

Council

13 February 2015

Public Questions (9)

| | |
|-----------|---|
| 1. | Question from Ken Pollock to Cabinet Member Development and Safety, Councillor Andrew McKinlay |
| | <p>Improving access to car parks for a minority of the circulatory traffic is insufficient reason per se to reduce flow dramatically in a working Inner Ring Road.</p> <p>Does you now accept that it is more sensible to trial the closure of Boots Corner first, BEFORE throttling (irreversibly, due to cost) the major East-to-West traffic flow through Oriel Road and onward into St. George's Road, (considering that the alternative Northern Relief Road is overloaded before taking any further East-West flow)?</p> |
| | Response from Cabinet Member |
| | <p>Issues such as this were considered at length by the Gloucestershire Traffic Regulation Committee on 15/01/15 and their recommendations were then debated and supported by Cheltenham Borough Council on 26/01/15.</p> <p>As a contributor to both those debates, I am sure Mr Pollock recognises that the final determination and implementation of any scheme rests with Gloucestershire County Council so I feel your question is better directed to the Highways Authority.</p> <p>In a supplementary question Ken Pollock said that he believed answer 1 was another refusal to answer (by pushing the matter off to GCC), although he noted that there was no longer an insistence that the two-waying in front of the Town Hall needed to be done irrevocably, before the trial closure of Boots Corner.</p> <p>Ken Pollock believed that no specific developments could now be claimed to depend on the Cheltenham Transport Plan, and asked whether the Cabinet Member would be very content for its implementation (and even any further trialling) to be pushed out beyond the Council elections of May 2016?</p> <p>In response the Cabinet Member said that the question was under a false premise as there was no change since the Council meeting held on 26 January.</p> |
| 2. | Question from Ken Pollock to Cabinet Member Development and Safety, Councillor Andrew McKinlay |
| | <p>Has Augur Buchler (AB) proposed/discussed a revision of their planning application for North Place (currently for superstore & car park), and have CBC planners informed AB that cutting Cheltenham's Inner Ring Road</p> |

| | |
|-----------|---|
| | would remove easy access to their site from the majority of the town which lives south of the High Street ? |
| | Response from Cabinet Member |
| | <p>No revised planning application has been proposed, discussed or received. Augur Buchler are fully conversant with the proposed highways changes.</p> <p>In a supplementary question Ken Pollock asked that when a revised planning application from Auger Buchler was discussed, could the Cabinet Member not see that "viability" of development would now override all other considerations, including 40% affordable housing (which would be unlikely to exceed 20%), and including town-centre car parking provision, if there was no longer a superstore to overlap usage with?</p> <p>He believed that if Auger Buchler secured planning permission via appeal, the (unpublished) "covenants" and parking "protections" (stated in another of the Cabinet Member's answers) would be impractical.</p> <p>In response the Cabinet Member said that a planning application had yet to be received but the usual pre-planning advice processes would be followed. He stated that the major consideration for Auger Buchler would be financial viability and emphasised that the Council's commitment to 40 % affordable housing and car parking provision was no more diminished.</p> |
| 3. | Question from Mary Nelson to Cabinet Member Development and Safety, Councillor Andrew McKinlay |
| | <p>Now that a new development scheme is required for the North Place/Portland Street site, do you believe that the Cheltenham Transport Plan will be viewed as an advantage or as a disincentive to any future developer or occupier of this site, bearing in mind how much more difficult the site would be to access if the CTP were implemented, particularly for residents (and visitors) coming from the south of the town, whose journeys would be more circuitous and exacerbated by much greater traffic congestion, especially along the Northern Relief Road (Swindon Road to Fairview Road) ?</p> |
| | Response from |
| | <p>Any new proposal will be progressed by the developer and owner of the site Augur Buchler. We understand that Augur Buchler is currently considering all their options and they are fully aware of the Cheltenham Transport Plan.</p> <p>In a supplementary question Mary Nelson asked whether, given the acute shortage of brownfield housing sites, the council would agree to all of the site being given over to residential development thus enabling the council to claim the government's £50,000 brownfield development incentive on offer until the 11th March, provided that the North Place car park requirement was still met?</p> |

