

Cheltenham Borough Council Planning Committee Minutes

Meeting date: 4 July 2025

Meeting time: 2.00 pm - 3.13 pm

In attendance:

Councillors:

Frank Allen (Vice-Chair), Glenn Andrews, Adrian Bamford, Garth Barnes (Chair), Barbara Clark, Jan Foster, Iain Dobie, Tony Oliver, Dr Steve Steinhardt and Suzanne Williams

Also in attendance:

Nicole Golland (Principal Planning Officer), Tracey Birkinshaw (Director of Community & Economic Development), Chris Gomm (Head of Planning), Karen Hanchett (Gloucestershire County Council Highways) and Cheryl Lester (Legal officer)

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Wheeler.

2 Declarations of Interest

Councillors Andrews, Dobie and Williams declared that they are councillors at Gloucestershire County Council. They confirmed that they had not been involved in the preparation of the county council's response and were not predetermined on the application.

3 Declarations of independent site visits

Councillors Allen, Barnes, Clark, Oliver, and Steinhardt declared that they had visited the site independently.

4 Public Questions

There were none.

5 Planning Applications

6 23/01875/OUT Land at West Cheltenham Southern Parcel, Fiddlers Green Lane.

The Principal Planning Officer introduced the report as published. The officer noted that late representations had been received from Gloucestershire County Council (GCC), NEMA and the MP but these had not raised any matters not already addressed in the report and had not changed the officer's recommendations. She addressed the following points raised in representations:

- Land Use Parameter Plans – It had been brought to the LPA's attention that there are individuals in the locality with sensitive issues in relation to noise and environmental disturbance. This has been considered and on balance officers are content that noise matters can be dealt with the reserved matters stage. This being from the residential developments surrounding the site and that it can be seen that largely the barriers between the site and the residential dwellings would be mixed use.
- Prematurity – The application has been through an extensive pre-application process and the outline has been with the local planning authority (LPA) for nearly two years. The government requires LPAs to determine applications when they are ready. Following extensive work by officers and the applicant the LPA are able to determine the application, which is why it has been brought forward to the Planning Committee. Joint Core Strategy (JCS) policy SA1 also clearly recognises that there are different approaches to bringing strategic allocations forward.
- Odour mitigation – the site requires Severn Trent Water to undertake mitigation works to remove large parts of the site from odour pollution. The test for the Grampian planning condition attached to mitigate any harm from odour is whether there is reasonable prospect of actions being completed within the time limits imposed by the permission. Severn Trent Water has indicated that this mitigation work will likely be undertaken between 2027 and 2028, further assurance on this timeline was provided to the LPA during meetings with senior representatives of the Severn Trent Water. If works do not come forward within the timescales envisaged the application is presented with appropriate conditions in place to mitigate this.
- Lack of GP Surgery – Whilst it is possible that the St. Modwen application, which does contain a GP surgery, may not come to fruition this is considered unlikely. The current scheme for 576 homes would not justify the need for a GP surgery on its own. When the allocation is considered as a whole there is provision for a GP surgery and the developer of the current application and those at St. Modwen are in agreement. The LPA has taken a pragmatic approach and are satisfied the infrastructure requirements are met. The NHS

has been fully engaged in the process of this application and agree with the approach taken.

- Disconnect between the views of the LPA and GCC – The LPA has been consistent in its approach both in terms of providing evidence to the M5 Junction 10 (J10) development control order examination, through pre-application and this application itself. There is a shared response with Gloucester and Tewkesbury councils to the revisions of the local development guide for decisions to be evidence led and clearly demonstrate the impact arising from individual developments. The Transport model utilised by GCC is a strategic model which does not provide the granular impact assessment of the isolated junction modelling and micro-simulation modelling provided by the applicant. The officer report states that the applicant has not had access to the GC3M model, this is incorrect, the applicant has confirmed they have seen it. However, what has not been seen is the more granular implications arising from that model. The LPA has been clear with GCC on the challenges around S106 and the need to undertake prioritisation in the overall planning balance. The LPA has received KC advice on its S106 prioritisation which found the LPA's assessment to be reasonable and robust.
- Employment Benefits – the letter received from the MP highlighted the employment benefits of the scheme. This scheme includes a nationally important innovation centre noted in the government's modern industrial strategy and will provide extensive commercial space. It will provide approximately 2,426 jobs in total alongside housing provision. The proposal fully accords with the employment ambitions of the Development Plan and Golden Valley SPD. As required by the NPPF significant weight is placed on supporting economic growth in the overall planning balance.
- As regards infrastructure, echoing the JCS, sometimes hard choices have to be made.
- Separate applications from different developers and not all the developers agree.– Despite this is a less-than-ideal situation, the planning application forms a large part of the strategic allocation and includes the development components required by the JCS. The scale of the application site facilitates a comprehensive scheme across the developable area within the strategic allocation allowing infrastructure to be planned holistically in accordance with the JCS requirements and responds positively to the Golden Valley Development SPD and Climate Change SPD.
- S106 Contributions - Officers adopted a balanced and pragmatic approach to S106 obligations, striving to create an appropriate mix of S106 contributions and suitable level of affordable housing for existing and future Cheltenham residents. Although the scheme does not fulfil the entire contribution requested for J10 it will still yield a considerable sum from the West Cheltenham allocation in a manner we are confident meets the S106 tests and is evidence led. There has been representations that the Council as landowner could forgo profits and for there to be a deferral on this basis. However, it was not appropriate to require any landowner to receive less than a normal profit and the profit that has been allowed the developer is typical.

