trup.

### Louis Trup, President of the Oxford University Student Union

My name is Louis Trup. I am from Brasenose College. Members of Congregation, as President of the Oxford University Student Union I will try and highlight the student perspective on the impacts of undertaking extensive, unforced construction work to remove the top floor of the Castle Mill student homes.

I believe that Congregation must take as given that the process that led to construction of the homes was bad. Those at Wellington Square must learn from this. Students care about this city, our city, and we at OUSU will of course want to be a part of ensuring that the future consultations are better.

However, this is not where the debate is today. Today we debate the future. We are today dealing with a proposal to prioritise a subjective opinion on aesthetics over painful realities for graduate students, disabled students, students with families, the wider Oxford community and the values which this body is entrusted to uphold – excellence in education and research.

The buildings are no longer just buildings; they are homes.

These buildings are homes for families. Removing the top floor removes some of the severely limited affordable and modern accommodation where students can raise children as part of a community. A current student resident of Castle Mill who lives

with their partner and child described to me the rat-infested home they moved out of when they came to Castle Mill, after months on the waiting list. There is not enough affordable family accommodation in Oxford, and I am not willing to tell this student, or students in a similar position in the future, that they will have to move their child back into poor-quality housing because of a view.

These buildings are homes for disabled students. 45% of the accommodation provided by the University for disabled students is in Castle Mill. Congregation must see that it has a responsibility to the members of our Oxford community who need additional provisions which cannot be found in the private rental market.

These buildings are homes for the finest students. Students apply to Oxford, not because they like our skyline, but because they want to live, learn and research amongst the finest thinkers in the world. An archaeology student, who has studied Port Meadow's heritage and understands its value, has made the point that 'If we cannot afford to live, we cannot come to learn and research.'

Now, I have highlighted how the impacts of this resolution will affect students in Castle Mill, but the passage of this resolution has impacts on a far wider scale.

Oxford is the least affordable place to live in the UK according to Lloyds Bank. Rent has risen massively year on year, and forcing students out of University accommodation will push the rents even higher. If we take graduate accommodation away, we will make it more expensive for students living out, impairing the wonderful access work done by departments, colleges and the central University. We will also make it more expensive for low-paid University and college staff. This is especially insulting following the work of Oxford students who have campaigned for these staff to get a living wage. In passing this resolution, we will take that improved living standard away from them in one fell swoop.

Many in the community may value a view, but everybody in the community needs somewhere to live, and so if Congregation is to do its duty to the local community, it must not negatively impact every person in it.

Now, the arguments made by the proposition, which argue for a phased approach, worry some students even more – the idea that students trying to study will have to live in a building site and bring their children up amongst all the health and safety risks that brings is disgraceful.

A phased approach even undermines the proposition's own arguments – phased building work would ruin the view of Port Meadow for not only a **few** years, but for **many**.

But most importantly, when we talk about the community, it must, and I emphasise, we **must** include the most vulnerable – disabled students, students with families and those struggling to make their rent. The proposers have scandalously denied these people a place in the community they have defined. Today Congregation could prioritise a subjective opinion on aesthetics over painful realities for graduate students, disabled students, students with families, the wider Oxford community and the values which this body is entrusted to uphold – excellence in education and research. Listen to your students, think about the vulnerable in our community, and uphold the values of this University: vote no.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Jamieson Hunter.

### **Jamieson Hunter, Department of Physics**

Vice-Chancellor, Congregation, I am Jamieson Hunter, Finance Manager for the Department of Physics. I have lived in Oxford for 17 years and have worked in the University for the last 6. I would like to make a few brief points.

I draw your attention to Section 15 of the Non-Technical Summary, and in particular the costs of Options 1, 2 and 3 and, as we have heard about the costs of Option 3, £12 million for building works, £2.5 million loss of rents, £7.5 million to provide additional accommodation and then £8 million of lost rent for the future. If you build the accommodation for £7.5 million you cannot lose the rent as well, unless you're going to give them rent-free in perpetuity. So you either lose the rent, or you build alternative accommodation, but not both. So delete the £8 million of costs and we get to the figure which was previously mentioned of £22 million.

Furthermore, I concur that the cost of the whole development being £24 million in 2010, which is about £3 million per block, for an average 40 or so students. The building cost inflation may have driven this up to, say, £4 million, so it is hard to comprehend the cost of £7.5 million now to build accommodation for 30 or so displaced students.

Today we vote to recommend Option 3. However, £30 million, £22 million or even £18.5 million is not trivial as a future cost. However, I would suggest that this is not a

*future* cost. It is a cost that was incurred in 2010 when the decision to build adjacent to Port Meadow was made.

The decision was ill advised on three grounds: it was an inappropriate location, it was inappropriate density of buildings and inappropriate design of buildings. The decision to build on Castle Mill triggered the costs that we are discussing today. The costs sat latent until now, an unpaid penalty for past indiscretion. The costs we are considering have long since been incurred and today we are just facing up to them.

The Congregation, I hope, will approve the proposal to adopt Option 3, and then I would hope that Council would ask for a better solution than mitigation. Given that they face a mitigation of the environmental impact they are duty bound to look for value for money; and once committed to £30 million or £18.5 million or somewhere in between, I suggest that they should look at the alternative, at the cost of building alternative accommodation.

Building new accommodation phase by phase at new locations would release the buildings at Castle Mill for demolition. There is no loss of accommodation until each new location is available, no student disruption until a one-off move to new accommodation is made, and the gradual phased restitution of the error of this development flows back to the community. Once the buildings have gone the land can be made over to parks in perpetuity for the community and a symbol of the restitution that the University has made to this community and all future generations. They will be able to celebrate the day that Oxford recognised the damage it had done and had the courage to make proper amends. It is likely that the two most southern buildings of Castle Mill could remain, and still return the historic views to the community. With screening and cladding, I am sure they may be retained.

Much will be made of alternative ways in which funds may be used – every organisation faces complex pressures and conflicting needs and certainly every extra pound saved on one project releases a pound to another. However, this factor does not diminish our responsibility to correct those things that went wrong.

This university, this city and all of the citizens should be served by courageous decisions that are made mindful of the great heritage that we share and mindful of the duty we have to future generations to manage the custodianship of this beautiful city with the utmost integrity.

Vote for Option 3 and hope that good Council delivers a result that will make us proud of our brief time in the history of this great place.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Professor William James.

**Professor William James, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Planning and Resources), Sir William Dunn School of Pathology, Fellow of Brasenose**

William James, Brasenose College. I shall first outline how we might implement the recommendation embodied in the Environmental Statement, Option 1, and then go on to outline the range of possibilities for implementing the resolution before us, Option 3.

Option 1 is priced by the independent consultants at £6 million. Should the resolution be rejected today, and subject to the necessary planning approvals, we will develop detailed schemes for implementing this proposal. We will do so in partnership with residents and other stakeholders, and will set aside a budget of £6 million for this and related environmental enhancements. Council wishes the financial impact to be restricted to the graduate accommodation account. If we allocate all the current reserves of this account and its future surpluses to the implementation of Option 1, the consequence will be either a delay of approximately four to five years in the future expansion of University housing, or a substantial increase in student rents, or a combination of these two. Clearly, even this option will have significant impact on the quality of some students' experience in Oxford, and on the divisions' academic plans.

Option 3 is priced by the independent consultants at £30 million. I stress that your officers have not examined this in any detail, and are uncertain about its structural and logistical feasibility. They also share the doubts of some members, which we have already heard, concerning elements of the estimated cost build-up, and note that, for example, the cost of site acquisition, let alone the identification of appropriate sites, was not included. We would therefore be unwise to assume that costs would be significantly lower. Clearly, the financial impact could not be limited to the graduate accommodation account, and would have to affect other planned activities in the University. I should stress that although the University has substantial endowments, the great majority are earmarked for particular charitable purposes, and cannot be used for graduate housing. We have been able to

identify a limited number of ways in which such a sum could be repurposed without breaking legal or regulatory obligations, and I will briefly outline them now.

First, some of our academic departments, all of which are asked to run balanced budgets, have accumulated significant reserves. These reserves have usually been set aside as contributions towards significant planned capital replacement projects, essential research equipment, or bridging support for staff at the end of fixed-term contracts. A windfall tax on these reserves could generate the necessary resources and ten departments would each lose over £1 million under this arrangement, with consequential disruption of their academic plans.

