Cheltenham Borough Council
Council
Minutes

Meeting date: **18 March 2024**

Meeting time: **2.30 pm - 5.25 pm**

In attendance:

Councillors:

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

Also in attendance:

Paul Jones (Deputy Chief Executive (Section 151 Officer)), Claire Hughes (Corporate Director and Monitoring Officer) and Gareth Edmundson (Chief Executive)

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1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Beale, Chidley, Oliver, Tailford and Willingham.

2 Declarations of interest

Councillor Horwood declared an interest in Agenda Item 10, as Chair of the Leckhampton with Warden Hill Neighbourhood Planning Group, and said he would withdraw from the Chamber during that item.

Councillor Clucas declared an interest, not directly pertinent to today's meeting, in relation to her role as founder-director of a multi-academy trust in Gloucestershire.

3 Minutes of the last meeting(s)

RESOLVED THAT

1. **The outstanding minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 28 September 2023 were approved and signed as a correct record.**

2. **The minutes of the meeting held on 23 February were approved unanimously subject to the following amendments :**

- Agenda item 10, Cabinet Member for Housing, should read: *over the next five years, a replacement kitchen programme will be rolled out, with 500 planned for this financial year, and a further 1000 per year over the next four years;*
- Cllr Harman is recorded as having abstained twice on the substantive budget motion but in fact only abstained once, despite reservations about the LibDem budget.

4 To receive petitions

There were no petitions on this occasion.

5 Communications by the Mayor

As this was the last meeting of Full Council for the municipal year, the Mayor gave personal thanks to all who had contributed to meetings, and thanked Members standing down at the elections in May for their time and contributions as councillors.

6 Communications by the Leader of the Council

The Leader gave the following updates:

- the booking system at the Household Recycling Centre is up and running, and the issue around same-day bookings should be rectified by the end of the week. Telephone and email bookings increased in Week 2, and site usage will be monitored and reported to the relevant Cabinet Member;
- at a recent presentation by Tom Pursglove, Minister of State for the Home Office, a new Ukraine Extension Scheme was announced, to begin in early 2025, providing 2.5 years of sanctuary for Ukrainians currently living in the UK, retaining their rights and entitlements. Notes will be shared with Members, via Democratic Services;
- following positive tenant consultation, the decision to wind up CBH as a company will continue and move forward with the transfer of housing services back to CBC. The tenant consultation demonstrated that residents understand the reasons, and provided valuable feedback. Thanks to Overview and Scrutiny and the Scrutiny Task Group for continuing to support and oversee the process; the transfer of staff is set for 01 July, and CBH customers will notice very little change. Members will be kept updated, and tenants will continue to have a strong voice in influencing and shaping services;
- the LGA Peer Review Team revisited the council two weeks ago and was impressed with how much progress had been made in the last nine months around CBH, Golden Valley, place leadership, and our organisational culture,

acknowledging how hard officers work for our communities. She thanked the peer team, councillors and officers for such a positive follow-up visit, with the report anticipated shortly.

Finally, with elections imminent, she wished luck to everyone who is standing, and thanked Members who are not seeking re-election. She invited the four retiring Members, with 56 years' collective service between them, to say a few words.

Councillors Fisher, Wilkinson, Britter and McCloskey thanked residents, officers and fellow Members, saying it had been an honour and a privilege to serve the people of Cheltenham.

7 Public Questions

Three public questions had been received. The written responses were taken as read.

1. Question from Nic Pehkonen to the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay

With the future of Gloucestershire Airport uncertain, what would the thoughts of council members be if the airport was suggested as a potential site for the Geological Disposal Facility with the Cheltenham and Gloucester region joining the ongoing, UK-wide GDF siting process? The airport site broadly seems to meet the above-ground surface area requirements and both road and rail transport links could be seen as favourable.

Cabinet Member response

Thank you for your question.

Whilst I accept not all residents may support Gloucestershire Airport, I do not agree with your opening statement that the future of Gloucestershire Airport is uncertain.

Previous studies have found that there is an economic value from having an operational airport, contributing around 475 FTE jobs and £52m of (Gross Valued added) GVA (economic productivity metric that measures the contribution to an economy) to the local area. Closure of the Airport would see these benefits lost from the local area as there would be no alternative for relocation of operators. If the Airport were to cease operations, this could have detrimental consequences for the ability to attract high value companies to the area, including as part of the 'Golden Valley Development'.

The significant investment in the main runway allowed the strategic decision to be taken to close the rarely used north-south runway (thus saving maintenance costs) and release previously sterilised land for development, now known as the CGX

Business Park. This will enable significant job creation as part of the economic recovery and be realised through private investment.

Both the Leader of Gloucester City Council and I have made it clear that as shareholders we are disposing of our interests in Gloucestershire Airport on the condition that any potential purchaser continues to operate the Airport as a going concern. For that reason and given that commitment upon a sale, I cannot support Gloucestershire Airport being put forward as a potential site for a Geological Disposal Facility.

2. Question from Tess Beck to Cabinet Member for Customer and Regulatory services, Councillor Martin Horwood

In 2020 an Article 4 direction for St Paul's ward came into force, requiring planning permission for conversion of a property from C3 to C4 (HMO) and this was adopted as part of the Local Plan, item HM5.

This policy is badly needed to maintain a community balance and was the outcome of many years of campaigning by the community and their then councillors. HMOs contribute to a transitory community which makes community cohesion difficult. 2021 census data shows one area of St Paul's 50 % of residents have lived there a year or less – a figure rarely seen outside new build developments or halls of residence. HMOs also contribute to greater density of occupation. 2021 census data shows an area of St Paul's, made up largely of 2 bed terraced houses is the most densely occupied area in the whole of Gloucestershire.

The Local Plan policy states that if there are in excess of 10% HMOs within 100m radius of the property, this is grounds for refusal of planning permission for change of use to HMO. The council would carry out and publish biennial surveys of the number of HMOs in the ward to support this. Unfortunately, the council has failed to carry out and publish these surveys. When I last looked, the only record of HMOs published on the council website was the list of licensed HMOs - which make up only a proportion of all HMOs, as not all HMOs are required to be licensed.

This failure to publish survey data has led to the Article 4 Direction/ Policy HM5 being unenforceable as we have seen in the recent appeal decision regarding 6 Marsh Lane. Although the council and people living in the area were aware of over 10% of properties within a 100m radius of the site being HMOS (17/134 = 13%), the only published data was the list of 10 licensed HMOs (10/134 = 7%). This meant that a refusal of planning permission for change of use to HMO was overturned on appeal with the council responsible for all costs, and yet another HMO in an area already judged to be over the 'tipping point' of 10%.

When will the full survey of HMOs in St Paul's ward be published?

Cabinet Member response

The council's Housing Team most recently undertook an HMO survey in May/June last year. The information is used by the council's Planning Officers to determine HMO applications within the St Paul's Ward. The planning team is currently looking

at how to present this information publicly, but is committed to doing this and will do so by June this year.

Supplementary question
Thank you for the response. I and others have been asking this question of our councillors since the appeal on 6 Marsh Lane was allowed mid-December 2023 and it has taken a public question to get an answer. I am disappointed we have to wait until June for the results of the HMO survey to be published – this will be over a year since the survey was carried out, and I assume that while the survey remains unpublished, that the Article 4 HMO policy which I and others campaigned for many years remains unenforceable.

Were the council's officers unaware until it was pointed out by SFP planning consultants and the planning inspectorate, that they would be required to make the results of any HMO survey public for the policy to be enforceable?

Cabinet Member response
Thank you for this supplementary – it is an important issue, and quite a technical question. I do not have the answer to hand but will write to officers and share their response with you.

3. Question from Tess Beck to Cabinet Member for Customer and Regulatory services, Councillor Martin Horwood
The University of Gloucestershire has informed us of their plans to dispose of Hardwick campus at the end of 2025. Residents are concerned about what this will mean for Hardwick Green, a small local greenspace on the corner of Swindon Road and Marsh Lane. This amenity space is much used by residents for recreation and dog walking, and it is also used by the neighbouring Boys Brigade group for outdoor activities.

What can residents do to safeguard this community amenity as a local green space? And will the council support them in this?

Cabinet Member response

Cheltenham Borough Council is proud to have protected a large number of public green spaces and 16 designated Local Green Spaces in our current Cheltenham Plan, adopted in 2020. We reiterated our support for the protection of urban green spaces important to communities in this way in a motion to council passed unanimously on 18 October 2021.

