

Cheltenham Borough Council Council Minutes

Meeting date: 19 June 2023

Meeting time: 2.30 pm - 6.45 pm

In attendance:

Councillors:

Matt Babbage (Chair), Paul Baker (Vice-Chair), Glenn Andrews, Victoria Atherstone, Adrian Bamford, Garth Barnes, Ian Bassett-Smith, Graham Beale, Angie Boyes, Nigel Britter, Jackie Chelin, Ed Chidley, Barbara Clark, Mike Collins, Iain Dobie, Stephan Fifield, Bernard Fisher, Wendy Flynn, Tim Harman, Steve Harvey, Rowena Hay, Sandra Holliday, Martin Horwood, Peter Jeffries, Tabi Joy, Paul McCloskey, Emma Nelson, Tony Oliver, Julie Sankey, Diggory Seacome, Izaak Tailford, Julian Tooke, Simon Wheeler, Max Wilkinson, Suzanne Williams and David Willingham

Also in attendance:

Paul Jones (Executive Director of Finance, Assets and Regeneration), Claire Hughes (Corporate Director and Monitoring Officer) and Gareth Edmundson (Chief Executive)

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Clucas, Lewis, Payne and Pineger.

2 Declarations of interest

There were none.

3 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were approved as a true record and signed accordingly.

4 Communications by the Mayor

The Mayor shared the sad news that Honorary Alderman Martin Hale passed away in early May, a former Labour Councillor for Hesters Way, Pittville and Oakley from 1986-1994 and 1995-2006.

Following the recent horrific attack in Annecy, he has written to express Cheltenham's shock at the event, and to say all those affected are in our thoughts. He invited everyone in the Chamber to stand in silence for one minute as a show of solidarity.

He sent best wishes from the Council to Councillor Payne who has taken leave of absence for three months, to undertake caring responsibilities.

5 Communications by the Leader of the Council

The Leader began by adding her condolences to Diane Hale on the loss of her husband, Honorary Alderman Martin Hale, saying he was a well-respected and committed councillor for the then Whaddon, Lynworth and Priors ward, now known as Oakley.

She went on to share the following items:

- the Cheltenham Zero Sustainable Travel Showcase is taking place at Park Campus, 9am-1pm on Tuesday 27 June. This inspiring event will cover all things to do with sustainable travel, including fleet transition, accessibility, and active travel options, with guests including Clevely Motors, Stagecoach and Cheltenham Borough Council. All are invited, and free tickets are available from Eventbrite;
- congratulations to trophy winners at the Cheltenham Skittles League prevention night on Friday, in particular the Mayor, Councillor Babbage, whose team, Albion House, won the Men's Division 4 championship;
- congratulations to the 200 artists who opened their premises to the public for Cheltenham Open Studios;
- the first families are benefitting from the #FeedCheltenham leisure pass, which provides free leisure activities for food bank users;
- subject to committee agreement, Councillor Bamford will take over the Chair of the Audit, Compliance and Governance Committee at the next meeting. Thanks to the current Chair, Councillor McCloskey, who is stepping down;
- congratulations to Cheltenham's MP, Alex Chalk, on his recent appointment as Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice.

6 To receive petitions

No new petitions had been submitted.

7 Public Questions

Public Questions (3 total)

1. Question from Mr Jay-Jay Potter-Peachey to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Wellbeing, Councillor Max Wilkinson

Having passed a [motion](#) to agree to a Rainbow Crossing installation here in Cheltenham. Can I ask for an update and whether or not this is going to be happening soon. The motion passed agreed that Cheltenham should have one and as per the motion from GCC it also identified a location.

Response from Cabinet Member

Thank you to Jay-Jay for his question. I am a supporter of Pride in Gloucestershire and an ally of the LGBTQ+ community and I know that he has been an effective campaigner on this subject for many years. I welcome and applaud his ongoing commitment to the cause.

As Jay-Jay will be aware from his involvement in the rainbow crossing scheme in Gloucester, these projects must be overseen by the Highways Authority, Gloucestershire County Council. The County Council's response to Cheltenham Borough Council is several hundred words and not appropriate for inclusion in an answer, but I am happy to share it separately. While the County Council expressed support for the aims of Pride, the view expressed was that rainbow crossings are costly when compared with other potential support that might be given to the cause. The County Council also referenced the very many other considerations it takes into account, including safety and site selection.

The County Council concluded that it would not support or be funding a rainbow crossing in Cheltenham and, even if Cheltenham Borough Council had sufficient budget to fund a scheme, Highways Officers would recommend other ways to spend the money. Jay-Jay may wish to consider further engagement with the County Council on the subject of the rainbow crossing and other options for infrastructure and street furniture. In terms of potential funding from the Borough Council, there are various annual grants available that could support public engagement activities for Pride, as well as the Community Infrastructure levy Neighbourhood Fund.

I am, of course, happy to meet Jay-Jay and discuss this at his convenience. I would recommend that if and when a meeting is convened, a member of the County Council highways team is in attendance.