Secondly, we could choose to allocate some of the OUP reserves recently transferred into University general endowment funds. A portion of these had been earmarked by Council for the capital expenditure plan, and this decision could be reversed, but obviously at the cost of cancelling several major projects that are central to the plans of all four divisions. A second portion of these funds had been intended for a second phase of the Oxford graduate scholarship matched funding scheme, but it would be possible to curtail that plan instead. The remaining portion was intended to build a permanent endowment, by matching philanthropic donations, in order to support key academic services, collections and posts in perpetuity, and thereby to reduce our dependency on recurrent transfers from OUP and taxes on departmental income. Again, these plans could be curtailed, but at the potential opportunity cost to the University of £3.5 million per annum in perpetuity.

Thirdly, we could cut £30 million from the operational budget of the University by freezing all vacant generally funded posts for nine months. Administering such a policy would, of course, be challenging, and the impact on students and colleagues of the absence of teaching and support staff over this period would be significant.

We shall have to decide whether, in the light of these likely consequences to our academic plans, the resolution can be supported. To vote for the resolution, one must necessarily have convinced oneself that such expenditure on such a purpose is the best way of employing the University's resources to achieve its charitable objectives: that is, the pursuit of learning through teaching and research.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Dr Daniel Isaacson.

**Dr Daniel Isaacson, Emeritus Fellow of Wolfson**

Mr Vice-Chancellor, colleagues. I am Daniel Isaacson from Wolfson College. That the University's Castle Mill development has done appalling damage to precious environments of high landscape quality and historic integrity, enjoyed by the scholars of Oxford University and the townspeople of Oxford over many centuries, and celebrated the world over, is not at issue. This damage has been strictly documented in the Environmental Impact Assessment, also known as Environmental Statement, which the University voluntarily (under threat of judicial review) commissioned after the fact, which describes this impact unflinchingly in the measured language of environmental professionals. It assesses the impact from four hugely valued Heritage Asset Settings – the Oxford skyline, Port Meadow, the River Thames and towpath, and St Barnabas Church – as High Adverse. Damage to fragile environments often is irreparable, such as paving Paradise to put up a multistorey car park and the Westgate Shopping Centre. Fortunately the damage we are considering today is repairable. The Environmental Statement sets out three options for mitigation of impact on the environment. The EIA assesses that for the four Heritage Asset Settings on which the impact of the Castle Mill development is High Adverse, the impact remains High Adverse if either Option 1 or Option 2 is implemented.

Yet Council has declared that it will implement Option 1, despite costing £6 million and doing nothing to reduce the High Adverse impact of the Castle Mill development on these four Heritage Asset Settings. Council justifies its insistence on Option 1 and refusal to implement Option 3 by two quotations which we have heard today from the Environmental Statement, as well as in the published statement. How can one and the same document mandate two contrary courses of action? Key to the answer to this question is the fact, pointed out by Sushila Dhall, that the two quotations come from two chapters that do not concern impact on the environment but rather economic considerations, and were written by consultants other than Nicholas Pearson Associates, who are responsible for the document as a whole.

The situation is like this. The Rolls-Royce of the squire of the village has hit a villager and injured him, fortunately not fatally, but the villager is in need of care. The village doctor writes a report for the squire on the villager's injuries and what caring for them will cost (this is in the days before the NHS).



At the same time, the squire's land agent writes a report on the situation, not about the injuries suffered by the villager, but about the impact on the squire's finances if he is asked to pay the costs of caring for the villager, and the land agent adds his view that the squire is much too important a person in this village, indeed the most important person in the village, whose farms, which are very expensive to run, are essential to the functioning of the village, and he couldn't possibly be expected to pay for any but minimal treatment of the injured villager. The squire cites his land agent's judgement as justifying him in paying for only the minimum treatment of the injured villager, though it's clear from the doctor's report that this will leave the villager with a permanent and debilitating injury.

One of the reasons why it is so important that we pass this resolution today is not only to mitigate the present disastrous incursion into the precious landscape of Port Meadow, but to hold the line against future predations. In the late 70s there was a proposed 'spine road' from the Botley Road, running north through Port Meadow, and then feeding into St Margaret's Road, to give a route from the west to the north that does not go through the centre of Oxford. One can see the logic of it but it would have been the death knell for Port Meadow as a unique and precious environment, and it was stopped, as earlier the inner ring road through Christ Church Meadow proposed in 1948 was stopped. If the present incursion is allowed to stand unmitigated (and Option 1 is visibly no mitigation), it will constitute a precedent which will pave the inevitable way to future incursions that will damage Port Meadow again and again, until it is only a shadow of what it has been for all these centuries, and it will be for the whole of Port Meadow, as Gerald Manley Hopkins lamented for an avenue of poplars at Binsey felled in 1879, *After-comers cannot guess the beauty been*. Thank you.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Professor Alex Halliday.

**Professor Alex Halliday, Head of Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Division, Department of Earth Sciences, Fellow of Wadham**

Alex Halliday, Wadham College, Earth Sciences, Head of MPLS Division. Mr Vice-Chancellor, members of Congregation, as Head of MPLS Division, buildings loom very large in my working life. Buildings are less important than people, but buildings also matter to people – as this debate illustrates. As Head of Division, I want to do all I can to ensure that the working conditions of

my brilliant and dedicated colleagues are worthy of them.

So buildings matter. Buildings like the new Mathematical Institute named after Andrew Wiles. Most people who work in it seem to approve; it has transformed the environment for mathematics research and teaching. Oxford has now stormed clear of every other institution in the United Kingdom in mathematics, according to the REF, with a top score by a margin for Outputs, Impact and Environment. That building was really important.

Of course not everyone likes the exterior and that's fine too. But what if they disliked it so much they wanted to change it in some significant way? For example, if they thought it would look better with a different colour or with half the number of windows, and they felt strongly enough about it to put a resolution to that effect to Congregation? But then another group of Congregation decided that green was a better colour and the windows were right in number but wrong in shape? This is all highly speculative, and, I hope, improbable; so, perhaps, not too serious. But I am seriously concerned about the implications of a resolution on a topic like the one we have today, were it to be carried.

I should make it absolutely clear that I am not questioning the importance of Congregation; quite the opposite. Rather, my concern is about whether this is the best use of Congregation and the best way of making decisions over an issue like this. Is using Congregation to try to redesign, at a huge expense, existing University buildings the best thing to be doing? I don't think so.

In any case our buildings, like everyone else's in the city, are subject to local authority planning which we have been working with. Rightly so, as we are part of a wider community with needs and priorities of its own, all of which have to be balanced with ours. And lest we forget, there is a continuing city planning process out there for Castle Mill right now.

But even if the final planning decision were in the gift of the University, would it be the best way of spending an estimated £30 million? Clearly not in my view. We need to make sure that our spending is aligned with our core academic and scholarly priorities, and knocking down brand-new purpose-built graduate student housing fails badly on that count.

£30 million equals the University contribution to the new Earth Sciences building, to take one example, admittedly one near to my academic heart. It also

represents the contribution the University hopes to make to the urgently needed new Physics building, which has already raised over £8 million in external philanthropy plus a key quantum technology UK government grant. It represents 1.5 times the cost of the exciting new China Centre at St Hugh's. It is equal to the endowment of Wolfson or St Antony's, both colleges that were built for graduates.

Quite apart from the message that it would send about Oxford, with the £30 million option we would have a range of unpalatable choices with cuts to our plans, some of which Professor James has already referred to, and they could include, for example:

- a tax on departmental reserves (for example, in my division Computer Sciences, Mathematics and Statistics, but many others in Social Sciences and Medical Sciences);
- curtailment of key projects in the capital master plan (for example the new Dorothy Hodgkin building that we are working on for interdisciplinary research between Medical Sciences and MPLS, with major knock-on effects for Social Sciences who want to expand into the science area and would be unable to do so);
- curtailment of the graduate scholarship matched scheme (MPLS may not be affected hugely by this but Humanities and Social Sciences are);
- a freeze on the hiring of academic and support staff unless externally funded; etc.

Even with the £6 million option, as recommended, there would be serious implications.

