

## Council

30 March 2015

### Public Questions (4)

<b>1.</b>	<b>Question from Carl Friessner-Day to the Leader, Councillor Steve Jordan</b>
	<p>The recent report and conclusions drawn by Athey Consulting highlighted a number of concerns expressed by businesses in the Cheltenham area and the lack of confidence they have in Cheltenham's competitiveness; two of the major concerns being congestion and parking. This Council has recently presided over the selling of the North Place Car Park reducing capacity by over 300 places and under 'Civic Pride' are intending on reducing the town centre car parking further with the development of the Royal Well car park. In addition this Council leadership continues to support the Cheltenham Transport Plan, which according to the Atkins Model and other experts will increase congestion by increasing journey times by at least another 5% in the outer areas, adding further to business woes. Will this Council now heed the advice of the experts and the facts, and therefore abandon their plans for the further sell off of such land and abandon the Cheltenham Transport Plan which not only take jobs out of Cheltenham, but also force our population to get into cars to travel further for work?</p>
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	<p>The comments referred to are drawn from page 20 of the Athey Consulting report, which was highlighting consultee feedback on Cheltenham as a business location. The same feedback highlighted major pluses such as the quality of life and Cheltenham's retail offer.</p> <p>The disposal of North Place &amp; Portland Street car park was predicated on the long term requirement for 300 spaces in that location to be provided in a new multi-storey car park. Portland Street remaining open has validated this calculation as it retains approximately 300 spaces, although as a surface car park it is not necessarily the most efficient use of this land.</p> <p>I believe the second reference is to Chapel Walk car park, which will be considered as part of any wider remodelling of the Municipal Offices and Royal Well, but I am not aware of any intended parking reduction. In fact, CBC is in the process of acquiring the former Shopfitters' site, initially for use as a temporary car park, to help cater for any pressure on spaces in this part of town.</p> <p>The reference to traffic seems to ignore the fact that Cheltenham has a very high (77%) self-containment factor, with many people both living &amp; working in Cheltenham. A 5% increase in journey times in some locations is not necessarily the crisis identified, particularly with continued improvements in public transport and connectivity e.g. the recently successful Cycle-Rail bid. What the report does suggest is creating new business parks, but recognises that options are limited within the CBC boundary. This is one of the reasons we are working with Gloucester and Tewkesbury on a Joint Core Strategy but will also seek to address it where possible in the Cheltenham Plan.</p>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Question from Carl Friessner-Day to the Leader, Councillor Steve Jordan</b>
	<p>Cheltenham currently employs above the national average in the retail sector, which is typified by low paid and part time work. With the town centre forecasted</p>

	to reduce by 22% by 2018, increased competition from surrounding areas including out of town shopping and Cheltenham's economy narrowly focused, has this Council's lack of economic vision created a ticking economic time bomb for our population which will now be difficult to address given other cities like Bath, Bristol and Gloucester have stepped up and shaped to the new economy?
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	The Athey report clearly cites Cheltenham's successful retail centre as a strength and highlights the projection of a significant increase in employment in the sector by 2031. I'm not sure where the reference to the quoted 22% figure is taken from but Cheltenham clearly seems to be bucking the national trend in terms of inward investment. Given that we have both new developments and new retailers expressing an interest in the town, there seems no sign of this suggested figure coming true. What the Athey report also highlights is the need for other employment opportunities, particularly business parks.
<b>3.</b>	<b>Question from Nic Pehkonen to Cabinet Member Development &amp; Safety, Councillor Andrew McKinlay</b>
	The Brewery developers have recently blocked off the High Street to traffic but they have placed their barriers on the one remaining pavement, reducing its width by almost half in places. This is particularly bad where the cycle route comes out of St George's Place and clearly little or no consideration has been given to cyclists or pedestrians who now have to share this narrow strip of pavement. I understand it will be like this until 26 June. I thought Cheltenham Borough Council wanted to promote active travel. This stretch of pavement is now very unpleasant and unsuitable for cyclists and pedestrians and no alternative cycle route has been put in place. Why have the developers been allowed to do this?
	<b>Response from</b>
	This is a question for GCC as the highways authority, which would have agreed the road closure on the basis of the proposed closure operational drawings. I will gladly take up this issue with GCC.
<b>4.</b>	<b>Question from Nic Pehkonen to Cabinet Member Development &amp; Safety Councillor Andrew McKinlay</b>
	Since the closure of the High Street for the Brewery development over a week ago, shops such as Wilkinsons' and Woody's have seen a dramatic drop in footfall. It seems the Brewery's intention is to put all the shops in the High Street that sell things that people actually need on a day-to-day basis out of business, and to replace independent local businesses with the empty premises and chain restaurants that make up most of the existing Brewery development. Is this strategy something that Cheltenham Borough Council supports?
	<b>Response from</b>
	The reality is clearly far from this. The Wilkinsons' store will be retained as part of the new development; in fact, they will be one of the first tenants within Brewery II Phase 1.  My understanding is that neither Wilkinsons nor Woodys are independent local businesses but part of multiples, but there is no intention of replacing them or other retailers with empty premises or chain restaurants. The Brewery II is predicated on maintaining and improving the retail offer in this part of town, which this Council has actively supported.