2. Question from Hon. Alderman Anne Regan to the Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Street Services, Councillor Iain Dobie

People's homes in Hatherley were recently photographed by recycling staff using an iPad.

- a. Does the council have legal permission to invade residents' privacy?
- b. If the front door bearing the house number is on the side of the house will this photography contribute to trespassing?
- c. Many people have justifiable reasons for not leaving their recycling boxes outside their premises, Age constraints, holidays, business travel etc are reasons for not having their boxes out. Why is the council taking this heavy-handed approach?
- d. How many telephone calls in the last 6 months, per week, has the council received from residents asking for a second collection?
- e. What is the legality of this action and what financial toll does the council propose to fine residents?

Response from Cabinet Member

The Council has a statutory responsibility to collect waste and recycling for residents in Cheltenham just like all other waste collection authorities across the country. Collection crews collect from the kerbside, in other words, the pavement, unless residents give their permission for collections to be made from an agreed location on their land as part of an assisted collection.

Collection crews now have access to 'in cab technology' allowing them to take photographs of any operational issues which are relevant to delivering that service for residents. These photographs are stored securely in the system for 30 days, then deleted, and only shared with the resident at that property if there is an issue raised by the resident regarding their collection, for example, a missed bin report. The photographs are intended to evidence that a collection has or hasn't been made, or other operational issues, and I am assured does not constitute any invasion of privacy or trespassing. The same image may well be available on Google Maps Street View.

Unfortunately we are unable to provide any telephone statistics on 'second collections' as they are not identified as such.

The Council has no powers to fine any resident for failing to present waste or recycling, nor do we have any plans to seek to do so.

We are actively encouraging the reduction in waste across the borough and we applaud residents who do not present refuse bins because they do not have any waste. We are however keen to ensure that tax payers money is not wasted in funding crews having to return to collect refuse bins from properties who had failed to present in time for their scheduled collection.

Equally we are keen for residents to present sorted recycling for collection but not all do. Photographing unsorted recycling boxes will help us support residents to sort their recycling.

3. Question from Hon. Alderman Anne Regan to Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries

The council-owned site in Hayden Lane was used as a gardening centre for the council. I understood the land was to be sold for housing development many years ago.

Why has nothing been achieved on this site when we are so desperate for social housing in this town?

Response from Cabinet Member

Thank you, Alderman Anne Regan, for your question, as an ex Cheltenham borough councillor you will undoubtedly be aware of the pressures we face in Cheltenham because of the national housing crisis. This crisis has been going on for decades, and differing governments have over this time not really grasped the depth of the crisis and provided any meaningful impact in bring about positive change. I am sure you will be supportive of this administrations housing investment plan being a key priority. Investing £180 million pounds in providing more affordable housing will make a meaningful difference in providing more much needed homes in our town.

I'm sure you will agree that one of the key challenges we face in reducing the housing pressures across Cheltenham is where are homes going to be provided and what site are appropriate.

Following the decision to close operations at Arle Nursery, the site was allocated and adjoining land within the Cheltenham Plan for housing development. The council have been exploring the various issues involved in securing redevelopment, with the objectives of maximising housing delivery, maximising housing options (including provision of affordable to rent housing and shared ownership housing) and maximising the latent value of the site to generate a capital receipt for reinvestment into the council's corporate priorities and capital programme.

The site and adjoining land is constrained by various matters, including highways and access, flooding along the line of the nearby River Chelt, ecology and wildlife and most pertinently, two high-pressure gas pipes running north to south between the Nursery and the adjoining allocated land. This has two implications: firstly, the need maintain a protection zone along the line of these pipes; and secondly, the requirement for substantial engineering works in order to provide an access road over the line of them, which is both challenging and expensive.

Having undertaken various surveys, including ecological, legal, ground and utilities, the site was originally appraised for development by the councils housing arm, Cheltenham Borough Homes. However, they were unable to deliver a scheme that would meet all of the objectives for this site. The council therefore re-evaluated the delivery options and determined a partnership approach with a third party was most likely to deliver on the core objectives.

Subsequently, the council has been working with another housing provider who has been able to overcome the constraints within the site area and are now completing the necessary site investigations as part of the preparation and submission of a

planning application. The council and its partners are working together to deliver a consented scheme by March 2024, with construction starting shortly thereafter, and the first new dwellings being ready for occupation towards the end of 2024.

Supplementary question from Hon. Alderman Anne Regan

With the housing shortage now critical, especially social housing, the town needs to work hard to provide for its residents. What proportion of social and private housing will the site hold, and how many Cheltenham residents are on the waiting list for social housing?

Response from Cabinet Member

The Cabinet Member was unable to provide answers at the meeting, and agreed to provide these by email as soon as possible.

8 Member Questions

Member Questions (5 total)

1. Question from Councillor Tim Harman to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Well-being, Councillor Max Wilkinson

Following his response to my question at the last Council meeting with regard to Tourism, will the Cabinet Member urgently look at the signage that is in a number of locations which shows that the Tourist Information Centre is located at the Wilson which it has not been for some time which is potentially misleading ?