We all know the buildings at Castle Mill are not the most beautiful expression of our support for our graduates. But they make a vital contribution to meeting the needs of those students. That's what we should be trying to do: making their lives better, not worse.

Of course, buildings matter and they matter hugely to me, but our students matter more.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Professor Steve Roberts.

**Professor Steve Roberts, Department of Materials, Fellow of St Edmund Hall**

Steve Roberts, St Edmund Hall. Mr Vice-Chancellor, members of Congregation. I note that the speaker following me takes as his theme that the surroundings of Port Meadow are already so degraded that these flats, if the lower-cost ameliorations were put in place, would make little difference.

If that is his argument, to be blunt, it is nonsense.

I live in Wolvercote. I walk on the meadow often. Port Meadow is largely surrounded by trees. The only buildings I can think of that already have any significant impact are some admittedly rather unlovely houses in Wolvercote itself: but these are low, they are part of a larger village, a domestically low-profile village.

The buildings in question here are massively more intrusive than anything else around Port Meadow. Most of the photographs we have seen, showing the impact of these flats, have been taken from the southern end of Port Meadow. And they look bad enough from there. But from nearly three miles away, from the 'airmen's bridge', the very north end of the meadow, the impact of this collection of tombstone-like buildings is, if anything, worse. For the whole length of Port Meadow they pull the eye in and the visual effect is like a slap in the face, a continual slap in the face.

The effect is especially bad on bright winter's days, like the one we had last weekend, when the meadow would otherwise be at its finest. I note that the pictures showing the effect of the various ameliorating schemes show the tree shielding in full leaf, in spring and summer; not in winter, when the bare branches offer very little shielding, if any at all.

Now, this might smack of nimbyism; there has been lots of talk of nimbyism; but this is a bigger issue than that. The message being given out loud and strong to the city, the nation and even the world by these awful buildings is that the world-famous Oxford University *just does not care* what a mess it makes of the landscape.

I have tried hard, on my walks on the meadow, to visualise the effects of the ameliorating schemes. I have tried very hard. The relatively small changes made by Options 1 and 2 would still get out a message. The message would be that maybe we do care, just a bit, but not enough to make any real difference.

These buildings, as has been said before today, are simply unlike the very fine Andrew Wiles Building which has just been alluded to; they are simply *too tall*. They are not tall in the sense of 'spires, dreaming, city, for the adornment of'. They are six hulking great identikit lumps. Only Option 3 will have any effect on that.

When my children were younger, if they perpetrated some domestic horror, the excuse would often be in the end: 'I didn't mean to...'

I don't expect anybody *meant* to perpetrate such a blight as these buildings have proved to be; I hope not. It is often the wrongs that we did not intend, the things we did not mean to do, not the ones that we did, that weigh heaviest upon the spirit; and these weigh very heavily.

I think Oxford University is old enough, and honest enough, to do the right thing; we should put right, as best we can, that which by some combination of carelessness and thoughtlessness, we got so very badly wrong. I support the resolution.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Dr Seamus Perry.

**Dr Seamus Perry, Faculty of English Language and Literature, Fellow of Balliol**

Mr Vice-Chancellor, members of Congregation, Seamus Perry, Balliol College, Chair of the English Faculty Board. I have some nonsense to offer you.

Well, no-one is saying they are great buildings. They don't rival the atrocity of the Westgate Centre, and they don't have that sheer in-your-face awfulness of, say, the Zoology Building; but they are not distinguished. They seem to me insipid rather than offensive; they could be accommodation blocks at any university anywhere; in fact, I suspect they would be rather superior accommodation blocks on most campuses; but they are not, I agree, what we would hope to see in Oxford, where the benchmark is set rather high - by Wren, Hawksmoor, Butterfield, Jacobsen and so on. Indeed, what is principally to be regretted, it seems to me, is that we have missed an opportunity to create some lovely buildings; and consequently the real lesson to be learnt, in my view, as the Registrar was saying earlier on, is that we need to sharpen up the ways in which we commission new buildings.

But that we have missed an opportunity to do something better architecturally does not mean we should seize instead with both hands the opportunity to do something else that is wrong. I want to come at this as well from the perspective of Port Meadow - literally, since I, too, live on the edge of it. One thing that has been unhelpful in shaping discussions, I think, and we have heard it this afternoon, is the background assumption that Port Meadow is somehow pristine. This is not an uncommon way of thinking: Oxford has imagined itself as a threatened green space since at least the middle of the 19th century. The poet Hopkins, who I am interested to see is often adduced in support of the motion, was lamenting the loss of old pastoral Oxford

in the 1870s, attacking what he called the city's 'base and brickish skirt'. Well, I admire Hopkins greatly, but I have never much liked his spiritual... nimbyism *is* the word, I think. Incidentally, the 'base and brickish skirt' in question is probably Jericho, a charming neighbourhood of which these days even most statutory professors can but dream.

But Port Meadow, members of Congregation, is not an ideal space; it is a real space, and the reality to which it belongs is the long incremental expansion of the city. It is a precious and beautiful area - that is why I chose to live in Wolvercote - and it has been part of a complex, living settlement now for a long time, which has naturally had an impact. The houses to the west of the Woodstock Road, for example, which are on raised grounds, none of them very lovely, are clearly visible all the way across the northern end of the meadow throughout the year and especially in the winter. Further down the meadow, there is a very extensive estate of tall visible neo-Georgian houses: within my memory there was once just low-level building and scrub on this land; you saw through to Southmoor Road. But by far the greatest visual incursion is Lower Wolvercote, on the northern perimeter, where there stands an extensive estate of three-storey 1960s glass-and-brick boxes, quite unmitigated by trees or anything else. I find it hard to work up much moral outrage about them, and not just because I happen to live in one.

My point - which the previous speaker was kind enough to anticipate, wrongly - my point is not that the meadow is spoiled already, so who cares; but precisely that it's *not* been spoiled. None of the admitted intrusions has ruined the meadow, which possesses a local genius to abide in the midst of the human community of which it is a part; and the Castle Mill buildings need be no more seriously despoiling than any of the other many structures that impose upon its view. The Environmental Statement, unambiguously it seems to me, recommends the mitigating work that the University has proposed, and I have still yet to hear a good reason to doubt the legitimacy of that opinion. A better reason, that is to say, than the mere hunch that one knows better.

Now you could call the several intrusions upon the meadow 'compromising' but I would put the emphasis on 'compromise' in a different way - compromise as a balancing of diverse obligations, all real, but not all simultaneously realisable - the whole area of non-utopian human enterprise, in short, which falls within what Winnicott cheerfully calls the *good enough*. We have a



duty to the good of visual amenity, no-one would disagree; but we have other duties to discharge as well; and the circumstances must be rare indeed in which aesthetic considerations are the only considerations that matter and I do not believe that we face such circumstances today. You cannot spend £30 million – why, even £22 million – twice. And on the whole, I would rather spend it on education. That is to say, rather than enabling a slightly better view of a ‘classic skyline’ to be had from a particular vantage point. To propose to spend such a sum on that – a sum equivalent to, or more than, the total endowment of many of the nation’s universities – seems to me somewhere between misguided and bizarre.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Dr Peter Collins.

**Dr Peter Collins, Emeritus Fellow of St Edmund Hall**

Peter Collins, St Edmund Hall and the Mathematical Institute. Mr Vice-Chancellor, I come here this afternoon carrying a lot of baggage.

How could I not support our graduates, having been the first MCR President at my undergraduate college, having represented University graduates before Wolfenden’s University Grants Committee and been Secretary of the Tutors for Graduates’ Committee for seven years?

How could I not appreciate the need for the right type of graduate accommodation, having served almost as long on the University’s Accommodation Committee, which, in my day, met graduate tenant representatives of University properties on a regular basis, as well as developing new accommodation for graduate families?

How could I not well understand the implications for fundraising, having chaired the steering committee of the Colleges’ Fundraisers Forum, later Development Forum, as well as having worked with benefactors on three continents?

And how could I not appreciate the full financial implications of the present predicament, having as a College Investment Bursar spent six months of my life purchasing and converting a hotel for junior member accommodation, having served on the University’s Contributions Committee, and having on the General Board seen the Saïd Business School accounts showing eye-watering University expenditure, involving (in part) work on decontamination, to develop the school on its present site after Congregation had turned down the University proposal to build in Mansfield Road?