The land at Marsh Lane is privately owned so our policy protecting public green spaces (saved policy GE1) wouldn't have applied and nor would any equivalent future policy. So the best opportunity for strong protection going forward would be designation as a Local Green Space, which is a designation recognised in the National Planning Policy Framework and which applies regardless of ownership. Local Green Spaces are designated during the plan-making process.

The next opportunity to designate new Local Green Spaces will be as part of the Strategic & Local Plan (SLP), our proposed new shared local plan with Tewkesbury and Gloucester. An initial Regulation 18 consultation on the SLP concluded on 12 March and this was an early opportunity to support designation at Marsh Lane. If you missed this deadline, further consultation is planned. The SLP will not reach its final stages for several years. I know a succession of local councillors of all parties in St Paul's have supported retaining this space for community use and this council would strongly support the designation of the land at Marsh Lane if it meets the criteria for a Local Green Space which include demonstrable support from the local community (National Planning Policy Framework 2023, paras 105 & 106). Bear in mind though that all local plans also have to pass public examination and sometimes legal challenge and that designation of Local Green Spaces must also be deemed to be consistent with the planning of sustainable development.

In the meantime, although this land doesn't enjoy any specific protection, current local Policy D3 of the Cheltenham Plan says that "the development of private green areas, private open spaces and private gardens which make a significant contribution to the townscape and environmental quality of Cheltenham will not be permitted". This policy can be cited in objection to any planning application. Each planning application is nevertheless judged on its merits by planning officers and by the planning committee if the application is called in.

Supplementary question
Why did it take submitting a public question to council to get an answer to this question, which I have been asking councillors since early February? I appreciate councillors are busy, but this is one of those occasions when a prompt answer could have enabled more effective action to be taken.

Cabinet Member response
This question puzzles me, as this land was proposed as local greenspace when the Cheltenham Plan was voted through in 2020, supported by a number of councillors. There was a decision around January 2018 which seemed to remove Marsh Lane from the list of local green spaces, for the reason that it was in educational use - this too was slightly puzzling as that is not usually criterion to rule out a local green space designation. The way the designation works is that local green space is only designated during the plan-making process, so the next opportunity to designate this land will be in the Strategic and Local Plan process, which has only just started and is at the very earliest consultation stage in the broadest terms. I have advocated for a number of new local green spaces, including Hardwicke Green, and there is clearly widespread support for this land being designated. The Strategic and Local Plan has to go through the proper process, may be challenged at examination, and may even have a legal challenge, and there is also an assessment process on whether a particular green space meets the criteria set out in the NPPF, but certainly with the level of community and cross-party support, I am hopeful that this is a promising area for designation. A public question wasn't required to establish that – it is a longstanding campaign.

8 Member Questions

Twenty-five Member questions were received.

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

Given this Council's responsibility for cleansing, including street cleaning, what steps does CBC or Ubico take to survey streets and determine which areas need cleaning and how often?

Cabinet Member response:

Street cleansing activities in the borough have been carried out for many years and are based on experience of the needs of the borough year on year such as where we get most leaf fall each year. The schedule of activities supervised and carried out by the Ubico crews is of course adjusted annually to meet the differing challenges presented. These challenges come in many forms including climate change and different and extreme weather patterns; peaks in footfall from visitors to our very successful festivals at different times of the year along with unexpected change for us all such as COVID-19.

The Council works closely with Ubico to monitor street cleansing activities across the borough and this happens as often as daily when needed such as over the recent horse racing festival. As part of the digital transformation work taking place within both the Council and Ubico, we will be seeking to further review how best we can continue to deliver high services standards for our residents within the resources available.

Supplementary question

This is an issue about which people feel very strongly. Would the Cabinet Member consider inviting each councillor to nominate one or two roads in need of attention in their own ward to be included in the street cleaning programme?

Cabinet Member response

Thank you for this interesting suggestion. I will follow it up.

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

Can the Cabinet Member state if Cheltenham Borough Council has a Tourism Strategy beyond our Festivals?

Cabinet Member response:

Thank you for your question. The last Tourism Strategy covered the period 2017-2022. Since that time, there has been a national re-structure of tourism provision which has led to the creation of Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEP) nationally https://www.visitbritain.org/resources-destination-partners/local-visitor-economy-partnership-lvep-programme

Cheltenham Borough Council is now a partner in the CotswoldsPlus LVEP alongside Cotswolds Tourism, Visit Gloucester, Visit Dean Wye, Stroud and Tewkesbury. The LVEP works to a board-approved service plan and is currently developing a refreshed destination management plan for the region. Once this is completed, this will inform the next steps for potential development of a new tourism strategy for the council.

The Place Marketing and Inward Investment service at the council holds overall responsibility for destination marketing and management and this was the subject of a presentation at Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 26 February 2024. Please see the report here for more information about the comprehensive programme of tourism and town marketing carried out by the team: https://democracy.cheltenham.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=267&MId=3676&Ver=4

Supplementary question

It is good to hear that a tourism strategy is on the way. When might it a full strategy be in place and what resources will be behind it?

Cabinet Member response

The instruction from government departments was to follow national best practice, to set up a regional or sub-regional group, and the LVEP referenced in the response is currently meeting to develop that strategy. The terms of reference have been agreed, as have the initial steps towards that strategy, and I expect the strategy to be in place some time after the election.

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

Can the Cabinet Member give us a detailed profit and loss account for the recent Ice Rink in Imperial Gardens?

Cabinet Member response:

Thank you for your question. Cheltenham Ice Rink was located in Imperial Gardens from Friday 17 November to Monday 1 January. It welcomed over 30,000 skaters, including 600 free tickets given to local residents via the No Child Left Behind Scheme. The ice rink was clearly successful in influencing visits and bringing new

money into the town centre during the Christmas period, an important time for local businesses. An independent analysis of the economic impact of the event showed the following:

- A total of £1.6m was spent in Cheltenham by all those visiting the ice rink, £860,000 of which would not have occurred without the presence of the ice rink.
- A total of £1.2m additional business turnover occurred in Cheltenham as a result of the presence of the ice rink (indirect and induced). This is new money that would not have occurred without the ice rink being in place. This additional money supports 13 FTE jobs or 17 estimated actual jobs in the town.
- 83% of all those who had visited Cheltenham Ice Rink said it had been the main reason for their visit to Cheltenham / coming into the town.

In addition to this, the innovative approach to power supply developed by the event team and ice rink partners meant the event used only 12.7% of the fuel and reduced carbon dioxide equivalent emissions by 98.7%, when compared to the town's 2021 ice rink.

For a number of reasons, which will be set out in detail in a report to the April Cabinet meeting, in 2023/24 expenditure exceeded income, requiring an investment by the council of £74,276. However, this does not take into account the wider economic benefits I've already mentioned, nor the impact on our own car park income. The economic impact analysis of the event shows a return on investment of approximately £11.50 per £1.00 invested by the council.

Supplementary question

This is quite a fuzzy answer. Do you have any idea when the alternative power supply for anything in the Gardens, such as the wheel and the ice-rink, might be in place or when the electricity might be connected?

Cabinet Member response

The delivery of that infrastructure is not within my portfolio – the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets will know more and will be happy to send an update – but basically this is in the hands of the national grid, who must work out the technical side. This is a complex process and requires many checks and balances.

4. Question from Councillor Diggory Seacome to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Well-being, Councillor Max Wilkinson

Is there a future for Tourism, as the rather forlorn Tourist Information pod outside Marks & Spencer, which is, as we have been informed, only open at weekends. Visitors do visit Cheltenham in the week as well, and deserve a better service.

Cabinet Member response:

I would like to thank Cllr Seacome for his question and remind him or reassure him that Tourism Information is still available in the Municipal Offices on weekdays. Town tourism literature is also available from local tourist information points at venues around the town seven days a week, including the train station and local businesses.

The Marketing Cheltenham team have begun a programme of measures to increase the access to tourist information for visitors to the town, with actions including:

- A programme of training courses for customer facing staff in local businesses to equip them with knowledge about Cheltenham's offer to support visitors.
- Increasing the scope of places where tourist information literature can be accessed via new literature stands, new venues, and updated marketing collateral.
- Targeted promotional activity in sites around the town to highlight the useful information available on the Visit Cheltenham website.

In response to the question about whether there is a future for tourism, I would draw Cllr Seacome's attention to the recent Overview and Scrutiny report presented to the committee which highlights a comprehensive programme of activity to support tourism and town marketing being carried out by the council team and partners. Indeed, the analysis of visitor data shows that visitor numbers are increasing and are almost back to pre-Covid levels, which is in line with, if not slightly ahead of, the rest of the country.