Response from Cabinet Member

Through this question, Councillor Harman has rightly raised that, at the time of asking, a number of signs in the town centre still referred to the Tourist Information Centre which was previously based at the Wilson Art Gallery and Museum. Some months ago, officers removed all fingerpost directional signage and reported to me that this had been dealt with. It has since come to officers' attention that there were some residual totem signs which referred to this location but had been missed at the time. This was an oversight but I can confirm that these have now been updated temporarily with a longer term, more permanent, redesign in the process of being commissioned.

I would like to take this opportunity to update members on the reinstatement of seven-day-a-week in-person tourist information provision, which has been a subject of debate in this chamber and elsewhere. I thank members of this council and members of the public for raising this important issue. I'm happy to report that we now have uniformed Visitor Welcome Assistants in the town centre on weekends and bank holidays during the key footfall hours of 11am-3pm. Based at The Cheltenham Pod on the High Street, the staff provide information, directions and a friendly welcome. This initiative has been well received and they are providing an important service for both visitors and residents. This is in addition to the in-person information provided by reception staff at the Municipal Offices on weekdays.

2. Question from Councillor Tim Harman to Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Street Services, Councillor Iain Dobie

It is good news that three trees have now been planted in the Bath Terrace Car Park entirely funded by the splendid Suffolk Traders.

It is also good news that other trees have been planted and funded from other sources across the town including from the County Council Build Back Better Fund.

Since declaring a Climate Emergency, how many trees has the council planted and funded itself?

Response from Cabinet Member

Bath Rd Traders generously gave £500 towards the cost of installing the trees in Bath Terrace car park.

Glos County Council paid for the trees themselves, as well as providing the planting accessories (stakes, cages etc).

CBC paid for the actual planting, whilst also providing aftercare and watering.

Tree planting numbers since 2019:

2019: 2,600

2020: 2,500

2021: 1,800

2022: 2,100

These tree planting numbers are for trees planted by this council only within the Cheltenham borough.

The numbers must be taken in context and do not necessarily reflect the number of trees which will reach maturity.

Many of the planted trees are very small (approx. 1.2m high). These were planted by public volunteers as mixed native species groups of trees. As the trees establish and grow, many of them (>80%) will need to be "thinned out" so as to retain the "best" trees for the space in which they will be planted.

CBC plants "large" (3-3.5m high) trees as "landscape features" in parks, gardens and open spaces. Many of these trees will be replacements for trees felled/removed.

Approx 40 such trees are planted each year. These combine a mix of native and exotic, long and short lived, large and small tree species. This wide palette gives a wide range of arboricultural interest, as well as helping to mitigate the impact of climate change and newly introduced pests and diseases (e.g. ash die-back, red band needle blight, *Phytophthora ramorum* etc).

Similarly, a proportion of the trees will fail to establish, be vandalised, or simply become suppressed and die as a result of dominating more vigorous neighbouring tree(s).

Tree planting numbers are only the very start of the journey towards the canopy cover target for the town. Subsequent to planting, there is a relatively high level of husbandry (watering, mulching, occasional fencing etc) so as to help ensure successful tree establishment.

Members of public are able to “sponsor” the establishment of a tree (£350). Tree sponsorship numbers have remained relatively constant over the years (approx. 25 per annum).

Gloucestershire Highways (with a 50% financial contribution by CBC) plants 70 x 3.5m high mixed species trees each year. The majority of these trees are replacement trees for trees previously removed.

Supplementary question from Councillor Harman

How many trees have been directly funded by Cheltenham Borough Council.

Response from Cabinet Member

I will ask the Senior Trees Officer for the precise figures and forward these by email to Councillor Harman.

3. Question from Councillor Stephan Fifield to Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Well-being, Councillor Max Wilkinson

Could the cabinet member please give an update on waters at the Pump Room and when they will be made accessible to the public?

Response from Cabinet Member:

Thank you to Cllr Fifield for his question. I know he takes a keen interest in this matter. The spa water at Pittville Pump Room is unfortunately still not available to the public due to presence of bacteria in the water.

Work is underway to understand whether the bacteria is coming from the water source or the system. If we find the source of the water is contaminated then my understanding is that it is unlikely that the water will ever be made fit for human consumption.

If the source is not contaminated, then there maybe scope to disinfect the system. However, the UV filters have been cleaned and replaced a number of times, and the system has been disinfected but bacteria was still present.

An alternative option might be to replace the whole system, but clearly that would come at some cost to local taxpayers and if the source is indeed contaminated this work would still not result in drinkable Spa water being available.

For clarity, Cheltenham Borough Council is responsible for the building works that may arise and the repairs and maintenance of the system.

The Cheltenham Trust, which has responsibility for the testing of the spa water, has asked a specialist contractor to undertake a site visit within the next two weeks to review the system condition. That contractor has been asked to supply an options and costs proposal.

Supplementary question from Councillor Fifield

Is there any indication as to when the spa waters will be fit to drink?