I also need to declare the Trusteeship of the Oxfordshire Branch of the Campaign to Protect Rural England and the Chairmanship of the British arm of the European heritage organisation Europa Nostra, the British members of which include the National Trust and English Heritage. I can confirm that the effect on the Oxford skyline of the Castle Mill blocks is not just a little local difficulty, but is bringing the University into disrepute outside our national borders.

It is in this context I would encourage you to appreciate my views, which are:

1. That it is difficult to contest that the Castle Mill blocks are ugly and that the view of Oxford from Port Meadow, celebrated for centuries, is severely compromised, yes, compromised, by the height of the buildings. That the buildings have, in a professional opinion, ‘high environmental adverse impact’ and have caused outrage across the local community cannot be contested.

2. The University in putting up these buildings has made a major error, both in respect of its duty to protect the historic environment and in maintaining its reputation. Apologies, amounting to admission, saying that its procedures have now been ‘adapted’ are just not good enough.

3. That the effect on the actions of benefactors is much more likely to be deleterious than helpful if Option 3 is not followed. Benefactors often remove support from institutions, as we heard, where repute is compromised and appreciate the need to correct mistakes more than compounding the felony, which is what Council’s representatives are asking us to agree to today.

4. Although any loss of accommodation for junior members is to be regretted, the temporary loss of the various units in the context of the ever-increasing total University and college provision should not be a deciding issue. Considering the design and heritage matters involved, these particular units should, of course, not have been proposed and built in the first place.

5. Of course, there will always be those who disapprove of Oxford as what they see as an elite university which wastes its monies giving tutorials to its students and being generally profligate. Many of us have spent a major part of our lives trying to dispel these myths.

Yes, there will even be those who would suggest that it is bad policy to spend

good money after bad in the context of a forthcoming election and the national spending on universities. But, having made one incredibly bad mistake, that the University should now run scared of doing the right thing by removing the extra storey and lowering the roof is short-termism of questionable moral worth. The context of the cost of doing this – much, much less than the repeated University mantra of £30 million, with its double counting – is not the day-to-day running of our departments, but the capital building costs of, say, developing the Radcliffe Observatory site. Calculations that I have vetted for removing the Castle Mill top floor, reshaping the roof, painting the facades and planting trees (but avoiding the cost of cladding) and accounting for the loss of net income whilst the work is done, give rise to a figure of around £9 million.

All the issues associated with today’s considerations will disappear away very quickly, unless we do not vote in favour of Option 3. If Option 3 is not grasped by Congregation, the embodiment of a bad decision, which we had a chance to reverse, will remain standing at Castle Mill, to remind the University, the local community and all those whom we hoped would have good intentions towards this ancient institution, in the UK and abroad – not to mention the city planners and those who expect us to inhabit the moral high ground – of our refusal, when given the opportunity, to correct a bad mistake. I urge you to support the resolution.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Professor Malcolm Airs.

**Professor Malcolm Airs, Emeritus Fellow of Kellogg**

Mr Vice-Chancellor, Congregation. I wish to oppose the motion, even though I can understand why so many colleagues and friends have been moved to support it.

There can be no doubt that the development in its present form is offensive. In the crucial views from the meadow, its unremitting length, its glaring white facade and its repetitive roofline take no account of its context. The anger that it has generated is totally understandable.

Nevertheless, it must be recognised that the development was legitimately granted planning permission with very little opposition in the belief that it was an appropriate use for what was considered to be a brownfield site.

Given that it exists, the most realistic response must be to explore measures that would lessen its impact in the short term,

whilst seeking a total redevelopment in a more respectful form in the medium term.

The proposed recladding and a properly considered landscaping scheme would address the issue of the stark appearance of the Port Meadow elevation but, in itself, it will do nothing for the roofline.

If, however, two of the central blocks are lowered, by removing the pitched roofs and replacing them with a flat sedum roof, this will introduce a degree of variety to the skyline and will allow the tower of St Barnabas to reassert its dominance. This would be a much more subtle and effective mitigation strategy than a uniform decapitation of the whole length of the development which would simply compound the banality of the original design. You can't turn bad architecture into a good design by removing an upper storey. But such an expensive change would encourage the retention of the building for its predicted lifespan of around 80 years.

Thus, in opposing the motion, I would urge the University to go further than the simple recladding exercise and to consider a more refined architectural treatment. And if, in addition, the University were to enter into a legally binding commitment to redevelop the site in a more sympathetic form after a reasonable period of time, it would demonstrate a willingness to respond to the well-founded criticism in a responsible manner.

It should be remembered that, whatever strategy is adopted, it will require a fresh planning application. It is absolutely essential this time that the detailed design should be subject to the widest possible public consultation in order to restore respect across the whole community. Thank you.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Professor Jan Schnupp.

**Professor Jan Schnupp, Department of Physiology, Anatomy and Genetics, Fellow of St Peter's**

Vice-Chancellor, dear colleagues. Jan Schnupp from St Peter's. The Castle Mill development is a drab, ugly concrete box, which occupies a prominent site. It is visible not only from Port Meadow, but it also dominates the train station, greeting many visitors to our city with a facade that is so painfully dull and grey that many travellers must surely think they have got off at the wrong stop! Am I in Slough? Surely this cannot be the city that is supposed to be renowned for its dreaming spires! First impressions matter, and as first impressions

go it is difficult to present a less ambitious and less aspirational face than the Castle Mill estate.

I therefore share many of the misgivings that are expressed by those of our colleagues who have proposed the motion before us. But while I sympathise deeply with the spirit of the proposed motion, I also find the way in which the motion is drafted to be logically flawed. What do I mean by that? The motion says: 'Congregation welcomes the conclusions of the EIA, resolves that of the three options that it offers for mitigation... Option 3 is the only one that offers substantial mitigation, and therefore instructs Council...' And so on, and so on.

My problem is that the three options that are briefly sketched out in the EIA can hardly be considered a comprehensive or exhaustive list of all the possibilities that we ought to consider when we are trying to turn this difficult situation to our advantage. Therefore, the fact that Option 3 happens to be the most radical of a bunch of unimaginative proposals does not make a compelling argument that Option 3 should be the one that we should commit the University to!

We must wake up to the fact that a set of buildings of that sort of size, at such a prominent site, will always be a landmark. Whether we take a floor off or not, whether we plant this tree in front of it or that tree, whether we paint the facades olive green or sand colour, none of that will change the fact that the site will always be a major landmark. And only plans which acknowledge and embrace this fact, and which turn this site into a landmark that we can be proud of rather than one which we need to try to hide, can ultimately offer value for money.

None of the three options in the EIA therefore hits the nail on the head, at least not to my mind, which is why the vote that we are about to take is so painful for me. I cannot vote for Option 3, but I also want to make it quite clear that I am also equally dissatisfied with Option 1. Rather I strongly believe that we must look for a much more creative solution to the problem.

It is in principle absolutely possible to build structures which are large but also beautiful, which do not have to try to hide their ugly bulk behind a few trees, but instead enter into a dialogue with nature and at the same time express creativity and aspiration and human values. We might, for example, look to the work of the late Austrian artist and architect Friedensreich Hundertwasser for inspiration. His playful facades often incorporate planted roofs and balconies

interspersed with colourful, uplifting designs. Many of his buildings are more than four storeys tall but they would nevertheless look great next to Port Meadow.

Surely, if we consider throwing six to seven figure sums at this problem, we should first ask whether it might not be possible to get a team of creative architects, sculptors and landscape gardeners to take a completely fresh and vastly more imaginative look at our Castle Mill problem. Maybe we could retrofit the Castle Mill site with tall, beautifully designed planted frameworks to act both as living sculpture and as a screen to break up the ugly blockiness of the Castle Mill complex. These might incorporate balconies and terraces to add value to the living space and they could be planted with a mixture of flowers, ferns, vines and various evergreens which might provide striking plant cover throughout the year much better and much faster than any trees could. If done with sufficient panache and vision such plans might provide a genuine fundraising opportunity, turning the uninspiring Castle Mill buildings into a landmark so visionary that it will be the envy of other universities and something that wealthy donors might actually be keen to have their name associated with.

