PUBLIC AFFAIRS DIRECTORATE
University Offices, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JD

Tim Cann, Clerk, Old Marston Parish Council
(*By email*)

3 August 2020

Dear Mr Cann,

Covid-19 response – University of Oxford plans for Michaelmas Term 2020

I am writing to Old Marston Parish Council about the University of Oxford's plans for the start of the next academic year in October 2020 and the impact on the local community of the return of Oxford's student population.

The Covid-19 pandemic has meant that significant changes to the University's operations are required. We are acutely aware of the need to keep Oxford's residents, businesses and community organisations, as well as the local authorities, fully informed as our plans progress. Preparing for the next academic year is a complex task and there are a number of details still under consideration. We would like to take this opportunity to set out what we have been doing and update you on the status of our plans.

We appreciate that some people will have concerns about the potential risk of infection from students arriving in Oxford, particularly those moving into private accommodation in residential areas. Please be reassured that the University's first priority is the welfare of our students, staff and our neighbours across the city. It is essential that our students, and indeed all of us, act responsibly and follow the Government's guidance on social distancing and good hygiene.

The University is putting in place extensive health and safety measures in our buildings and facilities, including in student accommodation. Cleaning regimes will be significantly enhanced, with regular cleaning of contact points such as door handles, banisters and bathrooms. Additional facilities will be in place for everyone to maintain good hygiene such as through regular hand washing with soap and water or hand sanitiser. Buildings and spaces open to the public are being adapted to ensure social distancing and appropriate ventilation. These measures have been designed in accordance with Government guidelines and with input from an expert advisory group made up of the University's clinical academics.

The most important of the new health and safety measures is the creation of a dedicated coronavirus testing service, which will be open to all our staff and students. This service will enable us to detect any new cases of Covid-19 early and react quickly to halt further transmission. It is also intended to help reduce any additional burdens on the local NHS services upon which the whole city relies. One testing centre will be based in central Oxford and the other in Headington.

On accommodation, our aim is to house the majority of students in college and University accommodation. In this accommodation, we are planning for the grouping of students into 'households' where they share high-contact facilities such as bathrooms or kitchens. They will be supported by their college welfare services if required to self-isolate.

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Those living in private accommodation and needing to self-isolate will be required to do so at that accommodation and receive welfare support where appropriate.

In addition to this, we are pleased to confirm that we are developing a set of guidelines or 'charter' for our students, outlining behaviours expected of them in order to protect themselves and others, and what they can expect from the University. The content of this charter needs to be given careful thought if it is to be effective; we are working closely with student representatives and colleagues across the University and colleges to ensure these guidelines are reasonable and that students comply with them.

Other aspects of student life are still under review. We are looking into the possibility of reopening college bars, dining halls and common rooms, as we aim to offer as full a social experience as possible for our students. However, services will only be allowed to reopen in line with Government guidance and health advice.

We hope that the measures set out here go some way to address any worries that your residents may have about our plans for the coming academic year. If they have concerns about potential breaches of Government guidelines by our students, or if there are any other matters they would like to raise with us, please direct them to contact the community relations team at local.community@admin.ox.ac.uk. They will be able to take these issues forward with the relevant University or college colleagues.

As more of the detail is agreed we promise to keep you and our other community partners up to date on developments. You can also check our new Covid-19 response website, which will be updated on a regular basis: https://www.ox.ac.uk/coronavirus

On behalf of the University, I would like to thank you for your patience and understanding as we finalise our plans for October. We know that our students will endeavour to be good neighbours during their time at Oxford.

Yours sincerely,

Laurence Garfield

Laurence Garfield
Government and Community Relations Officer
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