Response from Cabinet Member:

Further tests and consultation will be carried out over the next couple of weeks, but the timescale depends on whether the source of the waters is contaminated, which will be a lot more difficult to remedy than simply replacing machinery. As the Pump Room is in Councillor Fifield's ward, he may be reassured that no stone is left unturned by attending a site meeting.

4. Question from Councillor Stephan Fifield to Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries

Could the cabinet member please give an update on the status of Idsall Drive Car Park? Back in 2020 it was common knowledge that the Council was looking to sell the car park. Could the member give an update on whether this is still a possibility?

Response from Cabinet Member:

Thank you for your question Cllr Fifield, It is a matter of public record that in November 2020 as part of the Council's COVID-19 Recovery Budget there was a recommendation to note a list of assets for disposal which included Idsall Drive car park. This recommendation was approved by Full Council as part of the report which identified a total of eight sites for disposal. The proposal to dispose of these assets to generate a capital receipt were put forward for the benefit of the whole Borough and to ensure the ongoing viability of the Council and the delivery of our key priorities, for the benefit of our residents across Cheltenham.

In 2021/22, negotiations for the sale of Idsall Drive car park to Prestbury Parish Council halted. Whilst the car park remains earmarked for disposal, on the grounds that it is surplus to our operational requirements, no scheme has been brought forward for its disposal. Work is ongoing in relation to this asset disposal and the Cabinet have given a commitment to both Ward Councillors that they will be directly consulted before any proposals are brought forward.

Supplementary question from Councillor Fifield

EV chargers were recently installed in the car park. Is there a plan to move these to another location when the site is sold?

Response from Cabinet Member

I was not aware of any EV chargers in the car park, but conversations with the Property Team are ongoing to provide the community with this benefit wherever possible.

5. Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Street Services, Councillor Iain Dobie

It's good to see the hanging baskets going up around the town recently and the formal beds in front of the Municipal Offices being planted up.

Please would the Cabinet Member confirm whether there will be the usual window boxes on two floors at the front of the building and the hanging baskets in the window archways?

Response from Cabinet Member:

Thanks to Councillor Nelson for her question. I am pleased to confirm that the hanging basket and window boxes that were installed on 15th June at the Municipal offices are the same as we have done in recent years.

I hope all members will agree that the floral displays across Cheltenham including all the wind flowers, look amazing and I would like to thank the Ubico staff for all their hard work planting up and installing them, even in this heat.

Supplementary question from Councillor Nelson

Was the decision to extend the floral displays from the ground floor to the first floor taken as a result of her question?

Response from Cabinet Member

It may have been influential, but I cannot say the decision followed on directly from Councillor Nelson's question. I will look into the matter and report back.

9 Voter Identification

The Executive Director for Finance, Assets and Regeneration introduced the report, which followed a Council motion in December 2022, requesting an investigation of the risk of disenfranchisement as a result of the government's new voter ID requirements. The reports articulates the actions being undertaken to comply, and the recommendations to appoint three deputy electoral officers and use £20k of the Elections Equalisation Earmarked Reserve to further promote the voter ID requirement in future elections.

In response to Members' questions, officers provided the following responses:

- door-to-door canvassing tends to be for those people who have not returned their household enquiry forms and officers will rely on information received from canvassers as the forms are returned to understand whether those are the people less likely to have appropriate ID;

- rather than second-guess how many people in Cheltenham may be disenfranchised, we need to rely on the Electoral Commission report later this year about the broad national picture;
- secondary legislation in October will require postal voters to provide further, verified information, adding an layer to the process and requiring them to reapply each time. This which will result in further work for both the elections team and postal voters;
- everyone who may be affected will be contacted, with all details included on the form. People will also be able to apply for postal votes on line, which will make it more accessible;
- while it is true that the council is having to pay for this government initiative, New Burdens Funding cannot be used to cover all costs as this is specifically for staff training. The council has funding earmarked for this type of activity. Some of the extra expenditure will be covered by New Burdens Funding, but if the authority wants to do more, it will be at its own expense;
- regarding funding, money is put into the reserve each year, whether or not there is an election, so if the cost of an election is calculated as £60k, £30k is put into the reserve one year and topped up the following year to cover the £60k costs. Sufficient funding is therefore available to support the actions outlined in the report;
- the authority always holds extra funding in reserve to deal with multiple elections (e.g. for the county, police commissioner etc);
- anyone can apply for a Voter Authority Certificate, but they will be asked by the portal if they have any other form of ID. If they have, they will be informed that they don't need a certificate; if they say they haven't, their application will be pushed through;
- it wouldn't be feasible to have a photo booth in every polling station, and in any case, certificates must be applied for six working days before polling day, but it may be feasible to see if one can be installed at the Municipal Offices, where members of the public can apply in person for a certificate;
- officers will consider what training may be given to help polling staff make good judgements on the photo evidence presented;
- additional work will be done with people in areas with boundary changes and who need to attend a different polling station.