So in conclusion, I intend to vote against the motion because I feel that it will force us down a path towards an unsatisfactory solution which is not nearly original and imaginative enough. But I fear that, if the motion is defeated, Council might mistake that vote as a mandate to press ahead with an even less ambitious plan. I therefore turn to you, Vice-Chancellor, to remind you that, fairly or unfairly, Castle Mill estate will always be a very visible part of your legacy at this University, and I am looking forward to being able to remember you fondly as the Vice-Chancellor who brought us the visionary hanging gardens of Jericho, rather than the VC who presided over the construction of a disappointingly humdrum and unambitious rental barracks at the heart of Oxford. Thank you.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: With that we will take a five-minute break and we will begin again with Dr Jan-Georg Deutsch.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: I call on Dr Jan-Georg Deutsch.

**Dr Jan-Georg Deutsch, Faculty of History, Fellow of St Cross**

Mr Vice-Chancellor, members of Congregation. My name is Georg Deutsch and I am from St Cross College. What I have to say is brief; but hopefully to the point.

Mistakes have been made. There can be no doubt about it. I walked in Port Meadow on Sunday morning. The buildings are truly hideous. The question therefore arises: 'What should we do?'

I strongly believe that just because we do not like egg on our face or the price tag we can escape taking full responsibility for our actions.

Castle Mill was our mistake and it is our duty to do something about it. I therefore humbly submit that we should do the honorable thing and chop the top floor off.

Besides, Castle Mill is a commercial development. In the next 25 years the University hopes to make tens of millions of profit out of it. It is really truly too much to ask the University to forgo some of these profits for the sake of the unique landscape? Please think about that. Thank you very much for listening.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Professor Susan Cooper.

**Professor Susan Cooper, Department of Physics, Fellow of St Catherine's**

Susan Cooper, Department of Physics and St Catherine's College. As I see it, mistakes have been made by both the University and the City Council. The University should have had the sense not to alter the plans for the second phase of development at Castle Mill, originally limited to four storeys as the successful first phase had been, and to extend to five storeys, bringing the buildings clearly above the treeline and making them more prominent than any other buildings visible from Port Meadow. City Council officials should not have advised the University that there was no height restriction and should not have approved the five-storey version. In a fair world the University and the city would share the costs of remedial work.

The mistakes committed here are not legal wrongs, but contrary to 'best practice' and also to widely held opinion, which even I, no particular fan of Port Meadow, had to join once I had gone and looked for myself. The height of the buildings and their nearly white colour makes them incredibly 'in your face'. If they are anywhere in your field of view your eyes are drawn to them by that white colour, so that they spoil much more than the space that they actually occupy. This drawing effect would be much reduced if they were simply painted a variety of darker natural colours to help them blend in and appear less massive. I heard several opinions to this effect early on and it seems such an obvious solution that I assumed it would be carried out. If the University had

done so, it would have significantly reduced the stress levels of Port Meadow walkers over the last year and a half. But it did not, allowing anger to continue to build. I am embarrassed and angry at the behaviour of what is, after all, *our* University in this matter.

In making the decision before us here today, it matters to me a lot whether I think the University understands that it did wrong and will behave better in the future. The views from Port Meadow, and more generally the appearance of our city, are composed of many parts and will be affected by many separate future actions. The Vice-Chancellor wrote to us that 'the University has learnt from the experience' and has 'adapted and implemented procedures to try to ensure that, as Oxford's most frequent planning applicant, we always attain the highest standards'. I don't find those statements alone convincing enough. I would like to be given: first, an agreement not to use the granting of planning approval for the second phase of Castle Mill as a precedent in any future request; second, a description of what 'the University has learnt from the experience'; and third, details of how it has 'adapted and implemented procedures', with a comparison of past and new procedures to show clearly and convincingly what has changed.

I sent that request to the administration a week ago and hoped to receive a satisfactory reply. I think that Ewan McKendrick's speech was meant to be that, but there was no promise not to use Castle Mill as a precedent, and I didn't find the rest very convincing. I put more faith in the pledge of the President of OUSU to watch over future planning, and I call on members of Congregation to do the same.

Despite my disappointment, I feel that a good paint job would make a significant improvement, as I described earlier, and that removal of the upper floors, perhaps only two of them, would be better done in 25 years, when major renovation is expected to be necessary anyway. Thank you.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Dr Nick Brown.

**Dr Nick Brown, Principal of Linacre**

Nick Brown, Linacre College and, since January, Chairman of Buildings and Estates Subcommittee. I am grateful to the commentators on the Six Nations this weekend for teaching me the meaning of a hospital pass.

This motion pre-empts any decision that might be taken by our own Buildings and

Estates Subcommittee or the City Council on the best way forward.

The purpose of the Environmental Impact Assessment was to inform the planning process. The City Council has appointed consultants to review the EIA and Estates Services is working on its own detailed response to that document. I am alarmed that this motion will destroy the careful discussions that are ongoing between the University and the City Council. I am alarmed that those supporting the motion are saying, rather clearly: 'We have no confidence in the way that we have improved our scrutiny processes and we have no confidence in the capability of the city planners.'

BESC, I hope to reassure you, is no patsy; it's not a servant of the central administration. It is an important part of the oversight and the scrutiny of University processes. It's Congregation's eyes. I was warned, when taking over this committee this January, that it was one of the 'grumpiest committees in the University'. I disagree. I have found it to be focused, business-like and very rigorous in its scrutiny duties. In my opinion, had BESC been overseeing the development of the Castle Mill site, we might not have ended up in the mess we are now. BESC is taking a very active interest in the ongoing discussions between the City Council and Estates Services about the response to the Environmental Impact Assessment.

The City Planning Committee has not yet taken a view, but when it does it will certainly take account of the strength of opinion on the impact on the views of the city. The committee has the duty to balance protection of the environment with supporting a fair and inclusive society and promoting economic activity in Oxford. And the Goodstadt Report concluded that the experience and the expertise of the planning committee made it well equipped to handle the complex issues and balance of judgments required to come to a fair decision.

Those supporting this motion this afternoon will either be ignoring the social and economic factors which the council weighted so highly, or saying: 'We are more experienced and have higher expertise and we know better than you what is most important for our city.' Dr Isaacson's parallel was amusing but I noted that the squire did not attempt to tell the doctor what treatment the injured peasant needed.

The EIA did not discuss in detail the environmental impacts of Option 3. I would like, just for a moment, to consider those in



a more rounded way. Personally, I find the significant visual intrusion of the whole development more of a problem than its height. For me, chopping off a floor doesn't solve the problem. It creates another significant problem, which is waste.

Demolishing a building generates large volumes of high embodied carbon and highly processed waste materials that are only recyclable as their lower-value components. And in this case, that would include:

- 124 double-glazed windows
- 166 doors
- 33 newly fitted kitchens and bathrooms and
- 2,000 m<sup>2</sup> of roofing.

There would be significant waste vehicle movements causing traffic and pollution. Based on WRAP data the project would generate something like 15,000–25,000 tons of embodied carbon.

From the outside these may be unloved buildings. From the inside they are one of the most popular choices for our graduate students. We are often asked why loss of a mere 38 beds will matter when the University houses over 14,000 students. In fact, the University has only 824 graduate rooms and most colleges are unable to house more than their first-year graduate students. We are desperately short of places to house our ever-growing graduate population and our capacity to adequately house new students is one of the major factors contributing to the current cap on student numbers.

It is clear to me, from discussions at PRAC and elsewhere, that wherever we decide to take our £30 million from there will be serious consequences for the educational and research aims of this University. And, for those reasons, I urge you to oppose this motion.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Professor Kalyso Nicolaïdis.

**Professor Kalyso Nicolaïdis, Department of Politics and International Relations, Fellow of St Antony's**

Colleagues, in listening to all your wise remarks, I decided to set my written remarks aside. I felt like the old rabbi who listens to Avi and says 'You are right,' and then listens to Schlomo, who is opposed to Avi, and says 'You are right,' and someone says, 'Rabbi, how can Avi and Schlomo both be right?' And he says, 'You're right; you can't be right on both sides.'

And I think, colleagues, we can do better than this. And this conversation today has proven it. Indeed, I think most of us in this room, just like me, rushing from a tutorial, going to a seminar, are well aware that if we are here, it is because of our students. How can we fall for these arguments that are so strong in favour of Option 3, if our wonderful student, Louis Trup, tells us that students are opposed? How can we vote for Option 3 when coming into this building we engage with students, perhaps as I did, and they gave me a heart? They want to give all of us this heart and we all of us, in this room, want to continue to receive the present, the hearts and minds of our students, don't we?

