

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 11th May, 2011

6.00 - 8.00 pm

Attendees	
Councillors:	Penny Hall (Chair), Nigel Britter, Jacky Fletcher, Rob Garnham, Diane Hibbert, Sandra Holliday, Helena McCloskey, Charles Stewart and Paul Wheeldon
Also in attendance:	Barbara Exley (Public Protection Manager), Grahame Lewis (Executive Director), Owen Parry (Head of Integrated Transport and Sustainability), Councillor John Rawson (Cabinet Member Built Environment), Mike Redman (Director of Built Environment), Adam Reynolds (Green Space Development Manager) and Councillor Roger Whyborn (Cabinet Member Sustainability)

Minutes

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Pat Pratley, Lead Officer (Grahame Lewis attended as her substitute) and Rob Bell, Director of Operations.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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 the 02 March 2011 be agreed and signed as an accurate record.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

None received.

5. MATTERS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

None referred.

6. CABINET MEMBER BRIEFING

The Cabinet Member Built Environment updated members on the proposed redevelopment process of North Place and Portland Street which remained on target. Five bidders had been short listed to develop proposals in line with the development brief. They were selected on the basis of their previous experience of developing mixed use schemes in town centres and their financial strength to deliver such projects.

The five consortia had met with Officers and Members last Tuesday (3 May) and this had been a positive meeting. They would draw-up their initial proposals and costing by July, at which point all members would be updated and from this, two short listed schemes would be open for public comments from 22 August to 9 September 2011.

He had hoped to be in a position to offer more details about the Midwinter site but at this time was not able to.

There were a number of developments in which CBC was not involved, the Brewery Phase 2 and Jessops Avenue, this gave a good indication that there was an appetite to invest in Cheltenham.

Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) had only today confirmed that a consultation evening would take place tomorrow (12 May) in the Cambay Room of the Municipal offices for stage 2 of the parking review; South Cheltenham. This had been considered inadequate notice and these concerns had been expressed to GCC.

In stark contrast GCC had offered sufficient notice of the upcoming consultation regarding the 'surface water management plan', full details of which he would forward to all members.

The following responses were given by the Cabinet Member Built Environment to questions from members of the committee;

- Unfortunately timescales for the Midwinter site had slipped due to technical issues, but it was anticipated that a planning submission could be renewed in two weeks time.
- Neptune's fountain would be switched on at some point this month (May) however, the pumps were not fully functioning and did require work, but this would be done at a later stage. There were costs associated with such repairs and consideration was being given to funding these repairs.

There was general consensus that the committee were eager to see Neptune's fountain repaired and fully functioning as soon as possible. The Chair suggested that in the interim public notices could be displayed advising of any issues and that this should apply in similar circumstances across Cheltenham. The Executive Director committed to having Officers email members to confirm the approach to Neptune's fountain.

The Cabinet Member Sustainability confirmed that the consultation on the revised layout design of Imperial Gardens would start on Monday (16 May). It would be based at the Municipal offices and would run through the rest of May and into June. He noted the agreement that it would then be debated at Council rather than the overview and scrutiny committees. Members supported this approach.

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

- The decision to hold the Imperial Gardens consultation at the Municipal offices rather than Regent Arcade (for example) was based on officer resource rather than budget. A press release would be circulated, it was hoped there would be radio coverage and members were asked to communicate it to their constituents.

- The box office at Imperial Gardens was a late addition to the Jazz Festival and admittedly he too had been surprised at the level of food outlets within the large tented village this year, which was not in-keeping with Jazz Festivals of the past. However, the ambiance was an issue for Cheltenham Festivals and in future the level of tentage would be limited and spread across a larger area. He would confirm that the appropriate licensing permissions had been obtained.

Members were concerned that a matter as important as consultation on Imperial Gardens based solely at the Municipal offices would not attract as large of a response as there was interest in the subject and queried whether Officers were not available to carry out consultation at other venues at any point during the consultation period. The Executive Director emphasized how resources at the Council had reduced and the level of resource required in organising and supporting public consultation at alternative venues could not be sustained. The Cabinet Member would investigate whether alternative arrangements were possible but could make no commitment.