| | |
|------------------|--|
| | <p>In response the Cabinet Member said that at this stage nothing would be ruled out or insisted upon. It was highly unlikely that a planning application for a supermarket would come forward. Any application for a development which did come forward would be different to the original so it was a question of waiting for its submission.</p> |
| <p>4.</p> | <p>Question from Mary Nelson to Cabinet Member Development and Safety, Councillor Andrew McKinlay</p> |
| | <p>There has been much media coverage of Morrisons withdrawal from North Place, with a poll requesting residents to vote for various suggested alternative uses.</p> <p>However the reality is that Cheltenham’s residents and even the Borough Council, will have little if any influence into what actually gets developed there, as the land has been sold. It will be the decision of the landowner only as to what scheme comes forward next, with financial viability being the overriding consideration, and the only control left available to CBC will be via the planning process.</p> <p>Would you therefore agree that selling a key town centre site owned by the Council was not the best way of retaining control of its future use, and involved considerable risks, because the land could now remain an undeveloped eyesore for a considerable time? Alternatively if the Council now refuses any replacement scheme it does not like or want, Augur Buchler could appeal resulting in expensive legal costs for the Council.</p> |
| | <p>Response from</p> |
| | <p>I do not agree, as in addition to securing a significant capital receipt, Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) has exercised control over the wider site including a covenant for 40% affordable housing and long lease protections over the car park requirement.</p> <p>How long the site remains part developed is yet to be determined but clearly neither of the two parties to that dispute will wish to see a long running battle.</p> <p>The site is still subject to a development brief adopted by CBC so any proposal will legitimately have to comply with those constraints.</p> <p>In a supplementary question Mary Nelson quoted the Cabinet Member ‘how long the sites remains part developed is yet to be determined but clearly neither of the two parties to that dispute will wish to see a long running battle’.</p> <p>She said that the statement acknowledged that the site would be part developed in the first instance, and asked for confirmation of the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That it will be the housing development which will proceed first 2. Who are the two parties you refer to 3. And does the dispute you mention relate to the councils frustration at the likely long delay before any agreement is reached for the |

| | |
|-----------|---|
| | <p>commercial replacement of the Morrisons supermarket, or does it relate to a dispute between the housing developer and Augur Buchler?</p> <p>In response the Cabinet Member stated that the two parties in dispute were Auger Buchler and Morrisons with regard to the withdrawal from North Place. The other party involved was Skanska on the separate Portland Street site. Skanska were currently managing this site as a car park. It was difficult to predict what would happen pending a decision but he stressed that these were separate sites with separate issues.</p> |
| 5. | Question from Andrew Riley to Cabinet Member Development and Safety, Councillor Andrew McKinlay |
| | When the High Street West is closed to buses for 3 months to allow the Brewery Phase 2 road works to be done, where are all the buses which currently use this section of the High Street going to stop, and how will they be re-routed? |
| | Response from Cabinet Member |
| | My understanding is that Stagecoach will re-route its services via North Street, St Margaret's Road and Henrietta Street. Bus stops will be provided as close to the existing locations as possible and Stagecoach plan to have additional staff on the ground to assist with the redirection of passengers. |
| 6. | Question from Andrew Riley to Cabinet Member Development and Safety, Councillor Andrew McKinlay |
| | Is it the intention that the Brewery Phase 2 High Street work and re-routing of the buses will take place before any trial closure of Boots Corner, or is it possible that they could coincide? |
| | Response from Cabinet Member |
| | The Brewery works are scheduled to begin on 16/03/15. GCC have advised that no final decision will take place on the Cheltenham Transport Plan before April 2015, and if affirmative there would be considerable further design and implementation works, so there is no likelihood of these two sets of works coinciding. |
| 7. | Question from Peter V. Christensen to Cabinet Member Finance, Councillor John Rawson |
| | <p>In looking at the Budget documents I have been unable to see anything referring to Tourism. As you know, Tourism is a very big and important contributor to Cheltenham's economy. Cheltenham hotels are struggling to recover after the downturn and with a number of businesses leaving the town and some Festivals having cancelled Cheltenham as a venue the situation is exacerbated.</p> <p>In the Tourism Strategy of April 2011, written by Councillor Rawson, concern was raised about the material damage that would be caused to the hotels in the town as well as expressing a caution not to disrupt the existing balance, should the town overdevelop its hotel sector. The JCS</p> |