So the question before us, colleagues, is whether it is possible to remedy all the ills that have been explained by our colleagues in favour of Option 3; while keeping the hearts and minds of students. The arguments you have heard today, if I can summarise the core, revolve around two big notions. The first one is indeed that we can do better. It is creativity and you will see, in the flysheet of Option 3, that Option 3 is not, as painted, this simplistic option. It is about colleagues engaging.

In the same way as [Professor] McKendrick explained from the beginning that, maybe as of now for the future we will engage for other buildings, why isn't it possible to truly and creatively engage in a new solution? And in that sense, I think that Option 3, I was happy to see, has brought to its side Professors Schnupp and Airs who were so creative in suggesting other ways in which we can remedy the problem. But I ask you, colleagues: what is the better of these two, much too simple options, Option 1 and Option 3, to guarantee that your creative ideas will find a hearing? I am arguing that it is in the shadow of Option 3. It is in the shadow of a positive vote for Option 3 that Professor Schnupp's wonderful ideas will be taken into account.

And indeed, creativity, creatively engaging together, after we have expressed our collective overall state of mind through Option 3, is based also on one fundamental other key: and that is, dear colleagues, time. Many of my colleagues have spoken about time. Time is the solution. The costing of £30 million, the horrors that we are told about, are linked to the fact that the alternative is to do things quickly. But that's not what Option 3 is about. Option 3 speaks about phased demolition of the top floor, about phased improvements to the building. It speaks about giving ourselves time, indeed, to be creative; perhaps to

work together on a campaign for Save Port Meadow donors, who will work with us for the reasons that we have heard from my colleagues. Time is the key, colleagues, and the philosophers in this room, physicists in this room, will agree with me.

So if we vote for Option 3, we will vote for creative engagement all together. We will vote for giving ourselves the time to work with students and together, to create really the solution that speaks to the fact that, while this campaign has been an amazing alliance between town and gown, perhaps an unprecedented one, it can become, and it will become, an alliance between old gown and new gown. Thank you very much.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Professor Ian Walmsley.

**Professor Ian Walmsley, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), Department of Physics, Fellow of St Hugh's**

Ian Walmsley, Department of Physics, St Hugh's and Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research. Mr Vice-Chancellor, colleagues. I would like to ask the question: what is a commensurate response to the Castle Mill dilemma? Oxford strives in this context to maintain research excellence that assures it a place among the leading global universities. Further, it seeks to facilitate impact and innovation, building on the creative autonomy of our academic and research staff – and our graduate students.

The intellectual environment we value here both benefits from and contributes to a vibrant region, in which the academic faculty's entrepreneurial actions in both research and impact define the vitality of the institution and make Oxford and its environs a place that attracts the best and most creative minds.

Making sure we have the right structure and infrastructure to support this requires careful deliberation so that we use our resources wisely. And our actions persuade others: we rely on stakeholders outside the institution to support our decisions, often by means of their own resources.

There's many places where these things intersect and I would like to give you just one example from my own experience. Recently, I represented the University (indeed both local universities) in negotiations with the government on the City Deal. That deal has already led to the injection of over £1 billion into the region, both through the City Deal funding and more recently Local Growth Funding. Some of that (approximately £30 million, ironically) has come to the University

to support our innovation and research centres.

During the discussions which took place with the then Minister for Universities and Science, David Willetts, and the then Minister for Cities, Greg Clarke (which gentleman has now inherited both portfolios in an interesting conjunction of our own interests), as well as some of our regional partners – the Head of the City Council, the Head of the County Council and the Chief Executive of the Local Enterprise Partnership – we were asked by ministers what we were doing to support graduate students because they understood the central role of students in research and innovation.

I told him that we had to be sure we could provide three things in order that we could give them the education, training and research opportunities that would be internationally competitive.

First, sufficient funds to provide stipends and tuition. We are working on that through our doctoral training centres and through our own matching funds for the Oxford graduate scholarship scheme.

Second, we needed cutting-edge laboratories, digital provision, libraries and collections to enable them to address the really important research questions that challenge society in the 21st century. We are working on ambitious capital planning to allow this and discussing novel funding mechanisms to enable us to realise our plans.

Third, we needed a place for the students to live, especially ones that were appropriate for the increasing diversity of the postgraduate research student cohort. We are building such accommodation, and Castle Mill is a key part of that provision.

Without all of these three things, we cannot hope to maintain our research and teaching at the level we wish to.

The ministers concurred. They recognised that we were working to ensure the brightest graduate students could come to the UK and receive the sort of education that would enable them to change the world through their ideas and actions. And they invested in our vision by providing more than £20 million through the City Deal alone to co-locate research and innovation – enabling students to work alongside entrepreneurs and to learn from them.

That is an impact that we'll have on our region, on our nation and on the world, and we will need to convince the next government that we are working just as

hard to realise this part of our future. Of course, our regional, national and European governments are just one, if an especially important, external partner. Other partners, funders and donors will have different objectives but all will want to know that we use our resources properly.

And the question before us, then, is: what is a proper use of resources in this particular case?

We all agree that the buildings are not beautiful, that they visually impair Port Meadow in not positive ways. But what response should we make to that? I venture, in a time of scarce resources when we wish to show our international, national and regional partners that we are committed to our strategic aims of research and wider engagement and to supporting the people that come here to learn how to do those, spending £1 million per room to remove the top floor from Castle Mill is not a response that's commensurate with the problem.

As others have noted, we do have a responsibility to mitigate the visibility of the structures (and, indeed, that's exactly what the University has said it's going to do), and a responsibility to learn from that process and change how we go about deciding collectively on building designs.

But you have also heard from the students the sort of impact that undertaking Option 3 will have. And this is a message that will be heard externally and received in different way: some may thank us for it, but many will see it as spending £30 million that might have been used to invest in research spaces, scholarships, libraries, teaching labs or other things more directly associated to furthering our strategy for excellence. And we cannot spend this money a second time.

I suggest that a commensurate response is that we look at our vision for the future of the institution in the round and take into account all of our priorities. And, for that reason, I cannot support the motion.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Professor Sir Drummond Bone.

### **Professor Sir Drummond Bone, Master of Balliol**

Drummond Bone, Balliol College. Mr Vice-Chancellor, I thought of doing something different, just for the sake of variety, and saying that I actually love the buildings in Port Meadow. Unfortunately, I couldn't bring myself to say that. Like everybody else this afternoon, insiders all at the University, I do not find them fun at all. Nevertheless you might also have guessed that a Scotsman would find it pretty hard to spend

£30 million on anything, far less redoing something that we had just done.

More seriously, I want to speak this afternoon not as an insider, but as an outsider – as an external funder of the University, indeed. I happen to be Chairman of a Research Council, of the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the AHRC. We have available, to support postgraduate students in the entire country, £40 million annually. That's masters' – and we don't support much in the way of masters' – and postdoctoral training, all postgraduate students. That is just £40 million.

To spend three-quarters of that, or – even if we are moved to think £20 million – half of that, as the motion urges us to do today; to spend three-quarters or a half of the money available to support postgraduate research from its funding council for the entire UK to fiddle with a building – frankly, we will have no credibility whatsoever with external funders and precious little with the academic community outside this institution. Thank you.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Liesl Elder.

### **Liesl Elder, University Development Office, Student of Christ Church**

I am Liesl Elder, the University Director of Development, also at Christ Church. Vice-Chancellor, members of Congregation, I wish to speak out about our donors. The proponents of this resolution have claimed that Castle Mill is damaging our relationships with donors and benefactors, and if we wish to continue to benefit from their generosity, we must remove a floor from this development.

I am sorry to say that this claim is without merit and I fear that it lacks any evidence to support it.

As the University's Director of Development, I have more contact with the University's donors than most. We take the concerns of our donors very seriously. And I can assure you that none of our major donors has raised concerns about Castle Mill with me. In fact, I have yet to see any indication that our donors support this resolution at all. Over the past year, I have received only four emails complaining about Castle Mill: three from North Oxford residents, none, zero, from major donors; hardly the wellspring of support referenced by the proponents.