In relation to the new waste and recycling service the Cabinet Member Sustainability, based on his own observations and feedback from officers, considered the implementation to have been successful. Admittedly there had been some issues in areas consisting of non-conventional housing (park homes), though the issues highlighted had been addressed. An ongoing issue was flats, especially those with communal waste bins or storage, this was proving a difficult issue to overcome and Officers were meeting on Friday (13 May) to discuss a way forward.

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

- At this time there were no plans to provide larger food waste bins to larger families, however, residents were free to put out the large and small bin that had already been issued.
- There were a number of bedsits in the town centre which offered little or no storage for waste and to tackle any issues, a number of town centre streets benefited from weekly or twice weekly collections.
- Officers were aware of the issues in St. Pauls with students leaving bins on the highway when vacating properties outside of term time and additional collections were made.
- Garden waste collections did not include the collection of black bags and at this time there was no solution for residents who were unable to transfer their brown bin to the front of the property for collection.

The Chair thanked both Cabinet Members for their attendance and summarised the matters arising from this item;

- The Executive Director would draft a letter to GCC on behalf of the committee expressing members concerns in relation to what was considered inadequate notice of the parking consultation event.
- Details of the repairs required at Neptune's fountain and plans to address them would be sent to all members and officers would consider if a notice advising the public could be displayed at this site and others across the town.

- The Cabinet Member Sustainability would investigate whether there were any resources for undertaking the Imperial Gardens consultation in other venues.

7. DRAFT ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PLAN 2011-12

The Executive Director introduced the draft work plan 2011-2012 as circulated with the agenda. Consideration of the plan would allow members to shape upcoming scrutiny and offered the opportunity for more effective involvement in wider scrutiny issues. The comprehensive plan emerged following discussions between Officers, the Chair and Vice-Chair and was informed by the Corporate Strategy and Forward Plan.

The Chair invited members to comment on and add to the draft work plan 2011-2012.

The appropriate Officers gave the following responses to questions from members of the committee;

- The paper on 'New Homes Bonus' would not outline how any monies would be used, but rather, outline the strategy regarding long term vacant dwellings.
- The Localism Bill could see the Planning service change, though this would be covered under the commissioning review.
- Admittedly the CBC Travel Plan had stalled but was now in hand. The GCC restructure had proved problematic in attempts to take the matter forward, however, Officers were now in post.

Councillor Hibbert considered the notice given by GGC for the parking event tomorrow (12 May) was inadequate and would prevent people from being in a position to attend. Whilst she did not wish to delay the process she felt that given the importance of CBC input, GCC should consider offering a further opportunity and provide sufficient notice. Members supported the proposal that the Executive Director draft a letter on behalf of the committee, expressing their concern about the insufficient notice provided to CBC.

Following comments by members of the committee relating to cracked paving slabs and tarmac repairs, the Executive Director suggested that the committee first consider the cost constraints of replacing slabs with other materials. Members were happy with this proposal and the item would be added to the work plan.

The Chair volunteered to sit on the Climate Change Working Group and noted that it was she, rather than Councillor Driver that was nominated to sit on the Sustainable Management of Green Space Working Group.

8. BUILT ENVIRONMENT SERVICES - COMMISSIONING PROJECT

The Cabinet Member Built Environment introduced the paper as circulated with the agenda, which he took as read, choosing to highlight key points only.

Item 1.1 detailed the services which the review encompassed and outlined progress to date.

A key aim of the commissioning approach adopted by the council was to achieve cost savings but this was by no means the overriding priority. The first phase of the review, analysis, involved taking a fundamental look at what the council wanted their Built Environment service to deliver, in a constructive way to benefit the town. Consideration would be given to whether services or functions (where possible, given that the council were obliged to deliver certain services), should be devolved to Parish Councils for example, or whether a consultation process should be devised, which encouraged community feedback.