Supplementary question

The Cabinet Member mentions that tourism information is available at the Municipal Offices – is he suggesting that those council officers at the reception desk answer questions? It is not their job and they do not have the appropriate depth of knowledge.

Cabinet Member response

Information available in the reception area provides answers to a range of questions, including contact details, phone numbers etc.

5. Question from Councillor Diggory Seacome to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Well-being, Councillor Max Wilkinson

It was my understanding that the Cheltenham Trust, initially hived off from CBC, was to be self-supporting. I notice that it has just been given another £400,000 just to keep going. It has not done the local arts community any favours by raising hire charges for the Town Hall and Pump Room to a level they cannot contemplate, thereby losing income. Can you not persuade the Trust to re-instate the old 'local charity rate'?

Cabinet Member response:

The Cheltenham Trust was set up to ensure that this town could retain, in public ownership, assets such as the Town Hall, Pittville Pump Room, Leisure at

Cheltenham, The Wilson and Prince of Wales Stadium. Many other authorities, subject to the level of cuts we have received from Westminster, would have sold off or shut down such buildings. This authority has taken a different approach. As Cllr Seacome is aware, arts and culture has throughout its history required public subsidy. The Cheltenham Trust delivers important services for this town and receives a management fee accordingly from this council.

However, the reality of running those buildings is that in addition to the management fee, this authority pays utility bills which are forecast to be £1.43m in 2023/24. The level of fees the Trust charges for hires is a matter for the Trust management and I would urge Cllr Seacome to raise these issues with the Trust. But he should be under no illusion, this town has suffered huge cuts to its income as a result of his party's decisions in Westminster. Had we not experienced those cuts, neither the Council, nor the Trust, would be having these discussions.

6. Question from Councillor Diggory Seacome to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Well-being, Councillor Max Wilkinson

What has the Cheltenham Culture Board achieved in its short existence?

Cabinet Member response:

Thank you for the question.

Cheltenham Culture Board was set up to connect the cultural sectors together and to take on the role of producing the cultural strategy for Cheltenham.

The board's first meeting was in July 2021 and since then, it has made significant headway in building a strong alliance across Cheltenham's cultural and creative communities and there is excitement about its role to advocate that culture and creativity should be central to the economic and social life of Cheltenham.

The aim of the Culture Board is to set and deliver a cultural strategy for Cheltenham which makes demonstrable progress towards the Board's longer-term vision for the town. The strategy was endorsed by Cabinet in April 2023.

Below is an update against each of the six objectives of the strategy.

Objective	**Progress**
Forge partnerships and collaboration across the heritage, cultural and digital sectors.	The board has: • Established action groups to take forward the objectives of the strategy and continues to engage with other groups such as Cheltenham Arts Network and Cheltenham Heritage Network; • Facilitated supportive relationships between board

	members (e.g. volunteers and venues being shared between cultural organisations, support for fundraising, and scoping ideas for cost saving and joint marketing); • Facilitated a successful bid to Arts Council England for Holst 150 celebrations to take place over the summer of 2024 – with £30k being secured; • Facilitated engagement regarding the Golden Valley development's social value plans; and • Hosted a funding session with the SW Director of Arts Council England. In addition, in the discussions about the future of the Lansdown Art Studios, the culture strategy, which notes that the town has a shortage of artist studio space, was used as a key principle to inform the council's approach to the planning matter
Use culture and creativity to improve the life chances of our young people.	The board has: • Developed work experience opportunities for University of Gloucestershire students generated by Cheltenham Festivals and the Playhouse; • Formed a School and Education Group action group to coordinate experiences and participatory opportunities for young people via the Cheltenham Education Partnership.
Promote equity of opportunity to help build inclusive and creative communities.	The board has: • Facilitated the development of a doughnut Toolkit (based on doughnut economics model) as a leading cultural accessibility framework and developed working relationships with Creative United, Drake Music, Inclusive Music Consortium
Celebrate and nurture our community, grass-roots creative talents and ambitions.	The board has: • Supported the establishment of Cheltenham Arts Network which was set up in January 2023 as a new cross art-form information network for practitioners and arts organisers in the town; and • Provided ongoing fundraising support to help generate funds for Cheltenham Paint Festival.
Drive our visitor economy and wider place brand.	The board has: • Coordinated the planning and delivery of digital delivery platforms to support our visitor strategy

	via Visit Cheltenham, Chelt Open Studios, Cheltenham BID and Cynam; and • Established a working group of Cheltenham stakeholders to identify ways to celebrate and communicate the unique cultural identity of Cheltenham and sense of place. The group plan to use their influence and connections to build cultural networks, promote opportunities and increase audiences for cultural organisations. The first project the group is working on is the promotion and celebration of the 150th birthday of Gustav Holst in 2024. This presents an opportunity to highlight what can be achieved if partners work together on a common goal.
Use culture, creativity and innovation to contribute to the Cheltenham Zero and work collectively to address the climate emergency.	The board has: • Established a sustainability working group that is developing a strategy for the culture board to work collectively towards Cheltenham Zero and shared targets; and • Organised and hosted a Cycle Hub network meeting.

7. Question from Councillor Wendy Flynn to Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries

Have there been any discussions over the last 12 months about closing the Swindon Lane Recycling Centre? If so, what is the predicted saving on an annual basis?

Cabinet Member response:

I would like to thank Cllr Flynn for her question. Whilst there is a need to find significant savings on the council's spend on environmental services in the borough, there have been no discussions about closing the Swindon Road Household Recycling Centre in

the last 12 months. It should be noted however that Cheltenham are the only district Council in the UK to still provide a designated Recycling Centre for our residents.

Supplementary question

Are the Liberal Democrats committed to keeping the Household Recycling Centre open for at least two years if they remain in control after the May election?

Cabinet Member response

The council is committed to the Household Recycling Centre – we are the only council in the district to have one – but we cannot predict what central government

has planned financially or what may happen with the economy. We would like to keep it open but can provide no guarantee at this time.

8. Question from Councillor Wendy Flynn to Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries

How much is the predicted saving over 4 years from bringing in a booking system for the Household Recycling Centre?

Cabinet Member response:

I would like to thank Cllr Flynn for her question. You will be aware that on Monday 4 March we launched a new booking system for the Household Recycling Centre on Swindon Road. The decision was made to improve customer experience and because of the positive customer feedback from other Recycling Centres which already have booking systems in place.

As part of its digital transformation, the Council, working with Ubico, is seeking to implement digital technology to improve services to our customers. Although this may result in reduced costs of running the site, financial savings are not the main objective of the changes introduced.

Any financial benefits that are delivered will be monitored and reported at year end. The booking system is intended to improve access to the site for our residents by avoiding cars idling on the road before entering the site. This will not only reduce queueing time, particularly at peak times but also reduce the amount of CO2 released in the area as part of our corporate priority of making Cheltenham net zero by 2030.

Supplementary question
Can the Cabinet Member give assurance that the number of booking slots available won't be restricted over time, forcing people to use the county sites more often and this give weight to an argument to close the Swindon Road site?

Cabinet Member response
I'm not aware of this entering anyone's thought processes so far so can provide that assurance.

9. Question from Councillor Wendy Flynn to Cabinet Member for Cyber, Regeneration and Commercial Income, Councillor Mike Collins

In response to a question that I asked the Cabinet Member for Cyber, Regeneration and Commercial Income on 20/12/2022, I was told that 35% affordable housing was included in the financial modelling for the Golden Valley Development, with 70% social rented and 30% Affordable Home Ownership. Is this still the case? If not, what is the current ambition?

Cabinet Member response:

Thank you Councillor Flynn for your question.

You may recall that I sought to differentiate between the separate roles of the Council.

In its capacity as landowner, the Council, in partnership with development partner HBD, is still seeking to bring forward development that reflects the housing policy requirements.

The 35% affordable housing ambition is still currently included in the financial modelling for the project and we hope to maintain this as the project develops.

As I also said previously the eventual housing and tenure mix will still need to be considered in the light of the prevailing economic climate when each of the development plots that make up the whole of the site comes forward. This is a 10 year plus project.

We are at the first stage of this process with the submission of our outline planning applications. Tenure mix has not yet been defined and this remains an ongoing conversation between HBD and the Housing Strategy team. It will ultimately be resolved as part of the Section 106 discussions relating to these planning applications.