| | |
|------------------|--|
| | <p>meticulously calculated at great expense, what it considered to be an appropriate level of hotel occupancy, between 68 and 72% average occupancy p.a above 72% it is considered viable to introduce more hotels.</p> <p>We are currently below this level, yet already new hotels have arrived on the scene as well as the planned new 104 room Premier Inn at the Brewery and the plans for what appears to be the Clarence Aparthotel .</p> <p>So why is the Council planning for the Municipal offices building to be yet another hotel project?</p> |
| | <p>Response from Cabinet Member</p> |
| | <p>This Council has and will continue to encourage and support tourism to Cheltenham, and realises the importance and significance the various festivals and race week has to the economy of the town. We operate or substantially fund many services, facilities and events that significantly contribute to attracting visitors to Cheltenham.</p> <p>Any plan to market the Municipal Offices will depend on the Council finding suitable alternative accommodation. If and when this happens, there are no preconceived plans for alternative uses for the Municipal Offices. The existing development brief for the building has a wide range of options, of which a hotel may possibly emerge as part of a mix of uses.</p> <p>Incidentally I am touched that the local hospitality industry attaches such importance to the Tourism Strategy. At the time it was produced I was told by the then Chairman of the Cheltenham Hospitality Association that I should hang my head in shame.</p> <p>In a supplementary question Mr Christensen said that there appeared to be no evidence of any recent in depth tourism research to support the addition of new hotels in the town. He asked the Cabinet Member to tell him which department of the council was responsible for Tourism Strategy in supporting the additional of further hotels in the town?</p> <p>In response the Cabinet Member Finance stated that the council was responsible for the policy but responsibility for the implementation of the policy lay with the Cheltenham Trust. There remained a great desire to attract visitors to the town and there were initiatives within the budget to facilitate this. He informed members that Pat Pratley was the Executive Board member responsible for tourism.</p> |
| <p>8.</p> | <p>Question from Geoffrey Bloxsom to the Leader, Councillor Steve Jordan</p> |
| | <p>The borough council spent 6 weeks undertaking a survey to seek the public's views on how to spend the £8 million from the sale of North Place, yet succeeded in getting just 222 responses out of the 106,000 people who</p> |

| | |
|------------------|---|
| | <p>live in Cheltenham, which is clearly not sufficiently representative.</p> <p>Was it a deliberate decision to hold the so called Forum to discuss the options for this money on exactly the same day that the Cheltenham Transport Plan TRO Committee Meeting was held, which the Council knew would keep all the CTP objectors away and thus provide the best opportunity to gain more support and therefore votes for the new Public Square at Boots Corner, which depends entirely upon the Transport Plan being implemented?</p> |
| | <p>Response from Cabinet Member</p> |
| | <p>I would like to thank everyone who responded to the consultation as it provided very useful feedback. It was in fact a higher response rate than to previous budgets no doubt due to the chance to comment on the various options in the draft capital programme.</p> <p>Mr Bloxson's conspiracy theory about the 2 meetings is interesting, but since the Traffic Regulation Committee meeting finished well before the Budget Forum started I'm not sure how it makes any sense. In any case the Forum was an informal meeting where the indicative vote taken did not count towards the 222 formal responses received.</p> |
| <p>9.</p> | <p>Question from Geoffrey Bloxson to Cabinet Member Development and Safety, Councillor Andrew Mckinlay</p> |
| | <p>Given that you are the Cabinet Member responsible for the Cheltenham Transport Plan why did you not attend the TRO Committee meeting in the Town Hall on the 15th January to hear the many important concerns raised by a large number of the public speakers?</p> |
| | <p>Response from Cabinet Member</p> |
| | <p>A strategic decision was taken that the Cheltenham Borough Council presentation supporting the adoption of the Cheltenham Transport Plan to the Traffic Regulation Committee (TRC) on the 15th January 2015 would have most impact if it was made by the Leader of the Council rather than by me as Cabinet lead.</p> <p>The concerns and comments of both the objectors to and the supporters of the proposed Cheltenham Transport Plan were already well known to me and to the Council as a whole as a result of the three consultation exercises that had been undertaken. Had any new concerns been raised at the meeting, they would have been reported via the TRC minutes and the report to be considered by the Gloucestershire County Council Cabinet.</p> |