The Principal Planning Officer highlighted the following amendments to the recommended conditions:

- Condition 53 (an odour works condition) – should read “prior to occupation” instead of “prior to construction”.
- Condition 42 (Grampian condition on the J10 works) – GCC have this week requested the inclusion of the term “main works contract” to be added.
- A condition that the development shall not be connected to gas, in line with the conditions granted for Elms Park and the applicant’s energy statement, has been added.

The Principal Planning Officer highlighted that the officer report provides headline figures for the s106 which are not expected to change, but it will be the wording and triggers that will be negotiated by officers post-Committee. Also, that the 120 occupations limit regarding off-site SANG would be within the s106 rather than a Grampian condition as referred to in the officer report.

There were three public speakers on the item: an objector, the applicant’s representative, and a ward member.

The objector addressed the Committee and made the following points:

- Supports the Golden Valley scheme and the golden opportunities it will bring for the people of Cheltenham and Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) but asks the Committee to defer the application until the s106 and J10 are clear.
- With CBC as the principal owners of the land they also questioned whether there can be a delegation to a single officer and the s106 refused by a single officer, which he believed was wrong.
- Not mentioned in the presentation that J10 is as yet to be fully funded, it is approximately £48m short (and not got the final price yet) and it is not clear what will happen if this funding does not come forward.
- There has been a recent change at GCC, the highways authority, deferring the application would allow work on the s106 and discussions to reach an agreement on how J10 will be funded. The cyber park will happen without J10, but the housing won’t.
- In respect of t St. Modwen’s site, they understood was the building arm of Severn Trent, which they believed has been sold to another company, which may lead to a change in policy on that.
- There are a lot of good intentions within the application, but they are not firm enough and it is important that the time is taken to ensure clarity and transparency to make sure mistakes are not made.

The applicant’s representative addressed the Committee and made the following points:

- Last week the government published its new National Security Strategy. It sets out how the UK will respond to the growing threats we all face in this

increasingly uncertain world. At the heart of that strategy is a clear objective *“to marshal the country’s comparative advantage in science and technology to create new opportunities for working people, as well as putting ourselves at the cutting edge of cyber defence”*. Put simply we need to strengthen our ability to defend against cyber threats and invest in skills and industries that will secure that future.

- That’s why this application really does matter - Cheltenham, Gloucestershire and this project are central to achieving this national goal. Together we can deliver on this mission whilst ensuring the investment this project generates brings jobs, housing and prosperity to our communities. This is a once in a generation, multi-million-pound investment in cyber and advanced technology industries in Cheltenham.
- It has the potential to secure GCHQ’s presence in the town for another 50 years and to create, grow and attract new high calibre businesses and create well-paid high-skilled jobs. It will strengthen not just the local economy but national resilience as well.
- At the core of the application is the innovation centre, a landmark building designed to foster cyber security innovation. This will be the nucleus of the scheme, open to everyone, hosting events, housing startups, SMEs, nearby large corporates, and allowing the public and private sector to work together in partnership in a shared space.
- Skills development and training are also critical to the vision with strong links established with institutions like Gloucestershire College and the University of Gloucester.
- Alongside the employment hub the application includes much needed housing offering a mix of types, sizes and tenures to meet local demand, all set in a high-quality, green environment, connecting seamlessly with surrounding communities and offering them new amenities and opportunities.
- The council chose HBD as their development partner due to its proven track record in delivering outstanding places. It is a long-term partnership built on the shared values of design excellence, sustainability, and ambition. The very qualities needed to deliver lasting success in today’s challenging economic climate.
- Like many towns, Cheltenham faces challenges including the loss of talented young people to larger cities, and the shortage of affordable housing. This application offers a chance to address both and is the driving force behind the employment vision for West Cheltenham and will act as a catalyst for further applications to build on.
- Acknowledge NEMA’s representation but reject their claim that the application is premature. The comprehensive master plan and infrastructure delivery plan clearly outline how shared infrastructure will be secured through S106 agreements in line with standard practice for major developments. HBD has made sustained efforts to work with NEMA, including revising its plans to add a third access point, despite no obligation to do so. This commitment to collaboration is further demonstrated in the good working relationship with Revantage (previously St. Modwens) who together with HBD fully support the