Whilst Social Rent is considered to be the most affordable tenure, it also has the most negative impact on land value. The ultimate tenure mix on the project will therefore need to be considered from multiple viewpoints, including from a viability perspective.

As a starting point we would expect the Council's Housing Strategy and Enabling Team to seek a mix of 70% social rented; 30% affordable home ownership. For clarity this means that of the rented homes that we expect to see delivered as affordable housing on this development, 100% of them would be let as a social rent.

In the event that there are financial viability issues (and we are satisfied this has been independently tested) then Officers would have to review our tenure mix. In the first instance, Officers would still prioritise delivering social rent across those homes where affordability is likely to be most acute – i.e. on 1 bedroom homes and 4 bedroom homes or larger, with the remaining rented homes being provided as Affordable Rent.

Supplementary question

From the answer it looks like the current ambition is still 35% affordable housing with 70% social rented, but the Cabinet Member has stated that social rented housing has the most negative impact on land value. Is he therefore saying that having poor people living in the new development will affect the council's return on investments and its decision on the number of social rent units that will be built?

Cabinet Member response

Thanks for the question. I provided a full comprehensive and factual answer, including the reference to this being a 10-year planned project. To make cast iron commitment on the exact affordable housing mix would be irresponsible and I am not prepared to do that.

10. Question from Councillor Wendy Flynn to Cabinet Member for Customer and Regulatory Services, Councillor Martin Horwood

The Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust is asking Gloucester and Cheltenham councils to declare a nature emergency. Tewkesbury has already declared one. A nature emergency declaration will help the three Councils deliver on:

- Building sustainable economies that protect nature and not harm it.
- Making sure our town centres are vibrant, with opportunities for people to experience wildlife.
- Promoting healthy communities through connection to the outdoors.

Given the short timescale for the Strategic and Local Plan, and the huge importance of protecting nature, would the cabinet member declare a nature emergency, please?

Cabinet Member response:

Councillor Horwood submitted a motion to declare a nature emergency for consideration on 18th March, in recognition of the fact that UK is one of the world's most nature-depleted countries, in the bottom 10% globally. The motion recognises the work that has already been undertaken by the Council and its partners, such as the Gloucestershire Nature Partnership and the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust. Looking forward, it commits to embed nature's recovery at the heart of all strategic plans, policy areas and decision-making processes, including the forthcoming Cheltenham, Gloucester & Tewkesbury Strategic & Local Plan. It contains, moreover, a pledge to develop and agree on an evidence-based strategy and action plan for nature's recovery by 2030, setting clear strategic and measurable goals, alongside an assurance to provide a report on delivery against these targets.

Supplementary question

After submitting my question, I discovered that there was a LibDem motion coming in on the nature emergency which I hadn't seen at that point. I subsequently emailed the Leader, requesting to second the motion; the response didn't answer the question, and a second email received no response. I'm very keen for any motion on the nature emergency to be fully cross party, and therefore ask the Cabinet Member for Customer and Regulatory Services to allow me to second his motion.

Cabinet Member response (Leader)

I didn't respond to the second email as you had decided to ask this question in any event. In terms of the seconder, this will be brought out in debate, but at this point in time, we have two very passionate people proposing and seconding the motion. It is not that we don't want to do it cross-party but the two LibDems are very keen to bring it forward; everyone received the email requesting councillors to do so, and the LibDems responded immediately. I cannot see any member not wanting to support this motion.

11. Question from Councillor Wendy Flynn to Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries

The cost of living and fuel poverty crisis have led to many owner occupiers not being able to adequately heat or maintain their homes. What help does the council offer to owner occupiers on low incomes to retrofit or maintain their homes?

Cabinet Member response:

Thank you for the question.

Cheltenham Borough Council, along with the six other councils in Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire, is working in partnership with Seven Wye Energy Agency (SWEA) to run the Warm and Well scheme, offering free energy advice to residents in the county.

As well as their energy adviceline, SWEA has dedicated Energy Advocates who work across the county to help people struggling with their energy bills. They hold regular drop ins, work with local community groups and carry out home visits, to tailor their support to residents' needs and they can support residents with a range of issues including:

• Managing fuel debt and large energy bills

• Grant funding for energy efficiency improvements

• Home visits to understand how you use energy at home, and how to reduce it

• Access to further local support services where necessary

SWEA, through the Warm and Well scheme, also work to secure additional funding to meet the scheme's aims and objectives including funding opportunities that arise from regional, national and European sources and particularly from utility providers.

In addition, SWEA also develop and deliver training programmes for frontline community workers from a range of local services and voluntary groups. This helps enable them to understand and recognise issues relating to fuel poverty, especially with regard to the effect on health, and in turn help target help to those in need.

However, there is so much more that we as a council could do with the right government support, equally government could take a range of actions which would alleviate fuel poverty and provide energy security for us all …. Such as….

A. Remove restrictions on new solar and wind to accelerate the deployment of renewable power, providing more funding, and building more interconnectors to guarantee security of supply.

B. Convert the Energy Profits Levy into a 40% windfall tax and remove the associated investment allowance, with both changes backdated to October 2021, thus ensuring that gas and oil producers pay their fair share.

C. Allocate to the development of Marine Energy those revenues from Crown Estates' offshore wind licensing that are to be returned to the Exchequer by HM King Charles III for use in the public interest.

D. Establish a not-for-profit company, British Marine Energy, with a task force to plan a series of Tidal Range Energy schemes commencing with a "Pathfinder" project.

E. Ensure that the Electricity Generator Levy has allowances that permit renewable generators to reinvest their excess profits in new projects.

F. Introduce a one-off levy on the bonuses awarded to oil and gas executives, similar to the bankers' bonuses tax in 2009/10 in the aftermath of the financial crisis which taxed bank bonuses over £25,000 at 50%.

G. Cut the Energy Price Guarantee to £1,971 for the average household until April 2024 or average prices drop below that level, whichever is soonest.

H. Continue the existing Business Energy Bill Relief Scheme for a further six months from April.

I. Empower local authorities to support the expansion community and decentralised energy, including by supporting the Local Electricity Bill in Parliament, reducing access costs for grid connections and reforming the energy network to permit local energy grids.

J. Undertake an emergency programme to insulate all Britain's homes by 2030, with a central role in delivering this programme being taken by local authorities, cutting emissions and fuel bills and ending fuel poverty, with non-domestic buildings following.

K. Support households to cut their bills by:

    i. Providing free retrofits for low-income homes.

    ii. Piloting a new subsidised Energy-Saving Homes scheme.

    iii. Graduating Stamp Duty Land Tax by the energy rating of the property.

    iv. Giving councils the powers to develop community energy-saving projects, including delivering housing energy efficiency improvements street by street, which cuts costs.

    v. Allow homeowners to offset spending on insulation, low-carbon heat sources, EV charging points and climate adaptation measures against their income tax bills.

L. Establish a Net Zero Delivery Authority sponsored jointly by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and the Treasury to oversee the delivery of Net Zero; coordinate cross departmental coordination; and facilitate the devolution of powers and resources to local governments.

M. Require all new homes and non-domestic buildings to be built to a zero-carbon standard immediately, and progressively increasing standards as technology improves.

N. Increase minimum energy efficiency standards for privately rented properties and remove the cost cap on improvements - aiming for rented properties to be minimum EPC Band C by 2025 and minimum EPC Band B by 2030 where feasible.

O. Appoint Warm Homes and Community Energy tsars in central government to champion these causes.

P. Accelerate the current Review of Electricity Market Arrangements process to reform energy markets to ensure that households and businesses benefit from the expansion in low-cost renewables, including by:

i. Decoupling electricity prices from the wholesale gas price.

ii. Changing how the standing charge works.

iii. Ending the higher costs for prepayment meter customers and giving Ministers the power to suspend the installation of prepayment meters.

iv. Considering a social tariff for the most vulnerable.

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ii. Changing how the standing charge works.

iii. Ending the higher costs for prepayment meter customers and giving Ministers the power to suspend the installation of prepayment meters.

iv. Considering a social tariff for the most vulnerable.

Supplementary question

Thanks for the very long response to this question, but the answer addresses what the government could do, not what this council does, which on the face of it seems very little. Previously the council had a housing renewal policy which offered grants and loans; government guidance on this said that the government would consider that an authority was failing in its duty as a housing enabler and in its responsibility to consider the condition of the local private sector stock if it did not make some provision for private sector housing assistance. Does the council have a current housing renewal policy, previously the framework through which council could provide money for health and safety loans for people living in private sector accommodation? If so, where can I find it?