In debate, Members made the following comments:

- this appalling measure is an assault on local democracy, justified as a means to protect against fraud despite the Electoral Commission saying that this is not a problem in the UK. Their research has confirmed that the existing system of polling cards and trust works well;
- a government pilot led to 1000 people being turned away, many of whom are likely to be from ethnic backgrounds; projecting this across 230 voting councils suggests that 26k people could be denied ballots. Added to these are people who may not even have entered their polling station;
- the obvious explanation is that this is gerrymandering, an attempt to suppress the votes of certain sections of the community, as effectively admitted by Jacob Rees-Mogg at the National Conservative Conference, recognising that elderly voters will now be at a disadvantage; this smacks of racism and elitism, as it

seems that the part of the population that needs the vote most is least likely to have the required documents. It also seems like a way of introducing ID cards by stealth;

- this is outrageous and the council must do everything in its power to make the barriers to voting as light as possible;
- thanks for the election team for their hard work and efforts to try and help people to vote, despite this abhorrent and scandalous dereliction of democracy;
- the report is welcome as the start of a bigger piece of work to increase voter turn-out, which is just 24% in some wards and could drop further without interventions;
- it is too late to re-open the debate on the principle of voter ID, and we should remember that in addition to local publicity, a national awareness scheme was run across the country earlier this year;
- CBH is including information about this in its digital and hard copy newsletter, and it would be helpful to approach Bromford, Home Group and other social housing organisations to encourage them to do the same.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. the contents of this report be noted;**
- 2. Gareth Edmundson, Kim Smith and Alison Murray be appointed as Deputy Electoral Registration Officers;**
- 3. the use of £20,000 from the Elections Equalisation Earmarked Reserve to further promote the requirement for Voter ID in future elections be approved.**

10 Revisions to the Constitution

The Leader introduced the report, saying openness, transparency and inclusivity are key fundamental principles of the council, and the Constitution acts as our 'rule book' to ensure the public and Members understand the decisions we make and how we make them. The Constitution Working Group has been working closely with the Monitoring Office to make it easier to navigate and understand, with a whole raft of proposed changes, including:

- change to the rules on substitutes, allowing any member to substitute for another in their group, provided the required training has been undertaken;
- the introduction of a key set of parameters around the submission of funding bids and acceptance of grants to enhance the council's system of control and governance;
- keeping webcasts of all meetings available on line for four years;
- the use of electronic signatures and seals, once a guidance document has been provided clearly setting out parameters on use;
- an updated flow chart on the procedure for motions.

She thanked the Monitoring Officer and Constitution Working Group for their hard work.

In response to a Member's question, the Leader confirmed that:

- thorough cyber security vigilance will be applied before electronic signatures are used widely, as the opportunity for fraud is recognised;
- it was down to planners to consider the situation regarding prior approval for telecom masts, which currently give the public little opportunity to raise concerns; a change to the constitution regarding this could not be guaranteed.

The Chair of Planning added that the legislation is such that telecom mast applications cannot be referred to Planning Committee, but there is still process for engagement, and officers have refused permission for masts on the grounds of location, appearance and design. He agreed that it was important for the community to be aware of applications to install them, and to engage in the process. He encouraged all Members to attend the upcoming planning training session.

In debate, Members made the following comments:

- licensing, like planning, requires training, either in-house or through the LGA or Institute of Licensing; Members should be encouraged to take this up;
- the use of electronic signatures is good progress;
- keeping meetings on line for longer is good for both councillors and the public;
- the removal of all gender references is refreshing to see;
- the flexibility on substitution is to be welcomed.

RESOLVED THAT:

- 1. authority is delegated to the Monitoring Officer to update the document to reflect the current accessibility, equity, equality, diversity and inclusivity requirements, including gender neutralization;**
- 2. the provisions regarding substitutes as set out in part 6 of this report are approved;**
- 3. the revised debate flowchart to replace the existing version in Appendix G of the Constitution is approved ;**
- 4. the amendments to Part 3 (Responsibility for Functions) as set out in part 8 of this report are approved;**
- 5. authority is delegated to the Monitoring Officer to make further amendments to Part 3 to ensure that officers delegations reflect the current structure and sit at the appropriate level;**
- 6. the amendments regarding webcasting and the retention of recordings as set out in part 9 of this report are approved;**
- 7. the use of electronic signatures and seals as set out in part 10 of this report is approved**
- 8. authority is delegated to the Monitoring Officer to make the necessary changes to the Constitution to reflect these decisions.**

11 Notice of Motion A

Motion A

Proposed by: Councillor Max Wilkinson

Seconded by: Councillor Victoria Atherstone

Honeybourne Line extension

Council notes:

That the extension of the Honeybourne Line from Cheltenham Spa Station south to Shelburne Road has been an ambition of this town for almost four decades.

That the current proposal to extend the line requires partnership working between Network Rail (landowner), GWR (developer), Gloucestershire County Council (transport authority) and Cheltenham Borough Council (authority responsible for managing the Honeybourne Line).

That as delays to the project were experienced, costs increased significantly due to inflation in the construction market, as well as other factors, including the specification of the project.

That this project is a key part of Gloucestershire County Council's wider sustainable transport ambitions, linking Cheltenham to Gloucester in one direction and to Bishop's Cleeve in the other.

