

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 24th November, 2010
6.02 - 8.18 pm

Attendees	
Councillors:	Penny Hall (Chair), Ian Bickerton, Nigel Britter (Vice-Chair), Jacky Fletcher, Helena McCloskey and Lloyd Surgenor
Also in attendance:	Councillor John Rawson and Councillor Roger Whyborn

Minutes

1. APOLOGIES

Councillors Wheeldon, Hibbert and Holliday had given their apologies.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FORM

None declared.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting had been circulated with the agenda.

Upon a vote it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 15 September 2010 be agreed and signed as an accurate record.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

None received.

5. MATTERS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

No matters referred to committee.

6. CABINET MEMBER BRIEFING

The Cabinet Member Built Environment was in attendance and confirmed that as of Saturday (28 November 2010), Chapel Walk car park would be open to the public 7 days a week. This would cause inconvenience to the members of staff that had parked there in the past and he thanked them for their understanding. Councillors would also be losing their allocated spaces, but this was a positive move for the town centre.

The New Homes Bonus was out for consultation and would see the Council benefit financially from the first six years of council tax from new homes. The consultation was due to end on 24 December and the approach for formulating a response would be discussed later in the meeting. There was the potential for this to be seen as influencing planning decisions and as such, clear boundaries would need to be set.

Civic Pride featured on the agenda. Public consultation on the draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) had been successful. The Civic Society and Police had played an important part and this would be going to Council on 13 December.

LTP3 also featured on the agenda. It was noted that initial discussions were ongoing with Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) about a shared parking strategy in an attempt to address the current issues, with regards to GCC being responsible for on-road parking in Cheltenham and CBC for off-road parking. Members would be kept informed of any developments.

Following a request from a member of the committee, the Cabinet Member Built Environment would raise the issue of member parking with Officers. Specifically, the issue of where many would park when all 40 members attend the Council meetings.

Cabinet Member Sustainability arrived at around 7.30pm with prior agreement of the Chair.

He advised members that whilst work to Leckhampton Wall had stopped for a time, it would start again soon. Natural England had been in talks with the Council about their level of stewardship. They were proposing that the Council moved from Entry Level Stewardship to Higher Level. There would be no associated cost to the Council and would include a grant from Natural England of around £10k per annum.

He confirmed that he hoped to soon be in a position to make a formal statement about the Pittville Bridge. It was hoped that the Council would be able to manage the project, which would bring costs in line with the budget. As always, members would be kept informed.

The Chair thanked both Cabinet Members for their attendance and updates.

7. BUDGET CONSULTATION

Andrew Powers an Accountant from the finance team introduced the paper as circulated with the agenda.

During summer 2010 additional budget consultation was undertaken. This consultation consisted of 21 road shows in various venues across the town.

Residents were asked to use sticky dots to identify services they thought should be 'protected', 'reduced' and 'stopped' and during this process over 21,000 sticky dots were used. Residents had found it easier to mark services to protect and reduce than they had to mark those to stop.

This was not a scientific exercise but did engage the public. The two A3 appendices showed the results from this consultation, ranked in order, one in chart form and one in a table with figures.

The following responses were given to questions from members of the committee;

- The A3 sheets summarised all services against which a vote had been cast either way.
- Groups had been set up to look at services in more detail but he had not been involved in these meetings and as such, was unable to provide any further information.

The following comments were made by members of the committee;

- During the roadshows people were not always identified as residents of the Borough.
- It was felt that the lack of detail provided at the roadshows, made it difficult for residents to make an informed decision (e.g. Strategic Planning was marked to stop, but were residents fully aware of what the service included).
- It was a good idea at the time but more thought could have gone into it. Improvements should be considered if it is done again in the future. It could be made more consumer friendly.
- Quality of services must be maintained but there was scope to deliver them differently.
- Caution was required when communicating changes and cuts, especially to those services where residents had clearly indicated that they wanted them maintained at the current level.
- The Government had recently announced that local authorities would be able to charge more for services such as planning and this was something that would need to be considered further when the draft budget was reviewed by the committee in January.
- Members should bare in mind that the environment in Cheltenham was one of its greatest assets and any reductions may impact on the attractiveness of the town.

The Chair thanked the officer for his attendance.

8. CIVIC PRIDE - ACHIEVEMENTS TO DATE

The Managing Director of the Cheltenham Development Task Force introduced a PowerPoint presentation which highlighted some of the progress, achievements and plans of Civic Pride over the past year, though pointed out that work had only really started in January 2010.

He then talked through the slides of a PowerPoint presentation (Appendix 1).

Some of the key points made in addition to the presentation included;

Context:

A lot of planning and consultation had been undertaken but there was perceived to be a poor delivery record. As a result of this there was scepticism, especially from the press.

The last 18 months and the recession had raised the question of whether it was the right time to take projects forward. But having missed two peaks in the economy and the fact that Cheltenham had not been affected to the same extent as other towns/cities, it was felt that now was the time.

A number of policy changes since May, would affect Gloucestershire and make successes such as the work to St. Pauls hard to replicate to the same degree.