Cabinet Member response

I provided comprehensive answer and could have provided a response to the supplementary question if it had been included. The reason why that policy has not been updated is probably down to government funding as alluded to in my answer. It is one of the comprehensive things we or the government could do – fuel poverty is a

really important topic, with people in our town choosing between eating and heating, which is a really sad state of affairs. I will ask officers if we still have the policy alluded to and will provide Councillor Flynn with a copy, if it is still valid.

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

Could the Cabinet Member give an update on the latest costings for the emergency works on the Pittville Pump Room and what additional expenditure is expected?

Cabinet Member response:

I thank Cllr Fifield for his question. The total cost of the remedial works at the Pittville Pump Room is £56,195 including the scaffolding hire to access the plasterwork. No additional expenditure is expected.

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

Could the Cabinet Member provide the amount of lost revenue caused by the emergency works and were cancelled bookings completely refunded?

Cabinet Member response:

I thank Cllr Fifield for his question. Questions about the finances of The Cheltenham Trust should be directed to the Trust.

Supplementary question

I am surprised by the abruptness of the answer, and concerned that, as we are still financially liable for the Cheltenham Trust, have you had any conversations about that particular topic?

Cabinet Member response

There have been discussions, but it would not be right for the council to micro-manage the day-to-day revenue flows of the Cheltenham Trust – that is not how our management agreement with the Cheltenham Trust works.

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

Could the member for Cabinet Member please provide a date for when they expect the Pump Room to be reopened?

Cabinet Member response:

I thank Cllr Fifield for his question. As reported in our response to a question from Cllr Nelson at the February Council meeting, the works were due to be completed and the building made fully available to the Cheltenham Trust on Friday 8 March in

advance of their busy Cheltenham Festival events. I am very pleased to report that this deadline was achieved, and the building was handed back to the Trust on Thursday 7 March. The Council understands the importance of Festival week for the town's economy and officers have worked hard with staff at the Trust to ensure that they can benefit from what is arguably the most important week of the year for any business.

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

Could the Cabinet Member please provide an update on whether bookings that have been cancelled as part of the works done have been provided support to find alternative bookings?

Cabinet Member response:

I assume Cllr Fifield is referring to bookings made at the Pittville Pump Room. Bookings are managed by The Cheltenham Trust, as he is aware. Cllr Fifield should therefore direct his question to The Cheltenham Trust.

Supplementary question

I am just asking for information, not for the Cabinet Member to make any executive decision. I have had lots of residents ask and say they have had events cancelled at the Pump Room, and would just like to know if there has been any consideration for the lost revenue which would be useful if emergency works were to happen again.

Cabinet Member response

The response is the same as for the previous supplementary question – we do not manage the Trust's day-to-day business and this is a matter for them.

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

Could the Cabinet Member please confirm whether there are any covenants on the land of Idsall Drive Car Park of any form stipulating what the plot can be used for and what those covenants are?

Cabinet Member response:

I thank Cllr Fifield for his question. The only covenant on the land at Idsall Drive car park is any development is limited to no more than one dwelling. There are no other covenants on the land.

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

Could the Cabinet Member confirm how much the council intends to receive from the sale of Idsall Drive Car Park, and whether this money has been earmarked for a particular purpose?

Cabinet Member response:

I thank Cllr Fifield for his question. The expectation on marketing the site for sale was that the Council would receive a minimum of £100,000 and this was reflected in the asking price. I can confirm that following the marketing of the site, offers far exceeded this expectation.

Capital receipts are used by the Council to fund our capital programme, the most recent version being approved by Full Council on 23 February 2024 as well as repaying principal amounts of our borrowing. As you were unable to attend this council meeting, I'm happy to provide the relevant paperwork if needed.

You will recall in November 2020 this Council approved a recovery budget during the pandemic which diverted vital revenue resources to our core services by using the proceeds from the disposal of eight assets to repay debt. Idsall Drive car park was included in this report.

We successfully navigated these financial pressures in 2020/21 and 2021/22 by implementing this strategy and making sure that our services continued to be provided to all residents of Cheltenham at a time of national crisis. We now need to follow through with the funding strategy by disposing of the land in line with the original proposal.

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

Could the Cabinet Member please confirm how many offers were made for Idsall Drive Car Park including the accepted offer?

Cabinet Member response:

I thank Cllr Fifield for his question. The Council received 12 separate offers for Idsall Drive car park.

19. Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Well-being, Councillor Max Wilkinson

The recent announcement (Echo Feb 22nd), regarding future development of Cavendish House by owners Canada Life, is welcome news indeed.

The demise of the Promenade and particularly Cavendish House has, for a long time now, been the subject of much discussion and speculation along with potential plans to rejuvenate the town centre. Why has it taken so long to get to this stage? Residents, BID and many others have long seen (certainly before the sale of House of Fraser to Sports Direct in August 2018), and voiced, the obvious opportunity to

redevelop Cavendish House to provide much needed residential space . Why was this opportunity not actioned sooner?

Cabinet Member response:

I would like to thank Cllr Nelson for this question and assure her that this authority has been engaged with discussions with Canada Life, the owners of Cavendish House, for some time. However, while the council can offer support, decisions about the future of the building are the responsibility of Canada Life, albeit subject to achieving planning permission.

The planning team is currently in pre application engagement with the agent representing Canada Life with the expectation that an application will be presented shortly. This application has the opportunity to bring forward a mixed-use scheme reflecting the priorities of our corporate plan in respect of regeneration and investment in the town centre.

20. Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Well-being, Councillor Max Wilkinson

Cheltenham has many landmark tourist attractions including Montpellier and Imperial Gardens, The Holst Museum, The Wilson, The Old Court House, The Town Hall, The Everyman Theatre, Pittville Park etc etc - Why was the decision taken to remove the traditional black signposts with gold lettering? These were used to clearly direct visitors where they may want to go and are still popular and a proven success in

other Gloucestershire visitor destinations such as Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Bourton.

Cabinet Member response:

The work to remove the old black and gold signs commencing in 2013, was part of a wider wayfinding strategy to deliver an array of visitor friendly signs, maps and tourist information around the town centre after extensive consultation with key stakeholders, including Gloucestershire County Council. Well received on delivery, the project was generally felt to deliver on its objective to provide well placed signage to helpfully locate tourists and direct them accurately across the town, including helpful information on walking time to reach their destination.

21. Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries

How much consultation and discussion takes place with other towns that are seen to be thriving "destinations" for visitors (eg Stratford, Worcester, Marlborough) to ascertain how they set their parking charges and policies to achieve this? There are many other towns who have better parking facilities and while we all agree more should be done to reduce dependence on the car, the reality is that for visitors to

Cheltenham, that appears to be their preferred option. After all, not everyone has access to alternative means of transport. Here in Cheltenham car park spaces are reducing, it can be increasingly difficult to park in the town and when one does find a space, charges are prohibitively high.

Cabinet member response:

I thank Cllr Nelson for her question. You will be aware that in March 2023 the Council undertook a consultation on the car parking order to increase our car parking charges. This followed a period of five years where there were no increases in our charging schedule. The proposal which was eventually adopted by the Council was informed by customer usage of our car parks to encourage usage in some of our car parks which were not as popular and reduce queuing in others. This has also helped to increase footfall for those businesses situated nearby to some of the car parks which had lower usage.

Although other destinations were used to inform our proposal, there were more local factors which led to the fees being increased in some car parks more than others. Since the new fees and charges were introduced, we have not seen a fall in the usage of our car parks and in particular have seen increased use during busy school holiday periods. Currently there is sufficient capacity within our car parks to meet current demand, however this will need monitoring.

22. Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries

To facilitate and encourage Cheltenham residents to support the town centre more, could a "first half hour free" option be introduced in Borough town centre car parks?

Cabinet Member response:

I thank Cllr Nelson for her question. Supporting the economic growth and recovery of our town has been a keen focus for the Council since the approval of the recovery budget in November 2020. We have set aside budget underspends for key projects and events which have brought in both residents and visitors to the town centre.

However, we have been mindful that pre pandemic budgets placed significant reliance on car parking income to fund spending – an assumption which was not aligned to our goals around carbon net zero for our town. It is for this reason that in 2021/22 the car parking income budgets were reviewed and other sources of income and investment were sought to bridge the gap.

The proposal of a first half hour free would not only be extremely difficult and costly to enforce but would also be contrary to this principal of reducing our reliance on vehicles coming into the town centre.

