

Economy and Business Improvement Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 7th March, 2011
6.00 - 7.25 pm

Attendees	
Councillors:	Malcolm Stennett (Chairman), Garth Barnes, Nigel Britter (substitute for Councillor Paul Massey), Tim Cooper, Paul McLain, Lloyd Surgenor, Pat Thornton, Peter Jeffries and Jon Walklett
Co-optees:	
Also in attendance:	Councillor Steve Jordan and Councillor Colin Hay.
Apologies:	Councillors Paul Massey and Andrew Wall

Extract from the Draft Minutes

- 1. STRATEGY FOR THE USE OF IMPERIAL AND MONTPELLIER GARDENS**

The chair introduced this agenda item by reminding members that the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee had reviewed this report with a focus on the environmental aspects. The focus of this committee should be to look at the economic aspects of the options presented. However he highlighted the lack of financial information contained in the report. For example a figure of £5.2 million was quoted for the economic benefits that the festivals brought to the town but there were no details on how this figure was calculated. The impact on tourism was also a factor but again there were no details in the report. He also highlighted that only two options were given in the report but there should be a third option which was to maintain the status quo. He had circulated a breakdown of the costs for option 2 which had been made available with the Cabinet agenda for 15 March 2011 but there were no comparative figures available for option 1. The report was also light on the views of residents. In view of this it was going to be difficult for this committee to give a considered opinion on the economic aspects.

The Leader apologised on behalf of the Cabinet Member Sustainability who had not been able to attend this meeting. He emphasised that Cabinet had made a commitment to bring back a report on the strategy at the March meeting. In meeting this commitment they acknowledged that full details were not yet available but these would be worked up during the next stage. He stressed that there had been consultation with stakeholders and there would be further consultation during the next stage. Referring to the figures that had been circulated, he stressed that the £140,000 being spent was for a package of improvements which would benefit all users of the gardens. In particular it was hoped that the improvements made would enable Cheltenham Festivals to stay in the town centre.

In the discussion that followed members made the following comments:

- The report contained no feedback from the Chamber of Commerce or the Town Centre Manager.
- Consideration should be given to other options beyond the two described in the report such as using the the racecourse or the Pittville Pump Rooms and Pittville Park
- A detailed assessment should be made regarding the impact on the town centre if the festivals moved to the racecourse. During Race Week, businesses in the town do get a boost from the evening trade even if the retail trade was down during the day.
- The council should be supporting the Festivals and accommodating their needs. There was also an opportunity for the council to open up new income streams on the back of the Festivals.
- The cost of reinstating the gardens after a Festival must be a factor. The damage to Imperial Gardens had not been rectified following the most recent festival and the gardens were still currently in a poor state.

The Chair moved to bring the discussion to a close by summarising the views of the committee. Generally members were supportive of Cheltenham Festivals and were keen to find a way forward which was acceptable to all. The committee considered they had received a lightweight paper for such an important decision and due to the lack of financial information, they were unable to make a formal recommendation to Cabinet.

Resolved that:

1. The committee recommend Cabinet receive additional economic and financial information in order for them to be in a position to assess the benefit of implementing changes to the town centre parks in an endeavour to meet the requirements of Cheltenham Festivals. Along with the proposed options consideration should also be given to maintaining the status quo and / or using areas at the racecourse or in Pittville Park.
2. The committee request that they be involved in reviewing the economic aspects during the next stage of the consultation and receive a detailed report on the options with a full financial breakdown when it is available.