comprehensive master plan and approach taken to delivery of infrastructure. The reality is NEMA have come forward later in the process, their site is landlocked and lacks independent access, and it falls within a natural later phase of development. It doesn't deliver any of the early critical pieces of community infrastructure, so there is no need for it to come forward early. NEMA's request for a joint S106 across all developers is unrealistic and unnecessary, and risks delaying the significant amount of progress made to date.

- Members should be commended for their faith in the project and patience, some tough decisions had to be made. HBD's passion for the project remains as strong as ever. Together we can secure the future of West Cheltenham and, in many ways, the future of Cheltenham itself.

Councillor Jeffries, as Ward Member, addressed the Committee and made the following points:

- Here to represent Springbank, a community that borders the Golden Valley site. This development is not just another planning application, it represents a huge opportunity to bring lasting change to our community but also to Cheltenham as a whole.
- Springbank is a proud, tight-knit, and hardworking community but it is also a place that has been underserved for many years, living with the reality of overstretched services, limited job opportunities, and rising housing costs. In some areas we have ingrained poverty and deprivation. Golden Valley is not seen as just a new business park but as a chance to bring real investment, inclusion, and energy into the community and other communities across our town.
- Support this application and strongly encourage the Committee to approve it but do so with the belief that this approval must carry expectations that the promises made are delivered, especially for communities. Promises like jobs and skills that lift local people. Golden Valley promises thousands of jobs and that could be transformational for Springbank. There are young people eager for a break, skilled workers looking for stability, and families who want a better future. This development can open that door if the commitment is there.
- That is also why we welcome the Social Value Strategy, which identifies Springbank as a key area for employment, skills training, and outreach. Fully support this but urge the Committee to keep a close eye on delivery. Approving this application should mean unlocking those benefits not just on paper, but in the real world. Want to see local recruitment targets, apprenticeships linked to our schools and colleges, and direct engagement with Springbank groups and residents. Give Springbank the opportunity.
- This development delivers shared community facilities and public services like health and education, all of which are extremely important.
- Want to touch on housing that is genuinely affordable. It's one of those issues that comes up again and again in Springbank and other communities across our town. Families are being priced out, young adults can't find anywhere to live near their roots, and even if they can find somewhere private rents are

outrageously expensive and social housing is scarce. That's why affordable housing must remain a central part of this application. Homes for genuinely affordable rent, a mix of unit sizes and tenures, including social housing, provision for families, single people, and older residents alike. A thriving community needs key workers, carers, shop workers, and teachers, and they need somewhere to live. This development must help meet that need and it does not only for Springbank but for the town.

- For every pound that this development has to spend towards J10, it will be a pound less for affordable housing. We all know the system is broken when it comes to planning, more and more is being asked of developers, not just contributions to roads, education, all these things that are asked of developments. Affordable housing always suffers, I know committee members share my frustrations when this happens. So, in my view, J10 needs should be an infrastructure cost that the government deals with. That would be in an ideal world. Until then I trust the local planning authority, our officers to find the right solution to the current S106 deliberations.
- Let this be a turning point for Springbank and for Cheltenham, and for what an inclusive, exemplar development can look like in practice. Golden Valley can be a game-changer, not just for businesses and innovation, but for people. A real opportunity for local people now and into the future. Approving this application must mean delivering the social value, the jobs, the services, and the housing that Springbank and the wider community urgently needs and that this application promises.