The strong support from Cheltenham people for this extension.

Council regrets:

That after significant progress, the project is currently delayed indefinitely after government funding cuts to the rail industry.

That the identified funding gap will require further contributions from various sources.

That this authority does not typically benefit from budgets for strategic transport, has a budget gap of its own to meet, and therefore does not have any scope for funding this project from general budgets.

Council supports:

The petition by Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Cycling campaign, signed by more than 1,000 residents.

Work with partners in the project, primarily Gloucestershire County Council, to explore ways to bridge the funding gap, including reviewing the opportunity to

prioritise the Honeybourne Line Extension as an allocation for Community Infrastructure Levy funding.

Additionally Council notes:

The potential for a northern extension of the Honeybourne Line, between the Prince of Wales Stadium and Swindon Lane.

That this land is owned by Gloucestershire Warwickshire Steam Railway, but remains unused.

That Gloucestershire Warwickshire Steam Railway's historic ambition to extend the steam railway track into the town centre is unlikely to be realised for various practical reasons.

Council recognises:

The potential for this corridor of land to become a sustainable transport link and linear park as far as Swindon Lane, improving public health and boosting the environment.

The potential for this land to help link the main railway line and the town centre to Gloucestershire Warwickshire Steam Railway, boosting local tourism.

Council instructs:

Officers engaged in strategic planning to explore policies to protect this corridor of opportunity.

Officers to engage with Gloucestershire Warwickshire Steam Railway to discuss the extension of the Honeybourne Line northwards with a view to pursuing opportunities for the environment, leisure and tourism in a way that is mutually beneficial.

Council asks:

Officers to report back on progress with planning policies, and discussions with Gloucestershire Warwickshire Steam Railway at, or before, the Council meeting on 11 December.

In proposing the motion, Councillor Wilkinson began by highlighting CBC's commitment to driving the sustainable transport agenda, since commissioning the Connecting Cheltenham report in 2019 and working with the highways authority since then to deliver it. He said the Honeybourne Line is a cherished and much-used green corridor, and there is a long-running campaign to extend it southwards from the station to Shelburne Road, and to protect the corridor northwards for future extension.

The southwards extension comprises a few hundred yards only, but would cut out the busy and dangerous Gloucester Road for cyclists and walkers. However, it is a complex project, involving Network Rail, the Gloucestershire Warwickshire Steam

Railway, CBC and GCC, as well as the Department of Transport. Sadly, after a huge amount of work by all, this year's financial situation, construction inflation, and Network Rail's additional safety requirements, mean the project will be delayed further.

He thanked officers – Phil Williams at GCC, Tracey Birkinshaw, Jackie Jobes and Simon Hodges at CBC – for keeping the project on track. The county council is still interested in delivering the scheme, which forms a short but important stretch of its cycle spine project, and is open to an increased contribution from CBC. The Gloucester and Tewkesbury Cycle Campaign have a petition of over 1,000 signatures in support of this extension, and can still be signed via their website. The motion commits CBC to exploring the options – including community infrastructure levy and developer contributions – to continue work on this missing link.

The second part of the motion focusses on the more long-term northbound extension, which would ideally continue beyond the Prince of Wales Stadium as far as the Honeybourne Tunnel. This land is currently owned by Gloucestershire Warwickshire Railway, and the motion proposes the exploration of policies to protect the corridor of land in future strategic plans, and open discussions with GWR to explore the options of a future proposal that would be beneficial to all.

He urged Members to support the motion.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Atherstone agreed that the Honeybourne Line is crying out to be extended southwards, and the 2019 Connecting Cheltenham report highlighted the need to work with transport partners and community groups to achieve this. It would improve accessibility and inclusivity, encouraging further active travel; many people choose not to ride bikes due to safety concerns, and the busy Gloucester Road is likely to get worse when the Arle Court Transport Hub is fully functional and Golden Valley development active. She thanked Gloucester and Tewkesbury Cycle Campaign for increasing awareness through their petition, and called on CBC to continue working with partners to find alternative solutions and further funding.

She said a northwards extension of the Honeybourne Line offered a fantastic opportunity to increase environmentally friendly active travel and leisure, and improve connections. She asked Members to support the motion which would allow relevant officers to engage with strategic planners to find ways to protect this very special green corridor of opportunity.

Members made the following comments:

- the GWR has various plans for improvement and expansion, and this may help them finance what they want to do. It would be fantastic if the railway could extend to Stratford. A key point in the motion is to talk to them, understand their proposals for the land, and report back by the end of the year;
- the motion is very messy – it should be easier to recognise the proposed actions and what the motion is trying to achieve;
- it is a shame that the project has stalled, but this is symptomatic of Network Rail which tends to be only concerned with trains rather than cyclists, down times at

level crossings, resulting traffic chaos etc. It's hoped that CBC and GCC will work together to put pressure on the government to allow work on this important link to continue;

- the northern extension to create a longer and safe off-road cycle route would be a really good extra deliverable, providing extra links, a safer way to get to the race course, a longer running track and pleasant green environment. Protecting this corridor via the planning process is a good first step, followed by pressure on CBC's partners and Network Rail;
- residents in south Cheltenham are also excited about the southwards extension, which among other benefits will enable school students to travel more safely to Dean Close and Bournside.