Supplementary question

I appreciate what you say about it being extremely difficult to enforce free half-hour parking slots in the town centre to encourage people into the town, and accept that we are trying to encourage people out of their cars, but would you agree to carry out feasibility to put a free 30-minute or 45-minute slot in the afternoon at a fixed time to allow mothers needing one or two things? This might help shops in the town centre as well.

Cabinet Member response

I take on board what you are saying. There is a car parking strategy review and I will feed your comments into it, but I am cautious of free half-hours, due to cost of implementation against actual benefits to the town itself.

23. Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to Cabinet Member for the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay

We know the MX project has had to overcome various challenges in its development and was originally due to be completed in summer 2022 at a cost of £5.2m. Last June, we heard the total spend would be over £8.3m with completion "early 2024". When **will** the MX be completed?

Cabinet Member response:

Thank you Councillor Nelson for the question. As Cllr Nelson knows, CBC is not the developer for the MX and the responsibility for construction and completing the building rests with Workshop Cheltenham. The current estimate on the construction programme provided by Workshop Cheltenham is that the MX will be completed on the 26 April 2024. Workshop Cheltenham also report that this date is dependent on some factors that are outside of the control of the developer, for example, if there was extreme weather that delayed external works.

24. Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Well-being, Councillor Max Wilkinson

Given the delay with the completion of the MX project, why weren't the businesses who will potentially be occupying the MX space when completed, encouraged into the empty sites on the Promenade?

Cabinet Member response:

Thank you to Councillor Nelson for her question. The vision for the MX operated by Workshop Group/Plexal is that it will be another important facility which will support and help to further enhance Cheltenham’s position as a thriving tech cluster and act

as a bridge to support the Golden Valley and the National Cyber Innovation Centre . The building aims to bring together public sector with micro, SMEs and large companies working in cyber tech and adjacent technologies to deliver growth and innovation. This is combined with using the new event space to build Cheltenham's vibrant cultural offer in the heart of our town.

I do not know which specific vacant units Cllr Nelson is referring to on the Promenade but, outside of the Municipal Offices, the Council does not have ownership of units on the Promenade so cannot influence negotiations with occupiers and secondly, vacant retail units tend not suitable for tech businesses to occupy, nor can retail units replicate the compelling offer at the MX.

25. Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Well-being, Councillor Max Wilkinson

What measures are CBC taking to encourage more "Pop Ups" into the empty units on the Promenade?

Cabinet Member response:

I would like to thank Cllr Nelson for this question. I am sure she will be aware of the Cheltenham Vacant Units Action Plan, with its key objectives being to:

- Understand the current and ongoing position of empty shops in the town centre.
- Encourage the conversion of empty and underused space to maximise brownfield residential development.
- Take enforcement against unsightly empty premises to clear up our town centre.
- Work with landlords, agents, and town centre businesses to ensure that stakeholders understand key issues facing town centre development.
- Encourage flexibility of the planning system and future strategic planning to bring more residential accommodation to the town centre.
- Identify opportunities for meanwhile use where appropriate.
- Highlight opportunities for regeneration and recognise the value of key development sites within the town acting as a catalyst for lasting change.

The recommendations within that report, and the associated action plan, provide the answers she seeks. Work is underway with stakeholders including Cheltenham BID, to ensure that Cheltenham continues to be an attractive destination for visitors, residents and investors.

9 Consideration of the Petition - Stop the Sale of Idsall Drive Car Park

As petition organiser, Councillor Fifield thanked all who had signed it, Prestbury ward Councillors Bassett-Smith and Smith, and everyone in the public gallery. He said the car park is crucial to Prestbury local community and its likely sale price of £100k

represents a very small percentage of the council's overall budget. The petition requests that the sale be put on hold, pending a review by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

In response to Members' questions, officers confirmed that an extensive survey was carried out in summer and autumn 2022, at various times throughout the day and across weekdays and weekends. Councillor Fifield confirmed that his reference to the LibDem administration being strapped for cash yet increasing allowances to its own party concerned the two Cabinet posts over and above the average for comparable councils.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets said the sale of the car park was complete, and necessitated by the council having to be proactive in its management of the town's assets as a result of government cuts in local authority funding. The sale has been on the agenda for three years, but neither Councillor Fifield nor Prestbury parish councillors had communicated with him about it for many months. He said the democratic process has been followed to the letter, and the parish council has declined the council's offer to sell the car park at a much-reduced rate on several occasions.

For clarity, the Monitoring Officer pointed out that contracts have been exchanged but the sale is not complete.

In debate, Members made the following points:

- the car park is an important and well-used part of the village, for residents, business-owners and visitors;
- the government has been reducing funding to local councils since 2016; the decision to monetise assets is a direct result;
- the petition only asks for Overview and Scrutiny Committee, chaired by an opposition party member, to look at the matter more closely;
- it appears that contracts were exchanged after the petition was presented, riding roughshod over the process – this is disgraceful, and shows that the administration doesn't care about the voices of communities. It is clearly a fait accompli, and a bad day for Cheltenham and Prestbury.

As a point of clarification, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets said that an offer had already been accepted when the petition was formally submitted to Council on 23 February.

The debate continued:

- in an ideal world, the council would never consider selling off any of its assets but tough decisions such as this one have to be made. Process has been followed, and the council is looking to realise its assets and reduce ongoing liabilities;
- the petition was submitted very late in the day - there have been many opportunities for this since 2020;
- CBC is a well-run local authority, managing its assets in best possible way;

- Prestbury Parish Council declined to buy the car park, and neither of the councillors supporting the petition, both members of Overview and Scrutiny, asked for it to be considered by that committee at any point;
- the petition was sent to Democratic Services on 01 February, and the 750 signatures verified by 06 February, before bidding ended on 09 February; the administration chose to ignore the petition;
- Prestbury could have used the County Council's Build Back Better funding towards the purchase of the car park - Swindon Village is a less wealthy ward than Prestbury, but used the funding to purchase its car park;
- the Parish Council was offered the site for £40k – 60% below the market rate - and the offer now accepted is over three times that, demonstrating that the council went above and beyond the democratic process;
- a recent report to council regarding Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) showed that Prestbury held £118,514k at the beginning and end of the period – it didn't spend any money when the car park negotiations were taking place;
- to present the sale as a LibDem plot to undermine democracy and deny local feeling is wrong; Prestbury Parish Council represents the local community, and the decision to sell was not a last-minute fait accompli foisted on the people of Prestbury.

The Mayor invited Members to vote on the recommendations, which were approved.

RESOLVED THAT:

1. **the detail of the petition presented to Full Council on 23 February 2024 to stop the Council's sale of Idsall Drive car park is noted;**
2. **the activities outlined in Section 4 of this report undertaken by the Council between 2020/21 and 2023/24 which have led to the decision to dispose of the car park are noted;**
3. **the recommendations 1-4 outlined in the petition are rejected and disposal of the site on the open market is continued.**

26 in support
9 in objection

10 Leckhampton with Warden Hill Neighbourhood Plan - Progression to Examination

The Leader introduced the report, highlighting the following points:

- the LibDem council is supportive of neighbourhoods playing a bigger part in decisions which affect them, and happy to implement the policy of Neighbourhood Plans that the party helped introduce in government;
- adopted Neighbourhood Plans become part of the Local Development Framework and a material consideration in planning decisions; this plan is already being quoted as emerging policy by planning inspectors in appeal decisions;

- Neighbourhood Plans have to be consistent with higher level adopted local plans (currently the JCS and Cheltenham Plan) but offer local neighbourhoods an important say in the future of their areas;
- the draft plan includes policies relating to all planning issues, and has already gone through two extensive local consultations and a borough consultation. If approved by Council, it will proceed to examination by a qualified examiner, and be followed by a public referendum for local people in Leckhampton and Warden Hill;
- government support and significant funding is available to support neighbourhood planning, but it has taken years to get the plan to this stage – thanks to parish councillors and volunteers who have made this happen;
- the council wants all neighbourhoods, parished or unparished, to have a greater say in the decisions that affect their lives. We need to reflect on how we can support them all to do that.

There were no Member questions.

A Member thanked the Leader, and confirmed that more than ten years' work that has gone into this plan, involving a lot of scrutiny by the Parish Council and community.