The Castle Mill development has certainly not had a detrimental effect on our fundraising. On the contrary, last year was Oxford's most successful fundraising year in our history. I have every reason to believe

that that success will continue if Castle Mill remains at its current height.

Proponents of the resolution have also claimed that the University is wealthy, and has raised so much money through the Oxford Thinking Campaign that finding the funds to remove a floor from Castle Mill should be a simple prospect. Again, I must dispute this opinion with the facts.

I am very proud that the Oxford Thinking Campaign has been so successful. However, it has become clear over the past several weeks that many people do not understand that the overwhelming majority of funds donated are for restricted purposes. Over the past ten years, only £4.2 million has been given to Oxford without restriction – what donors often term our ‘area of greatest need’. All other funds for the Campaign have been designated by our donors for use by the colleges, by specific departments, or for particular purposes like student scholarships, endowed academic posts and specific research projects. Thus, whilst the sums we have raised over the years have been large, the amount available for something like Castle Mill is very small, and certainly grossly inadequate for Option 3.

One thing that would be certain to jeopardise Oxford's future fundraising would be to use donor funds for something other than that which they were intended. So whilst it is tempting to think that there is a big pot of money in the Oxford Thinking Campaign that can be used to fund this resolution, it is simply not the case. And as for the suggestion that we might find some creative donor who would like to pay to take a couple of floors off Castle Mill, I have to say this is complete wishful thinking. After working with major donors for more than 20 years I can assure you I have never met one who would be interested in this sort of project.

I think the proponents of this resolution actually have the argument about our donors backwards. I am far more concerned that we will alienate donors if we vote to spend such a huge sum of money on shortening Castle Mill, particularly when we have other viable options for mitigation. I can assure you that donors would much rather see us spending our funds on students, academic staff and research. If this is how we choose to spend £30 million or £20 million or whatever that large total is – removing a floor from a building that we have just completed – why should they invest their funds in Oxford? Can we really argue that this is the University's greatest need? I think not.

I urge you to disregard the proponents' arguments about our donors and benefactors. The real risk to fundraising is if we agree to this resolution. Vote no.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Professor Paul Davies.

**Professor Paul Davies, Emeritus Fellow of Balliol**

Paul Davies, Faculty of Law, one-time Estates Bursar at Balliol College during whose tenure of office substantial student accommodation was added to the Balliol estate. I am probably the last speaker in this long list who is going to speak in favour of the motion, so let me try and summarise where I think we've got to.

The University essentially has two arguments for not proceeding with the removal of the top floors, one related to the loss of student accommodation and the other related to the cost. Neither, it seems to me, has survived rigorous scrutiny.

On student accommodation, the University's website says it has 9,850 graduate students in residence, so that the Option 3 removal of the top floor would mean that the University was no longer providing accommodation to about 0.4% of the graduate body. This is a very small percentage and can hardly be claimed to be the threat to the academic lifeblood of the University which Council has suggested.

As for the cost of the remedial work, the £30 million figure, it seems to me, has been designed to frighten the horses, and we have heard a certain amount of nervous neighing this afternoon in relation to that figure. But if you look at the University's own Environmental Impact Assessment you will see that the cost of removing the top floor is £6 million. Add a generous £3 million to paint the facades and do a bit of landscaping, and you come out with a figure of £9 million, which is not much more than Council is prepared to spend on Option 1. So it's unclear to me that the cost argument stands up either.

But what I would like to add to the debate is the suggestion that the University is asking itself entirely the wrong question. Council is asking the question, ‘Do the costs outweigh the benefits of removing the top floor, the buildings having been put up?’ which is, of course, the actual situation. I would suggest to you that environmental law requires a different question to be asked. That question is: ‘What would have been the scope of the permission given to the University by the City Council, had the Environmental Impact Assessment been available to the city planners before the building work began?’

And the answer to that question cannot include the costs of remediation, because, *ex hypothesi*, at that stage there would have been nothing to remedy. I would suggest, therefore, that it's wholly illegitimate for the University to claim the loss of the rental income into the future of flats which I would suggest it would never have been given permission to put up in the first place. It is a cost which the University is claiming, one might say – as indeed the Registrar would notice and my colleagues in the faculty would say – that is a form of unjust enrichment.

So it seems to me that this is the old story. Those who take a disastrous decision remain committed to it, even after the full horrors of what they have decided become apparent. Again, with the honourable exception of my former supervisee, the Registrar, there has been no hint of apology from Council and very little by way of regret at the decision to build a set of buildings whose design would have graced an East German city before reunification.

The truth of the matter is that Council is in a wholly conflicted position. It cannot be expected dispassionately to review a decision which it was responsible for. It is therefore entirely appropriate that this body take the decision and I hope that you will express your contempt for the low level of the arguments that have been addressed to you by Council by supporting the motion.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: James Blythe.

**Mr James Blythe, Vice-President (Access and Academic Affairs) of the Oxford University Student Union**

Mr Vice-Chancellor, members of Congregation, I am James Blythe, Vice-President (Access and Academic Affairs) at Oxford University Student Union and, like many speakers before me, Brasenose College.

Lots of speakers today, and lots of people debating this issue, have not shared Professor Nicolaïdis's heartening desire to listen to the student voice in this debate; to listen to the voice of those who will bear the brunt of this resolution's impact. I am grateful for the opportunity, with my colleague Louis, to speak for them today. It has been, I think, too easy for proponents of this resolution to paint it as a debate between bumbling and a tad malevolent bureaucrats in Wellington Square and noble-minded and tirelessly campaigning ordinary academics and citizens. Be under no illusions, members of the Congregation: that is a false characterisation. The issues involved are complex; mistakes, bad ones,



were made. This has dragged on for years, as we all know, but it is my view that the choice before you today is actually straightforward. It is, as Jamieson Hunter said earlier, between conflicting objectives: a clear choice between two possible solutions. But those objectives, I hope to demonstrate, are not objectives of equal value.

Now, in my speech, I will, I have to admit, *mea culpa*, be using the evidence of experts. I have not prepared my own back-of-a-fag-packet assessment of the costs. I use £30 million. You may each choose your own number from one of the many proposed today. I think £9 million rather low, £30 million plausible; could be more, could be one of the range of intermediate figures. It is an independently provided estimate, not designed to scare any horses but to advise us. In your vote today, you can either preserve £30 million, or another appropriate number you wish to choose for yourself, from the limited discretionary money available to this University, preserve it for our key objectives, for education or research – OR you can go far beyond our expert advice, cave into nimbyism and spend this vast amount on enforcing a particular aesthetic approach.

What else, then, could we use £30 million for? I have the pleasure, or at some times burden, of representing students on Council's Planning and Resource Allocation Committee. From that position, I am very clear about the University's financial position. I have not been duped. The students have not been duped. Of course, we have huge income as a university, but also a very inflexible budget and an extremely expensive model of education, one, I doubt I need to remind the people in this room, that is a true jewel in our crown as a university.

If I look at where £30 million could come from, I am clear that, along with vital new science buildings, new graduate housing – following the new and improved approach outlined by the Registrar – along with that, along with even 5½ professorships which an earlier speaker was happy to dismiss but which I know students would value enormously, along with those priorities, one of the few places available is the money originating with the Press, available for the Graduate Scholarship Matched Fund. In other words, members of Congregation, supporting the resolution today will deal, I think, a double blow to the graduate students of this University. That, to answer Professor Roberts, would be the real slap in the face. That would, Dr Collins, bring us truly into disrepute with our students.

When I talk to graduate students, as of course I do very frequently, they want me to be campaigning on two issues: graduate housing and graduate funding. This resolution, with remarkable dexterity, devastates both of those priorities at once. It harms the welfare of the students, especially the most vulnerable: students with families and disabled students, who could just as easily be Dr Isaacson's villagers – leaving you with the unenviable possibility of being his squire.

Today's debate is also, I believe, about the role of this body. Your students see you as the ultimate guardians of the University's future, of the welfare of its students, and of its key strategic priorities. A vote for this resolution will show yourselves instead to be interested only in enforcing fanciful and disproportionate aesthetic decisions, regardless of their vast and deleterious impact on the welfare and experience of your students or the educational and research objectives of the University.