Councillor Wilkinson thanked Members for their comments, acknowledging the particular importance of the route for schools in south Cheltenham wards, and the public health benefits of opening this route for walking and cycling route to the northernmost boundary of the town. He took on board and apologised for any lack of clarity in the motion as set out.

RESOLVED (unanimous)

- **to approve the motion**

12 Notice of Motion B

Motion B

Proposed by: Councillor Paul Baker

Seconded by: Councillor Tabi Joy

On the 25th March 2019 this Council unanimously supported a resolution, proposed by Councillor Wilkinson and seconded by Councillor Boyes, to recognise the work done by Cheltenham Welcomes Refugees (CWR) and for Cheltenham to adopt the title of Town of Sanctuary.

In doing so, the authority sought to take practical steps to welcome and include refugees and to support them wherever it can. It also pledged to deepen its work with Cheltenham Welcomes Refugees, to build new links between them, the council's partners and other local organisations to support and provide inclusive and accessible activities.

It further committed to supporting activities that promote the education and training of refugees, enabling them to better integrate into the town and play an active role in the success of our local economy and creating sustainable communities.

Since 2019 the Council has been a very proactive Town of Sanctuary offering a place of safety and welcoming both refugees and asylum seekers from across the world.

Actions include :

- Providing homes for 31 Syrian families and 7 Afghan families and looking to house a further 20 Ukrainian families and 1 Afghan family this year
- Working in partnership with GCC and the 6 district councils to see how we can best respond to support people seeking asylum, this includes attending regular meetings e.g Migrant Resettlement meetings and Gloucestershire Operations Partnership Forum meetings.
- Working in close partnership with Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (GARAS), CWR, the South West Strategic Migration Partnership and Clearspring Ready Homes
- Facilitating meetings to discuss support for asylum seekers with for example CTFC and CBC Communities Partnership and Wellbeing Team, undertaking a survey of newly arrived asylum seekers to see what activities they would be interested in and contacting local football and cricket teams.
- Worked with the Everyman Theatre and other partners to organise the 'Walk with Amal' for Refugee Week 2022, a festival to remind us all of the displaced children worldwide who are forced to flee their homes due to war or violence. The procession by the 'Little Amal' 3.5 m puppet was a huge success.
- In addition a considerable amount of work has gone into supporting those fleeing from Ukraine with housing and supporting hosts.

MOTION

To further enhance Cheltenham's strong record of welcoming, supporting and helping both refugees and asylum seekers we now request that the council appoints up to 4 Refugee Champions. The role of these Champions will include but not be limited to :-

- Promoting the work of GARAS and CWR with Council colleagues and within their communities.
- Helping to forge new links within our communities and schools to support and engage with refugees and asylum seekers.
- Correcting the rhetoric and highlighting the positive contribution that refugees and asylum seekers can play, and do play in our town, they are an asset, not a liability.

- Working with CWR to support new initiatives to help and support refugees and asylum seekers in our community
- Inspiring groups such as residents' associations to run events to raise funds for refugee charities and to support refugees and asylum seekers within their local community

Sadly Government language towards refugees and asylum seekers is often unhelpful, inaccurate and unashamedly hostile. Cheltenham Borough Council seeks to distance itself from such rhetoric. We recognise that refugees and asylum seekers are fleeing their homes due to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. We recognise that no one would want to leave their homes, their communities, their families and friends and everything they have ever known and enjoyed unless they were in fear of their lives. We absolutely believe that refugees and asylum seekers should be treated with respect, understanding and kindness.

Finally this Council resolves to :-

- Condemn the Illegal Migration Bill which it considers to be a breach of the fundamental tenets of international human rights law;
- to write to our MP, calling on him to do everything he can to withdraw this appalling legislation :
 - To commit to resourcing an asylum system that can deliver fair and timely asylum decisions, so saving millions of pounds of tax payers money on temporary and often unsuitable accommodation.
 - To allow refugees and asylum seekers to work at the earliest opportunity so they can begin to rebuild their lives, become more independent and contribute to our society and our economy.

In proposing the motion, coincidentally on the first day of Refugee Week, Councillor Baker firstly reflected on the positive progress made by CBC and CBH since Cheltenham adopted sanctuary town status 2019. He now seeks to further develop that progress with four refugee champions to work with and promote the aims of Cheltenham Welcomes Refugees (CWR), and to record CBC's strong objection to the Illegal Migration Bill currently going through parliament.

As trustee of CWR, he has met many refugees and asylum seekers, and finds it a humbling and rewarding experience. These inspiring people, often with young children, have fled appalling circumstances, risking their lives in search of safe and secure future. We are all incredibly lucky to live in safe and beautiful town and

country, no one wants to be ref or a seeker, and should be proud of Cheltenham's progress over the last few years, in particular the hard work of Richard Gibson and team at CBC and Nigel Potter and team at CBH.