The paper evidenced that the service was by and large, efficient and effective, however, 'Systems Thinking' would identify waste from systems and processes. This would, where possible, drive out waste and create efficiencies.

The Cabinet Member Working Group met for the first time on the 13 April where additional issues were raised and as such the timescales for the review had been extended. A preliminary report outlining the potential outcomes of the review would be prepared for Cabinet on the 26 July, with the final report scheduled for consideration by Cabinet in September. These reports would be available to the committee for comment prior to the Cabinet meetings.

The following responses were given by the Cabinet Member Built Environment in response to questions from members of the committee;

- He understood members concerns about the devolution of services and/or powers to Parish Councils, especially given that not all areas in Cheltenham had them, but this would be approached with caution.
- The suggestion that there was a relationship between the speed at which planning decisions were reached and the level of appeals was possible and this would be considered further.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member Built Environment for his attendance and welcomed future updates.

9. STREET SCENE ENFORCING REVIEW

The Public Protection Manager introduced the paper which was circulated separately to the agenda. The item had originally been scheduled for the March meeting and its deferral to this meeting had been necessitated by a restructure and redundancies.

Street Scene enforcement was an effective service for which demand often outstripped capacity, but there were areas for improvement, specifically to do with links with other services and partners.

The following responses were given by the Public Protection Manager to questions from members of the committee;

- From the 1 June 2011 Police Officers and PCSO's would be based in the Municipal offices and discussions were ongoing in relation to who could undertake what tasks. A memorandum of understanding was currently being drawn up and this was considered a positive move by both CBC and the Police Authority.

- The 2000 requests for service referred to in item 2.2 included noise complaints, waste, street cleaning, highway obstructions, abandoned vehicles and increasingly, fly tipping.
- There was a perception that some areas of Cheltenham were far more of an issue than others. A mapping exercise was being undertaken in order to ensure that enforcement activities were co-ordinated.
- Officers did benefit from flexible working hours this was however, being hampered by the long term absence of one of the officers. An 'out of hours' service was staffed by 2 Street Scene Officers and 2 more were in the process of being trained. The PCSO's based at the Municipal offices from 1 June 2011 would also enhance the service.

The Chair thanked the Public Protection Manager for her attendance and commended the work of the Enforcement Officers which she advised was regularly acknowledged at Parish and Police meetings.

10. REGENT ARCADE AND GROSVENOR TERRACE PARKING

The Cabinet Member Built Environment introduced the paper as circulated with the agenda and offered some political context to the issue. Members were reminded that the budget agreed in February included a sum of money for car parking equipment.

The rationale for investment across the parking facilities included cashable savings, greater customer satisfaction and improved overall performance. In the current economic climate it was nonsensical to increase charges in a bid to increase income. The logical conclusion had been to reduce operating costs.

Initial investment would be directed at replacing the operating and management systems at Regent Arcade and Grosvenor Terrace car parks, which were considered to be at the end of their expected life cycle. A business case was currently being compiled by Officers.

The Head of Integrated Transport and Sustainability reiterated that the current systems were ageing, it proved difficult to source replacement parts which given the age of the system were increasingly second-hand and from January 2012 the system would no longer be credit card compliant. Customers and colleagues at the shopping centres had grown increasingly frustrated with the limitations of the ageing systems.

Whilst the new system needed to be future proof, this could be achieved without spending more than was necessary. As part of the evaluation process CBC undertook some 'soft market testing' by inviting some leading suppliers to present their systems, this proved encouraging and demonstrated the need for a customer led approach rather than a technology led approach.

Ultimately the aim was to extend the new system to other car parks across Cheltenham, a move that would be all the more crucial as a result of the ongoing investment by GCC in on-street parking.