RESOLVED THAT:

- **the Leckhampton with Warden Hill Neighbourhood Plan progresses to examination;**

- **authority is delegated to the Director of Community & Economic Development, in consultation with the Leader to submit the Leckhampton with Warden Hill Neighbourhood Plan along with other prescribed documentation to the examiner.**

11 Capital Non-Treasury Investment, Treasury Management and MRP Strategies and Statements

Presenting his report, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets reminded Members that with ten years' austerity and its commitment to fund discretionary services, the council has taken a route to commercialise operations wherever possible. With the cost of services at £23.6m and income from local taxation and grants equalling around £17.3m, we have to fill a void of £6.3m through trading and investment income. How we use capital and manage investments is essential to make sure we maximise returns to support the General Fund budget, and minimise exposure to the higher cost of borrowing.

He said the documents presented today set out a 12-month plan, including mandatory strategies for local authorities, to be reviewed and approved by Council each year. Together with our Asset Management Strategy, they provide the framework for our capital, asset and investment decisions for the coming year.

Also presented today for approval is the annual minimum revenue provision statement which explains how the repayment of borrowings has been calculated. There has been no significant change to our approach for the coming year, following a final consultation on the regulations which closed in February

There were no questions from Members.

A Member thanked the Cabinet Member for his report, which highlighted the huge amount of detail required for the many difficult financial decisions. She was pleased that £180m was still prioritised for affordable housing and that the council continued on a good path with that strategy.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets gave thanks, as always, to the finance team, who work tirelessly to ensure that CBC is very well financially run.

RESOLVED THAT:

1. **The Capital Strategy 2024/25 at Appendix 2 is approved;**
2. **The Investment Strategy 2024/25 at Appendix 3 is approved;**
3. **The Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2024/25 at Appendix 4 is approved;**
4. **The 2024/25 MRP Statement at Appendix 5 is approved.**

12 Revisions to the Constitution

The Leader was happy to bring some further changes to the Constitution, allowing everyone to understand the various roles held by councillors. At the request of the Constitution Working Group (CWG), the role profiles for councillors have been refined, which is not only encouraged by the Local Government Association but will also be useful during the induction process and for Members considering new roles.

She said the change to the appointment to outside bodies will give greater clarity around the requirements, value and skills of council representatives. Responses were reviewed by the CWG, who requested that the document be amended to identify which bodies require a council appointment under their constitution. The review and amended Constitution Part 5G was approved by CWG in February.

She thanked the CWG and Monitoring Officer for their work.

A Member suggested that the heads of charity listed at paragraph 5.2 are out of date and need to be redrafted – this will be done.

Members raised the following issues:

- the deadline for questions currently closes before papers are published, and should be reconsidered. The Monitoring Officer confirmed that this is on the work plan and will be looked at by CWG after the election;
- the status of some appointments to West Cheltenham Partnership (formerly Hester's Way Partnership) and Pates Foundation needs to be clarified – this was noted and will be taken off line;
- the Twinning Association is now known as The Cheltenham International Partnerships Association.

In response to a Member's question about how and when the list of outside bodies was first created and how new ones can be added, another Member said he was not aware of any changes to the list in his many years as councillor, but suggested that Members could suggest groups for consideration. It was agreed that this would be considered separately.

A Member concluded by saying how great it is that the council supports outside bodies as it does, and long may it continue.

RESOLVED THAT:

1. **the revised Part 5G - Guidance for Councillors Appointed to Represent the Council on Outside Bodies at Appendix 1 is approved;**
2. **the Councillor Role Profiles at Appendix 3 for inclusion in the Constitution is approved;**
3. **authority is delegated to the Monitoring Officer to make the necessary changes to the Constitution to reflect these decisions.**

13 Notices of Motion

Three motions were received.

Motion A

Proposed by: Councillor Martin Horwood

Seconded by: Councillor Richard Pineger

The Nature Emergency

This council:

Declares that there is a nature emergency, **recognising:**

a. **That nature is in long term decline and urgent action must be taken to reverse this, that the UK is one of the world's most nature-depleted countries - in the bottom 10% globally and the worst in the G7 - and with only about half its biodiversity left that it is far below the global average;**

b. **That a thriving natural environment underpins a healthy, prosperous society, that it benefits our physical and mental health, feeds us, cleans our air, moderates urban heat, absorbs carbon, makes towns like Cheltenham beautiful and that its survival and diversity is essential to human life;**
c. **That the nature crisis and the climate emergency are intrinsically linked and that the impacts of the climate crisis drive nature's decline, while restoring nature can help to tackle the climate crisis.**

2. Notes the positive work already begun and planned by this council including:

a. **Policy SD9 of the current Joint Core strategy with Gloucester and Tewkesbury which commits us to protect and enhance biodiversity and to establish and reinforce resilient ecological networks**
b. **The Parks, People & Wildlife green space strategy and the work already undertaken to promote biodiversity in the council's own parks, gardens and cemeteries, watercourses, local Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), woodland, three Local Nature Reserves and other natural areas.**
c. **The 16 Local Green Spaces already designated in the 2020 Cheltenham Plan safeguarding access to nature and ecosystem services for communities in the urban area[1]**
d. **The example set by development plans like the Golden Valley supplementary planning document (SPD) which won the Building with Nature Policy Award**
e. **The establishment, with partners, of the Gloucestershire Nature & Climate Fund to help restore and enhance nature when business and developers cannot meet Biodiversity Net Gain goals entirely on site**
f. **The imminent recruitment of the town's first borough ecologist**
g. **The planned development this year of an Ecology, Nature Recovery & Biodiversity SPD for the whole town**

3. Commits to embed nature's recovery at the heart of all strategic plans, policy areas and decision-making processes, including the forthcoming Cheltenham, Gloucester & Tewkesbury Strategic & Local Plan

4. Having declared a climate emergency in 2019, commits to tackling the climate and nature emergencies together and investing in nature-based solutions to the challenges posed by climate change including mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to increased climate risk such as flooding and extreme summer heat.

5. Develop and agree on an evidence-based strategy and action plan for nature's recovery and report on the progress made, building on the 2007 Cheltenham biodiversity audit and work already begun by the Gloucestershire

Nature Partnership including the Gloucestershire Natural Capital Mapping Project, Gloucestershire's Local Nature Recovery Network, identified Nature Improvement Area and local Strategic Nature Areas.

6. Set clear strategic and measurable goals for nature's recovery by 2030, for example, covering the following areas:

a. **Contributing to the national commitment to protect 30% of land for nature by 2030, in line with the UK's international commitment to biodiversity.**
b. **Increasing space for wildlife and long-term maintenance and expansion of the Nature Recovery Network.**
c. **Reducing pressure on wildlife.**
d. **Improving doorstep access to nature, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds and those wards already identified as having the worst access to nature.**
e. **Supporting communities and businesses to make better decisions and take action to support nature's recovery.**

7. Work with local communities and organisations, including with schools, colleges and young people, to achieve the strategic goals, particularly engaging with disadvantaged and underrepresented sections of society.

8. Work with local communities and organisations to achieve the strategic goals, particularly engaging with disadvantaged and underrepresented sections of society.

In proposing the motion, Councillor Horwood acknowledged the encouragement of Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and LibDem colleagues to bring it forward, and welcomed the support of the Green Party.

He said scientists are clear that global loss of nature and biodiversity poses an existential threat to humankind's future, but there has been less focus of countries like ours that have trashed nature over many centuries. He noted that the council is already taking action to preserve and restore nature in many ways, including work to increase biodiversity, the Gloucestershire Nature and Climate Fund, the Golden Valley SPD, the emerging Ecology, Nature Recovery and Biodiversity SPD, the appointment of a borough ecologist, and the Gloucestershire Natural Capital Mapping survey. He said all of this will help us to set the clear and measurable targets to put nature recovery even more firmly at the heart of all our policy making.

Councillor Pineger, seconding the motion, reserved the right to speak.

In debate, Members welcomed the motion and made the following comments:

- green space is essential for wildlife to thrive, especially in urban settings; despite the need for more homes, we have an obligation to invest, because once lost, these sites, including small pockets in more urban areas, will be gone forever;
- the six local wildlife sites - formerly key wildlife sites – should be included;

- it would be good to know in two or three years' time if the motion has succeeded and fulfilled its aims;
- county councillors can use the Build Back Better fund to support wildlife in their wards;
- more transparency about what the council is already doing around biodiversity would be helpful for residents who want to engage;
- the organiser of Nextdoor Nature, part of the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, has expressed a keen interest in working with planning committees to inform them about wildlife provision.

The Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Street Services highlighted what the council is already doing to protect and promote biodiversity, including sustainable planting, harvesting local wildflower seeds, minimising the use of chemical weedkiller, and planting more trees. He paid tribute to volunteers who undertake much of this work.

