

Liz Sawyer: Address to OCC Meeting, 6.1.2017

Ladies and Gentlemen, good evening. This is the second time that I have come to talk to you about the Seacourt Park and Ride expansion plan. I come now as a member of the Oxford Flood Alliance.

I have made my objections regarding the application's contravention of local and national planning policy to the relevant councillors and officers, and I appreciate the discussions that I have had with them. I focus now on a concerning and potentially tragic aspect of this development: the risk to life.

I want to make you, the full Council, aware of the real hazards this application creates. As you know, the site for the proposed car park extension is in the functional floodplain, and will flood far more regularly than the existing car park does. It slopes gradually down, away from Botley Road, towards the river. It is more low-lying, and would be accessed by the public via two ramps from the existing site. On average, the new site is 80cm lower. But both car parks undulate, so some areas can be badly flooded while others are still passable. Parts of the proposed new car park would be a full 2 metres lower than parts of the existing one. Those lower areas will be under water that is deeper than a fully-grown man before the floodwater starts to come close to the Botley Road.

Therefore, it is quite wrong to compare the risks posed by the new car park to the safety record of the existing Park and Ride, as the planning application does. The flooding in the new area will be both more frequent and much, much deeper.

Now, I grew up in Tewkesbury, where people know from experience about the dangers of flood waters. And yet people have still been killed there in flood events. To show how dangerous flood water is, here are 9 of the Automobile Association's 'flood facts':

- 1. Most drowning deaths happen within only 3m of a safe point.*
- 2. Two thirds of those who die in flood-related accidents are good swimmers.*
- 3. A third (32%) of flood-related deaths are in vehicles.*
- 4. Just 15cm of fast-flowing water can knock you off your feet and be enough for you not to be able to regain your footing.*
- 5. It's a challenge to stand in waist-deep water flowing at only 1m/s (2mph). By 1.8m/s (4mph, walking speed) everyone is washed off their feet.*
- 6. If the speed of the flood water doubles, the force it exerts on you or your car goes up four times.*
- 7. Just 60cm of standing water will float your car.*
- 8. Just 30cm of flowing water could be enough to move your car.*
- 9. A mere egg cupful of water could be enough to wreck an engine.*

Remember the proposed car park is 80cm on average lower than the existing one, and more than twice that in places. This application opens up the real risk of a large body of deep floodwater that is easily accessible to the public.

I give you just one of the many flaws in the inadequate 'flood response plan' in the application. The document recommends closing the lower car park in times of flood merely by putting up signs, and that the site not be manned in times of flood. But what is to prevent someone from slipping down the ramps into the water as they approach the bus stop? Would the council ever allow a bridge to be built that had no safety railings? And suppose the council puts up signs at 8.30pm in anticipation of flooding, but at 11pm someone moves one to get their car out of the slightly flooded car park, and forgets to put it back? How many cars will drive down the ramp into the lower car park the following morning before the council employee returns and replaces the sign? People could drive down into deepening water, and be unable to drive their cars back out, up the ramp. Many scenarios are possible, but the flood response document considers not a single one. The entire emergency plan is 640 words long, shorter than this address. It reads as an afterthought to the planning application, an irresponsible, negligent afterthought. There *is* no way to make such a planning application safe: hence national planning guidelines prohibit such developments in the functional floodplain, on the grounds of public safety.

I urge you to think very seriously before allowing this application to proceed. Thank you.