He also acknowledged the support of the Everyman theatre, and the many local schools who have welcomed the children of refugees and asylum seekers - these children are so happy to be at school, making friends, engaging with community. He praised CWR, which does an amazing job, providing practical, emotional and social help and support, and thanked Cheltenham Town Football Club for providing tickets for matches.

The four refugee champions can help promote activities in the council and to the wider community in variety of ways, some of which are suggested in motion. Cheltenham is a friendly, welcoming and generous town, and the vast majority of the population maintains those values. The UK's incredible record of welcoming those fleeing war, conflict and persecution is now sadly damaged by government's latest Illegal Migration Bill, which is widely condemned and will be thrown out by the House of Lords.

The simple answer is to provide safe routes and prompt processing of asylum applications, which will save millions of pounds in hotel accommodation. Economic migrants and those fleeing safe countries such as Albania should be returned, but most asylum seekers are granted refugee status. They have a huge variety of skill sets much needed in the UK since Brexit, and should be allowed to work at the earliest opportunity.

The Rwanda plan will not save the tax payer any money and is, as described by the Archbishop of Canterbury, morally unacceptable, and yet is supported by Cheltenham's MP. The least Council can do is express its unanimous dismay and ask him to reconsider.

Seconding the motion, Councillor Joy said CWR has been operating for eight years, and has achieved an immense amount through volunteer engagement, both supporting displaced people and helping them settle in Cheltenham, and liaising with the public to dismantle harmful ideas about refugees and asylum seekers. Refugees come from many different countries, with different individual circumstances, and it makes moral good sense to share what we have. People reciprocate so much – they want to give back to the community by volunteering or giving blood – and they don't see themselves as refugees, just a people doing what they can to survive and protect themselves and their children.

CWR has an overwhelming workload, including highly trained legal professionals working on individual cases, in a situation which is changing all the time. She welcomed any attempt of the council to be proactive and give all the support it can, and said no-one should be complacent – although the UK doesn't have laws

objectively based in moral standing, showing solidarity with others and helping turn their lives around from immeasurable trauma.

Many members gave the motion their full support, shared their own experiences and made the following comments:

- it is humbling to see what CWR does to help refugees and asylum seekers and the motion is welcomed;
- the government's Illegal Migration Bill is a repugnant piece of legislation, an attempt to stop the boats, when what is needed is simply safe and legal routes and efficient processing of applications. If people are not supposed to be in the UK, they will be returned; if they are, they must be welcomed;
- hosting a Ukrainian has been a privilege and an education; this person is working long and hard days, paying tax and national insurance, and has made a life in a foreign country, which isn't easy at the best of times. We cannot do enough to make sure people's time in Cheltenham is happy, and additional support for the work of CWR and GARAS is to be welcomed;
- it is vital that the council and town lead the way as the crisis grows, revealing the UK's shameful and dehumanising asylum system to be in tatters;
- it is impossible to explain the level of gratitude an asylum seeker feels for a country which has allowed them to stay. Since Brexit, there has been an increased 'othering' of outsiders – a broad range of groups, not only asylum seekers – but we should welcome them, not judge them. People who should know better refer to the 'will of the British people' in reference to the Illegal Migration Bill, but conservative voters need to seek deep within their hearts and recognise that this is not the Britain we know and love;
- the Corporate Plan refers to residents and communities being able to thrive, not just survive – this should be on every council document. The motion is one step on the journey;
- not only GARAS and CWR, but many community groups – schools, colleges, churches – go a long way to welcome refugees and asylum seekers. Cheltenham is a town of sanctuary, and it will be good to ensure there is enough housing for those who need it;
- while supporting the spirit of the motion, and recognising that asylum seekers deserve our help, there are still many illegal immigrants without any right to be here;
- immigrants are only labelled illegal because someone has said they are. We are extremely privileged to be UK citizens, compared with those people who live in danger and take huge risks to get here. If they are simply economic migrants, they should be returned to their homes or go through the proper immigration route. It isn't for us to say whether someone is legal or illegal.

Councillor Baker thanked Members for their comments. He reminded them that the government has changed the rules regarding asylum applications – the only way to apply is to be on British soil, and 70% of those who apply are allowed to stay. The government is making everyone who arrives an illegal immigrant.

RESOLVED (28 in support, 4 abstentions)

- **to approve the motion**

13 Any other item the Mayor determines as urgent and which requires a decision

There were none.

14 Local Government Act 1972 -Exempt Information

RESOLVED THAT:

“That in accordance with Section 100A(4) Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the remaining agenda items as it is likely that, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, if members of the public are present there will be disclosed to them exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3 and 5, Part (1) Schedule (12A) Local Government Act 1972, namely:

Paragraph 3: Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

Paragraph 5: Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings

15 A Financial and Legal Matter

The Leader of the Council introduced the report.

Members had the opportunity to ask questions and then debate the report.

RESOLVED THAT

The recommendations 1, 3, 4 and 2B be approved