Councillor Nelson proposed an amendment to Paragraph 2A, adding the words: '…ecological networks, *including local wildlife sites'***.** Councillors Horwood and Pineger were happy to accept the amendment.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Pineger thanked everyone who spoke, and welcomed all that the council is doing already to increase biodiversity in green spaces all around the town. He said the motion is not only for Cheltenham, but will also send a signal to other councils throughout the UK, and contribute as the movement builds across Europe and the rest of the world.

MOTION A CARRIED, with Councillor Nelson's amendment to Paragraph 2A, adding the words: '…ecological networks, *including local wildlife sites'*

Unanimous

Motion B

Proposed by: Councillor Flo Clucas
Seconded by: Councillor Paul Baker

Special needs in schools

Our schools in Cheltenham are not receiving the full entitlement of assistance from County for children with special needs. Those children, staff and other pupils are suffering as a result.

This Council:

Calls for the Leader to contact the Cabinet Member at GCC for information and response to children's needs in schools, as set out below:

1. Council is concerned that in some of our schools in Cheltenham, those children with special educational needs, and those children with particular

issues in relation to the speaking and understanding of English, are not receiving the help and support they need.

2. Our children with special educational needs – an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) - are entitled to such help.

As the County Council itself states:

3. ´An Education, Health and Care Plan is a statutory plan that has replaced a Statement of SEN. An EHC Plan may be needed when a child or young person's educational needs cannot be met with the existing additional resource already delegated to the school. The Local Authority assess this need based on the evidence provided. '

4.Too many of our children who have such needs are being failed by a system, which is grossly underfunded by central government. As a consequence, additional stress and workload is being placed on teachers and teaching assistants and their desire to remain in the service and is adversely impacting those children who are already disadvantaged, their parents and carers.

5. In addition, in some schools, young children are being asked to act as translators, as assistance is not being provided by the County to those whose first language is not English and who have little or no English language ability.

6. Council requests that the Leader writes to the Cabinet Member responsible at Gloucestershire County Council to ask them to state:

a) How many children in Gloucestershire have an EHCP?

b) How many of those are not receiving the care they should through the EHCP?

c) When will that assistance, so needed by children, young people and schools, in relation to EHCP and language translation needs, be made available?

d) How many decisions for ECHP applications take longer than 20 weeks to be completed?

e) What is the financial shortfall for schools both primary and secondary of needed assistance?

f) What is the impact of such delay and cost on schools?

In proposing the motion, Councillor Clucas said she had been prompted to do so on hearing from head teachers about the increasing number of children excluded from school, long waits for educational certificates and care plans, children staying away from school without any challenge, and the £44m shortfall in government funding for health and education across the county, all of which is having a negative impact on the children involved, their classmates, and teaching professionals.

The motion asks for data and information about what can be done to improve the situation, as a matter of great concern and urgency, so that we can look at impact and potentially come together to help children and young people who need extra assistance.

The seconder, Councillor Baker, reserved the right to speak.

Members welcomed the motion, and shared some observations and comments:

- we must find solutions to look after children and people who need special help, as well as supporting parents, carers, teachers, teaching assistants, and other children;
- any member of the public can ask a question about this of the county council, and county councillors can raise the issue through any political route, including motions and questions;
- the relevant county Cabinet Member and perhaps the Director of Children's Services and Director of Education could be invited to attend a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny to provide information on the county's precise position. This could be added to the motion as an amendment.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Baker said it was not an understatement to say there is a crisis in schools for children with special educational needs and disabilities, and the impact on teachers, on morale, workloads, stress loads, health, absences, and other children in school could not be underestimated. The recent inspection at county demonstrates that the system is not working; despite small improvements, a lot more work and considerable investment is needed to address the situation, which is the result of chronic underinvestment and lack of foresight. The motion is a start, raising awareness, and he thanked Councillor Clucas for bringing it forward.

In summing up, Councillor Clucas thanked everyone for their support. She said nothing is more important than caring for children and the situation cannot be ignored. Asking questions is the first step towards making improvements.

VOTE ON MOTION B with additional paragraph as bullet point 7:

7. **following receipt of the information requested in point 6, the Cabinet Members and relevant officers from the County will be invited to meeting of Overview and Scrutiny.**

Carried
[1 abstention]

Motion C

Proposer: Cllr Max Wilkinson
Seconder: Cllr Adrian Bamford

GP capacity in Cheltenham

GP capacity in Cheltenham

Council notes:

- **Concerns about the capacity of the primary care sector in Cheltenham, including evidence that demand for routine GP appointments regularly exceeds supply.**

- **Primary Care is delivering a record number of appointments, but Gloucestershire has the worst figures in the country for patients waiting over 28 days for an appointment, based on the latest figures available (October 2023, as reported at HOSC). Clearly existing capacity is insufficient to meet current need and all estimates indicate that need will continue to increase at pace.**

- **The ongoing impact of national policies that have encouraged doctors trained in the UK to move abroad for better terms and conditions.**

- **That the government has acknowledged the shortage of doctors and seeks to address this as part of its NHS workforce plan.**

- **That there are many examples of local best practice in primary care and that GPs are working hard under significant pressure.**

- **The challenges presented by the level of investment in Primary Care and the financial complexities of delivering new surgeries.**

- **That long waiting lists for hospital treatment, combined with difficulties in social care and A&E, are placing additional pressures on GPs.**

Council welcomes:

- **The inclusion of a new GP surgery as part of the CIL projects list included in the Cheltenham Gloucester and Tewkesbury Strategic Local Plan and approved by this council.**

- **The local petition of more than 1600 names calling for a new GP surgery in Cheltenham.**

- **The potential availability of council-owned land for delivering such a project in partnership with others, as part of this authority's prudent approach to use of its assets.**

- **The desire to include a new surgery as part of new commercial and residential developments at West and North West Cheltenham.**

Council resolves:

- **To reiterate support, first expressed as part of the paper on the CIL schedule, for a new GP surgery for Cheltenham.**

- **To request that officers further explore with the health care commissioners and current GP provider service, possibilities for delivering new surgery premises:**

  b) Via the provision of new premises for existing surgeries seeking to move and/or expand into more appropriate, accessible buildings
  c) At strategic sites, as part of the growth of Cheltenham

- **To report back with progress and options to a full meeting of council on, or before, the scheduled full council meeting on 14 October.**

The proposer, Councillor Wilkinson, began by saying that there is a crisis in primary healthcare, with GP practices under huge pressure and cruelly underfunded, resulting in long waits for appointments and many doctors leaving the profession. The motion is not a criticism of hardworking GPs in and around Cheltenham, and there is little CBC can do about the crisis, but we can build on the CIL proposal in the Strategic and Local Plan to work with Gloucester and Tewkesbury to prioritise building a new GP surgery in Cheltenham. The council can also investigate using its assets to assist existing surgeries seeking a new home. It is our responsibility to work with our neighbours to address key concerns, and ensure we are providing the services residents need for their healthcare.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Bamford said that the NHS used to be the envy of the world, with a full range of medical services, excellent coverage, and ready access for the majority of people, but after 14 years of woefully adequate government investment, the situation is very different, including long waits for non-urgent surgery; excessive waiting times for ambulances and deplorable waits in A and E; struggles to find hospital beds; people discharged too early; and practice nurses, physios and pharmacists treating patients in primary care who would normally have seen a GP. With demand through the roof, practice budgets overstretched and staff frazzled, requesting one additional medical practice in Cheltenham is the least we can do.

In debate, Members shared their own experiences, including long waits in A and E, people having to travel long distances for care, and not knowing their GPs. One Member commented that doctors are leaving general practice to work in a medical capacity elsewhere and providing a service that treats patients in a timely fashion is essential to avoid making the situation worse - it isn't just about lack of money, but also about how the money is spent – this is where we need to concentrate.

Summing up, Councillor Wilkinson thanked Members, saying that the NHS and the people have been let down, and the problem of investment falling in real terms is key. He said record amounts of money may be being spent, but with inflation,

expensive treatments, and more people with more problems, additional funding is needed to catch up. Members' comments and experiences highlight some of the issues, and although the motion won't solve them all, as the local authority we must do anything we can to make things better for the local population, to at least take the edge off some of the problems.

VOTE on MOTION C as proposed
Carried
[5 abstentions]

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

There were none.

15 Local Government Act 1972 -Exempt Information

RESOLVED 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)

16 Exempt Minutes

The exempt minutes of the meeting held on 23 February were approved as a true record and signed accordingly.

17 Exempt item 001 - A Property Matter

Members considered the exempt property matter and voted on the recommendations.