In response to Members' questions, officers confirmed that:

- Social and affordable housing is being considered within viability assessments for the other applications within the allocation. A viability assessment has been received for St. Modwen and is being discussed. The HBD North development is subject to a viability assessment. Currently have not received a viability assessment for NEMA, but this development is less progressed so it may follow.
- Exact measurements or dwelling locations are not being prescribed as this is an outline application. At the reserved matters stage, the impact of overshadowing and overbearing, impacts on those residents adjacent /existing houses to the development will be considered. Within the design code they are showing typographies that are either work from home mews type dwellings, also terraces. There would be the opportunity for gardens and space to be given as prescribed in the design code.
- Due to the need to carry out prioritisation to reach the right balance between S106 contributions and affordable housing, the libraries provision originally requested by GCC (which specified the money they were seeking could be used for a new library in Cheltenham hypothetically) was reduced to a third. Officers believe overall that this is still providing significant funding which can be used to improve services in and around the area. It is also within GCC's

gift in the future to apply for CIL funding, which will be over £1m from this development, that could be to put towards a library.

The matter then went to Member debate where the following points were made:

- Members thanked officers for providing a briefing which allowed technical questions to be asked in advance of the meeting.
- Cheltenham has transformed over the decades from a centre for army retirees, to a focus for the insurance and defence industry. This development will secure the future of Cheltenham for their children and grandchildren and change the nature of Cheltenham again. Do not want Cheltenham to just be somewhere for the rich to retire but want to provide jobs for the people who live in the town and secure their future.
- Elms Park was the start of a new chapter for Cheltenham and this development will be the second page. It is important to stress the economic importance of the scheme; it is very rare to see a development of this size come forward with such strong employment opportunities. People are struggling for work and to afford the accommodation, this application will have a big impact for Cheltenham. Acknowledge that the situation with J10 and GCC's comment are not ideal but Cheltenham is also struggling with the lack of affordable homes, and this development will still provide a substantial contribution to J10. J10 will not be able to be funded all through CIL money, it is a government priority to provide money for the infrastructure.
- Whilst one Member supported the development in principle, they did not feel they could support the application due to the shortfall in affordable housing as it does not reach the 35% target. Whilst the residual requirement could be delivered off-site there is a shortage of housing land in Cheltenham to provide this. They were concerned that this would set a precedent for other developers. They also highlighted that this could lead to a disproportionate level of affordable housing on other sites and it is crucial that affordable housing should be evenly distributed throughout development sites, to avoid creating larger areas of relative poverty. Perhaps it is time for developers to accept lower levels of profits than is currently seen as acceptable.
- This application has been in gestation for a long-time and it is about time that it is delivered. It will have many positive aspects for Cheltenham, the whole of Gloucestershire and nationally. It will produce economic positivity, mixed housing, and affordable housing. Have to be pragmatic about pushing the project forwards.
- They thanked officers for circulating the advice from counsel which clarified the areas of disagreement without using legalese.
- Important to recognise the bigger picture and the threat to national security from cyber threats, AI, nanotechnology, and new threats that are emerging. Powerful leaders are warmongering and actively disrupting outcomes around the world. Vitally need research, analysis and defence against these new threats to our security. The innovation centre's importance for national government is a high point for approval.

- Strongly support the business case for Golden Valley. Worked for GCHQ including several years for national security and recognise the case from both the national security grounds and the opportunities for local communities. Report recommendation clearly sets out that officers will work to resolve the J10 issue and provisions are in place if this is not possible, so it was not felt that the application should be delayed on that matter. It is important that momentum is maintained. It was also felt that given the Secretary of State for Transport has acknowledged that J10 is vital, central government should provide the funding to Highways England.
- Whilst the application does not hit the 35% of affordable housing, there still has affordable housing going into this parcel. They did not accept having lots of affordable and social housing encouraged deprivation, would mean the opposite, means people will have more money in their pockets.

The matter then went to the vote on the officer recommendation to delegate authority to the Head of Planning to permit the application subject to:

A) the conditions as set out (as amended) or substantially similar as may be agreed under delegated authority given to the Head of Planning; and

B) completion of a S106 obligation and/or other legal document to deliver the infrastructure and other mitigation, as set out in this Report at paragraphs 7.352-7.356, and for alterations to s106 heads of terms as may be agreed under delegated authority given to the Head of Planning in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Planning Committee.

C) In the event that the S106 obligation and/or other legal document remains unsigned nine months after this resolution, that the application is reviewed by the Head of Planning in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Planning Committee, and if no progress is being made delegated authority is given to the Head of Planning to refuse the application in the absence of an agreed S106 Agreement.

For: 9

Against: 1

Abstain: 0

Voted to permit subject to conditions and s106 with the delegations set out in the officer recommendation.

7 Any other items the Chairman determines urgent and requires a decision

There were none.