The following responses were given by the Head of Integrated Transport and Sustainability to questions from members of the committee;

- New operating systems could include enforcement. The press had misconstrued the suggestion that spaces could be pre-sold, the proposal was in actual fact a result of town centre hotels enquiring whether spaces could be pre-booked outside of normal business hours.
- All car parks currently offered disabled parking bays though work was in progress to bring some of them up to current standards. Engagement with the Blue Badge User Group had identified that whilst a number of badge users were accessing parking in Cheltenham, this was, in the main, on-street parking.
- Following discussions with the procurement team, the suggestion was that expressions of interest could be invited in approximately two weeks time, preferred tenders received and the new system implemented by December.

Councillor Wheeldon advocated the proposed upgrades which he felt would be vital on the implementation of increased residents parking and with the loss of North Place and Portland Street.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member Built Environment and the Head of Integrated Transport and Sustainability for their attendance. She felt it was an exciting prospect for Cheltenham which she fully supported.

11. GREEN SPACE STRATEGY

The Green Space Development Manager introduced the paper as circulated with the agenda. The paper outlined some of the accomplishments of the Green Space Strategy since it was approved by Cabinet in 2009 and raised points for consideration.

Appendix 1 detailed progress on specifics within the Action Plan and overall, good progress had been achieved in several key areas. Highlights included a number of successful funding applications, high customer satisfaction with allotments, increased bio-diversity, Green Flag awards and significantly increased partnership working and volunteer wardens.

The following responses were given by the Green Space Development Manager and Cabinet Member Sustainability in response to questions from members of the committee;

- Some sites had an established management plan, in which case it would prove simple to direct resources (volunteers) to the sites, though admittedly work to some sites was far more ad-hoc. There were issues about health & safety and insurances, which could be overcome and Park Rangers would maintain an overview.
- A presentation on work in support of bio-diversity and sustainability to the Climate Change Working Group could be arranged.
- Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) of which one may already exist, would allow for S106 contributions to be targeted at strategic level sites.
- The formal quarterly meetings with Gloucestershire County Council related mainly to operational matters including the cutting of grass verges and most recently roundabout sponsorship. The Green Space Development Manager did not attend these meetings personally.

- Imperial and Montpellier Gardens were assessed some years ago for the English Heritage 'Register of Listed Parks and Gardens of Specific Historic Interest in England' and were not considered to meet the relevant standards. History of parks was key in this assessment, notable designers, etc, though they could be reassessed in the future. Sandford Park could well be added as its history was proving very interesting.
- For clarity, the second to last recommendation on page 39 referred to a reduction to the size threshold for sites in order that more could be considered as meeting the 300m accessibility standard.

Councillors Fletcher and Garnham advised members of the Big Community Offer Highways. This was a new offer being developed by GCC which would allow interested parish, town and neighbourhood groups to apply for and fund enhanced highway items (trees, drainage works, etc), which would be match funded by GCC. This was a pilot project in certain areas of Cheltenham at the moment.

Councillor Garnham suggested that whilst Green Flags were an excellent indicator of clean, safe and well managed green spaces, perhaps another useful indicator would be usage of parks and gardens. Whilst resources at the council were reduced, perhaps community groups could undertake spot checks.

The Chair thanked the Green Space Development Manager and Cabinet Member Sustainability for their attendance. She felt the Green Space Strategy was one of the most exciting to be considered by the committee given that green space was so special to Cheltenham.

The Green Space Development Manager would organise a meeting of the Green Space Strategy working group in the coming weeks.

12. CABINET WASTE WORKING GROUP (CWWG)

Councillor Britter, a representative of the Cabinet Waste Working Group (CWWG) explained that the group had last met when the new waste and recycling service had recently been launched. An early achievement was the tonnage of waste that was bypassing landfill and being recycled.

The approach that had been taken was to 'go live' with the service and address tenant and member issues as they arose. And to date this approach had been successful.

The next meeting of the CWWG was scheduled for a week on Monday (23 May) and members were invited to email Councillor Britter and/or Fletcher before that time so that they might raise specific issues for discussion and resolution.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THE CHAIRMAN DETERMINES TO BE URGENT AND WHICH REQUIRES A DECISION

There were no urgent items for discussion.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled for the 13 July 2011.

Penny Hall
Chairman