As the sovereign body of the University, you have a duty to the students, to the future of the University, to our globally competitive research, to our charitable objects. The choice is clear. The students are watching. They expect you to do the right thing and vote, quite simply, for spending the University's limited discretionary money on education and on research: what we are all here to do. I trust you will not let them down.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Sir Jonathan Phillips.

#### **Sir Jonathan Phillips, Warden of Keble**

Jonathan Phillips, Keble College. Mr Vice-Chancellor, I know that you and many in Congregation will be aware of FM Cornford's minor masterpiece, *Microcosmographia Academica*. In it the author speaks of a category of those who have had their fingers 'on the pulse of the Great World – a distant and rather terrifying region'. And I count myself in that category and it's precisely because of my awareness of that 'distant and terrifying region' – and I don't mean Port Meadow – that I have concluded that I must ask to speak in this important debate today. I offer you not a narrative of fear, but a narrative of realism. The 'Great World' will be incredulous if we commit to the expenditure associated with Option 3. And in that 'Great World' there are funders, policymakers, commentators, politicians and philanthropists who will take a very negative view of any such decision. Let us please heed the wise words of the Master of Balliol and the University's Director

of Development. We will be regarded as careless and imprudent in our use of our resources and damage our claims for more.

To be clear, I don't at all dismiss the concerns of the promoters of this resolution about the appearance of the Castle Mill buildings and their impact on the landscape. These are matters very much to be regretted and we may also wish that history could record a somewhat different account of how we have arrived at the current position.

On that latter point, we have heard this afternoon from the Registrar, speaking on behalf of Council and the University and giving, I think, a very welcome expression of regret and a commitment that lessons have been learned. I don't think that that came easily and I think it needs to be heard clearly and taken very sincerely and seriously. As a member of Council for the immediate period ahead, I can assure Congregation that there is no doubt whatsoever that my colleagues and I will be determined to hold University officers to that commitment.

But, vital though it is to learn lessons for the future, the fundamental issue before us today is not how to hold the line against future predations; it's whether the University should decide to spend £30 million in an attempt to mitigate the damage of the past and I think that would be a disastrous decision.

I have heard lots of arguments that £30 million is an overblown estimate, that it includes a significant element of rental forgone, and so on. With modifications of the consultants' recommendations the figure could be significantly lower, or perhaps appear less extravagant if it were spent over a period of time. But I have also heard that £30 million could be a significant underestimate, not least because it excludes the cost of land purchased for substitute accommodation. Look, from the perspective of the University's external reputation, it doesn't matter whether it turns out to be £18, £20, £22, £25 or £35 million spent in a year or over half a decade. That sum, in my view, will sit alongside the cost of constructing these buildings, some £24.5 million as I understand it, and it will look, and we will look, ridiculous.

Now, I do acknowledge that on occasion it's necessary to risk appearing ridiculous in the eyes of the 'Great World' in order to defend or promote an important principle or cause. But, however strongly we might feel about the University's duty to safeguard the landscape, the issue for us, as trustees of this University and its academic mission in teaching and research, is whether we should

put aside that sum in the order of £30 million to support that duty in this case. If one thing is clear from earlier contributions to that debate, if we decided to do so, there would be choices which would impact severely on elements of our mission and be regarded by our students, as we have heard twice, as flying in the face of our obligations to them.

However strongly one may feel about the appearance of the buildings, mitigation of the environmental impact at the cost implied by the resolution would be to inflict even more substantial wounds on ourselves. The unavoidable outcomes of the level of expenditure implies that significant academic priorities would need to be forgone and, in the longer term, there would be the impact on philanthropy, as we have heard.

I am not suggesting that the alternative to this proposal in the resolution is to sit on our hands and do nothing. Council is minded, subject to local authority planning processes, and I am sure, to respond to one speaker, that would be a creative process this time round, to proceed with mitigation measures consistent with Option 1, up to, I emphasise, up to the cost of £6 million. That itself is a large sum and there would need to be wide consultation about its expenditure and it is a major commitment recommended by independent consultants.

I hope very, very strongly, Congregation, that you will not oblige us to go further. Because if this resolution is passed, I tell you, our friends will frown and our competitors and our enemies will rejoice at the scale of our own goal. Thank you very much.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: That brings us to the end of the declared speeches. Professor MacCulloch, do you wish to reply to the debate?

### The Revd Professor MacCulloch

Vice-Chancellor, colleagues: we meet in the Sheldonian Theatre, whose name commemorates Archbishop Gilbert Sheldon and his generous benefaction to the University 350 years ago. It is our common and pleasing custom to name University buildings after donors, instigators or even designers. What name shall our University bestow on the Castle Mill flat complex on a handsomely engraved plaque at its entrance? Should it be your name, Mr Vice-Chancellor, or should it be the name of the person or the persons who shaped its present design? Or should it be in the name of all those who wish to oppose the motion and vote for Option 1, in effect to preserve the building in its present state, effectively

unmodified? Remember that that name will stand, for as long as the building stands; maybe a century, or more.

So much of what is at stake here is about the good name of this ancient and honourable corporation, the University of Oxford. Whatever is said about due process having been observed, the reality exposed by the Environmental Impact Assessment is that something went severely wrong. And one of the very heartening features of this rather heartening afternoon has been the expression of repentance from the Registrar, in the name of the wider body. Well, I am a theologian and I have to remind you that repentance is nothing without making amends. Natural justice demands that we cannot simply walk away from that wrong, just because we don't like the price tag on it. To revive the car analogy: would you be happy if someone smashed into your car and then told you that they couldn't do anything to repair the damage, because they didn't feel like spending their money on you?

So: I ask you to send a strong message of encouragement to our colleagues in administration and senior office: we all want to help you make this building better, and remedy all that has happened as a result of its building. We have heard some fascinating, creative suggestions today - marvellous - and those who made such suggestions and those who warmed to them, please vote for the motion. We can use our brains, our thinking, to find a solution which makes all of us proud and hopeful, not bruised and resentful. To vote for Option 3 is just the start.

Realism, following the Warden of Keble's realism: if you vote **against** the motion you are voting to let the conflict with the city and the wider public continue because you have closed down the only effective starting point for reconciliation. Rest assured, the City Council has many more questions to ask about this building, despite recent assertions to the contrary, from the Estates Department. And the press and the media have many other questions too. On the other hand, if you vote **for** the motion, you are voting for the process of the beginning of reconciliation: a statement of good faith to the world at large that the University promises real, effective action. More realism: Option 1 costs a lot of money and achieves virtually nothing. Option 3 is more expensive and it achieves real change. So: let us make this a creative occasion. The next question for our discussion can be the timing and the choreography of our action, in a way which responsibly uses funds at the University's disposal and causes the least

disruption to the lives of graduate students whose interests we all champion. I ask you to cast aside your fears, think positively and creatively, and vote for the motion.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Members of Congregation, that brings us to the end of the debate. We will now move to voting on the resolution. The procedure will be as follows. When the Proctors, Pro-Proctors and Bedels have moved to each of the exits of the theatre, I shall invite members of Congregation to cast their votes. I must remind you that only members of Congregation are entitled to vote. All members should complete a voting paper before leaving their seats. Having completed their papers, those seated on the floor and the semi-circle in the Sheldonian should leave via the South exit. Those seated in the lower galleries of the Sheldonian should leave via the East and the West exits. Those seated in the upper galleries in the Sheldonian are asked to wait until they are called, and to leave then via the East and West exits once those seated in the lower galleries have exited.

Members of Congregation should give their voting papers to the Proctor, Pro-Proctor or Bedel at those exits. Any members of Congregation wishing to vote who have not received voting papers should collect them from one of the stewards immediately inside each exit. As I explained at the beginning of the meeting, the Proctors, Pro-Proctors and Bedels will accept only each member's single personal voting paper, in order to comply with the regulations. When all of the voting papers have been collected, members of Congregation will be asked to return to their seats, to await the announcement of the result.

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### Result of the vote

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SENIOR PROCTOR: There voted for the resolution: 210 votes. There voted against the resolution: 536 votes. The resolution is accordingly rejected.

THE VICE-CHANCELLOR: Ladies and gentlemen, that concludes the business before Congregation. May I thank all of you for participating this afternoon in this forthright but, I think you will all agree, collegial debate? Thank you.