A fresh start:

The funding partners considered a number of models and agreed to go with a fluid approach. Another success had been securing an independent Chair, Graham Garbutt, who had a wealth of experience. Partners had funded upfront and this had reduced the impact of the recession on the task force.

The Board was made up of individuals with particular skills and experience.

Business Plan Targets:

The 2010 Business Plan was agreed by the Board in April 2010 and set out the key targets for the Task Force. This was publicised on the centre page of the Echo and the resounding feedback had been 'get on with it'.

The delivery model was flexible, able to respond to changes but with clear priorities.

The focus of the last month or so had been de-risking, which would maximise any revenue outputs.

Key Outcomes to Date:

Gloucestershire County Councils contribution was to build a new traffic model, which at a cost of £100k, allowed real time testing and sequences to be changed.

Ultimately, Cheltenham was not designed for road transport. The one-way system was creating problems and resulted in a race track. Brave decisions were required and partners had assessed other authorities approaches and outcomes.

Most of the traffic came from the North of the town but most of the car parks in Cheltenham were located to the East – this needed to be addressed.

North Place and Portland Street had originally been considered for office space, but there was no interest. It was noted that Cheltenham House where Cheltenham Borough Homes were based, had been actively marketing since 1997 – it had never been at full occupancy in that time.

There was no alternative, further consultation on the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) was required. Fortunately the plan had been publicised beforehand and as a result, the press were kind.

An archaeological evaluation was carried out in October 2010 by an independent company, given the sensitivity of the site. There was no archaeology and English Heritage had been appeased.

The SPD would go to Council on 13 December 2010 and if agreed, the site would be marketed in January 2011.

Royal Well and the Municipal Offices:

The hope was to get rid of the racetrack, but this would require funding. The plan was to use the capital receipt from North Place.

The Municipal Offices were already being used as a joint delivery vehicle, with HRMC now based there. Work had already started on a complete heritage assessment of the building, to better understand the assets the Council had. Again, all risks would be removed in order to increase opportunities.

Non CBC sites:

There were a number of non CBC sites which offered potential but were struggling to progress given the fact that some developers had overpaid.

Communication:

This was key, the Echo needed to be on board so as to be sympathetic to more difficult communications and promote good communications. A quarterly update would soon be issued to them.

Where from here:

North Place and Portland Street would be actively marketed. There had already been some serious interest from developers, so it could be very positive for Cheltenham.

Traffic modelling would be pursued but there were some major costs associated with this. Research showed that 14% of traffic in Cheltenham stayed within the town itself average 11% of traffic disappeared when changes were made to the modelling, as people actively change their transportation. This would require some brave decisions.

The current context was challenging and showed no signs of easing. But a solid partnership had been built, despite losing the RDA. Discussions with other groups were ongoing and current partners were happy that tangible progress was being made. Momentum needed to be maintained and given the flexibility of the plan this was achievable – where a master plan would not have been in the current climate.

The following responses were given to questions from members of the committee;

- Were North Place to be put on the market in January 2011 and sold, 300 spaces would be retained in Portland Street, the buses would be moved and capacity would be increased at the other end of town. For 3 weeks whilst the archeological evaluation was being done, 1/3 of the car park was sectioned off at any one time and yet the car park was never full. There were software issues with the current car parks which meant that only ticket sales could be monitored, rather than spaces.
- As previously stated, Cheltenham had excess car parks, so the loss of some would not impact visitors. The key was to provide adequate signage and isolate motorists to the nearest car park. If they chose not to use the nearest car park they would risk being in slower traffic.
- Cash for other projects needed to come from somewhere, but capital assets would be reused and invested elsewhere.

The Chair thanked the Managing Director of the Cheltenham Development Task Force for his attendance and a comprehensive, exciting and invigorating presentation.

9. LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN 3 - DRAFT RESPONSE

The Chair introduced herself as a member of the Local Transport Plan 3 (LTP3) Working Group, which had included Councillors McCloskey, Fletcher, Hibbert and R Hay. It was important to note that Cabinet Member Built Environment had also attended each of the meetings.

The Working Group had produced something that, if agreed by the committee, would be submitted to Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) tomorrow (25 November 2010).

The Integrated Transport Manager introduced the report as circulated with the agenda. The report set out the recommendations of the LTP3 Working Group with regards to the proposed response of the Council, to the draft LTP3 consultation.

Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) had been granted an extension by GCC in order to allow time for a quantitative response to be drafted. Members and stakeholders had been involved in the collation of the response.

The Working Group had, had to accept that the plan was an evolving plan, which was a result of the current budget constraints and a key message had been 'localisation'.

The following comments were made by members of the committee;

- Cheltenham was one of only a few towns that did not have a bypass and already suffered from traffic issues, which would only increase in the future if nothing was done. The M5 slip road would increase traffic on the Tewkesbury Road and the worry was that businesses would relocate and people would avoid Cheltenham. The preservation of historic buildings was important but not at the expense of traffic flow in the town.
- Civic Pride highlighted the issue of traffic. The closure of Boots corner and a large development in the north-west of the town would overwhelm some already busy junctions in Cheltenham. GCC were being encouraged to consider the number of traffic lights, etc and the taskforce would continue to pursue these issues with GCC.
- Light rail was a fundamental element and it was reassuring to a reference to this had been included.
- Changes to individual junctions would cause problems in other areas and a bypass would come at a great cost.
- A north-west bypass would be contrary to Council policy and the Working Group were not able to contradict that.
- Medical evidence was clear that air quality had a direct impact on health and as such care needed to be taken when building, etc. It was pleasing to see that this had also been referenced.
- The position of many industrial estates in Cheltenham drew good vehicles into the town centre.

The committee members that had been involved in the Working Group paid specific thanks to the Head of Integrated Transport and Sustainability and his team for their efforts.

Cabinet Member Built Environment had found the Head of Integrated Transport and Sustainability to be very knowledgeable and took the opportunity to thank the members involved. Cabinet would be very grateful.

Industrial estates were important and all strategies needed to take consideration the use and occupation of these sites. One estate in particular, situated near to the train station suffered from a real issue with commuter parking.

The Working group saw the LTP3 as an evolving document and felt it was important that CBC continue to raise concerns with GCC.

The Chair reiterated that Officers had consulted with Members, other Officers, businesses and community groups and assured the committee that they would be updated about how the feedback had been received by GCC.

Upon a vote it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the schedule of representations be approved as Cheltenham Borough Council's formal response to LTP3 and the formal response be submitted to Gloucestershire County Council by 25 November 2010.

On a personal note, the Chair echoed comments made by other members and expressed how rewarding she had found it to work with the Officers and Members involved in the working group.

At this point Councillor Lloyd Surgenor excused himself from the meeting.

10. CABINET WASTE WORKING GROUP

Councillors Britter and Fletcher were introduced as members of the Cabinet Waste Working Group.

Councillor Britter referred members to the briefing note which had been circulated and summarised much of what the Working Group had achieved to date. Most of this had centred around the leaflets that were being produced and the issue of food waste from flats, as a solution was needed.

The literature on curb-side garden waste would be ready for the start of December and other literature would be available from early in 2011.

A member highlighted her reservations about 2 weekly collections of residual waste. Nappies and cat litter, etc, would fall into this category and would cause an offence if left for 2 weeks.

The Working Group had raised this very concern. The Cabinet Member Sustainability stressed that this was not a problem other authorities operating 2 weekly collections had encountered. His suggestion was that, if it were bagged properly there wouldn't be an issue. He confirmed that Cabinet had considered this and agreed that, where there was a particular issue (i.e. large families, etc),

a larger capacity bin would be provided. It was felt that this would address the issue.

The following responses were given by the Cabinet Member Sustainability to questions from member of the committee;

- All residents of Tewkesbury Borough Council (TBC) were provided with a food waste container, but he did not have figures for how much food waste was being disposed of in residual waste, or the number of residents who were not using the food waste container. TBC however, were very happy as their recycling rates were up. He would ask for figures from TBC.
- Plastic bottle recycling would be rolled out to the (approx) 20% of homes in Cheltenham, who were not yet included in the scheme, as soon as possible. This remaining 20% were dealt with by a particular vehicle and a solution was being devised. The message being given by Officers about the implementation target of 2012 was incorrect.

The Chair thanked the committee members and the Cabinet member for their update.

11. ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PLAN 2010-2011

The Chair referred members to the work plan as circulated with the agenda.

She highlighted that the next meeting of the committee (19 January 2011) was dedicated to the budget, except for a verbal update from the Cabinet Waste Working Group. Members were happy for this to be the focus of the meeting, if the Cabinet Member Finance and Community Development felt it necessary.

This had resulted in a number of items being moved from January to March and therefore there was a rather full agenda planned for this meeting. The agenda for which would be agreed on 8 February 2011.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THE CHAIRMAN DETERMINES TO BE URGENT AND WHICH REQUIRES A DECISION 'New Homes Bonus' Consultation

Cabinet Member Built Environment was requesting that the committee agree to establish a Working Group, tasked with developing a response to the consultation, which was due to close on 24 December 2010.

The scheme would be financially beneficial to the Council and the bonus paid whether affordable homes or not, though more would be paid for affordable homes.

The suggestion was that this should be open to all members given its significance and consist of 3-4 members at the most. It was highlighted that this would not need to go to Cabinet for approval. The response would be taken forward by the Cabinet Member Built Environment and would no doubt only require/allow for 1-2 meetings, given the short timescale.

Councillors Fletcher and McCloskey volunteered to form part of the Working Group and it was agreed that information would be circulated to all other

members in an attempt to secure other volunteers. It was also agreed that Cabinet Member Built Environment should be involved in any meetings.

Given the short timescale, Mike Redman – Assistant Director Built Environment and Lead Officer for the Working Group would be asked to circulate dates ASAP.

13. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday 19 January 2011.

The Chair thanked all members and officers for their attendance and closed the meeting.

Penny Hall
Chairman