

Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Wednesday, 13th July, 2011

6.05 - 8.05 pm

Attendees	
Councillors:	Penny Hall (Chair), Ian Bickerton, Nigel Britter, Jacky Fletcher, Sandra Holliday, Helena McCloskey, Charles Stewart and Paul Wheeldon
Also in attendance:	Rob Bell (Director of Operations), Gill Morris (Change and Sustainability Officer), Councillor John Rawson (Cabinet Member Built Environment), John Rees (Environmental Maintenance Manager) and Councillor Roger Whybornn (Cabinet Member Sustainability)

Minutes

1. APOLOGIES

No apologies were received.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

3. AGREEMENT OF MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THE 11 MAY 2011

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 11 May 2011 be agreed and signed as an accurate record.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The following response was given to the public question received;

1. Question from Mr. Ken Pollock	Given (1) that Imperial Gardens as both lawns and flower-garden is so crucial to Cheltenham's image and amenity, and given (2) that the current proposal's assurance that 'good lawns can be maintained' has been seriously doubted in the recent public consultation (as is confirmed by the present declining state of the lawns, despite the questionable remedies such as 'drill seeding' which are now being attempted), would it not be reasonable for the councillors on Environment Scrutiny to add these issues to their current Agenda, and express a clear view either in support or against the currently proposed layout?
Response from the Chair of the Environment O&S Committee (Councillor Hall)	As Chair of the Environment overview and scrutiny committee I felt strongly that given the importance of the Imperial Gardens to Cheltenham, all

council members must have the opportunity to contribute to the debate on the revised layout design of the Gardens and had been lobbying for the post consultation debate to take place in full council and not be confined to the overview and scrutiny committees.

On Wednesday May 11th the Environment overview and scrutiny committee discussed the details of the consultation process and was in agreement that after the consultation it would be debated in full council on June 27th before the results of the consultation and the full council debate go to the cabinet for decision on July 26th.

The minutes of the council meeting on June 27th have now been published and record the debate that took place.

5. MATTERS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE

No items were referred to the committee.

6. CABINET MEMBER BRIEFING

The Cabinet Member Sustainability, in light of the public question, started his update with news on Imperial and Montpellier Gardens. The matter was discussed at Council on the 27 June and the principle message had been the importance of good maintenance and restoration of turf. At the end of the season the Council would assess what restorative work was necessary and Cheltenham Festivals (CF) would pay any costs. Although a number of alternative design ideas had been suggested, he was confident that the proposed design was the right one. This sentiment had been reaffirmed by the endorsement given to the design by Friends of Imperial Square and Gardens, who had commended officers on the design. The spotlight had now been turned on Montpellier Gardens in a bid to avoid reproducing issues there and discussions were ongoing with CF. Drill seeding was the topic of much debate but this had to be undertaken at a suitable time of year and for the best results it needed to be done on good quality turf and as such some areas would need to be replaced.

The Cabinet Member Sustainability gave the following responses to questions from members of the committee;

- All relationships, as with that between the Council and CF, needed to be based on a level of trust and if the Council were reasonable in their assessment of the restorative work required he could see no reason why CF wouldn't agree.
- The use of existing notice boards in and around the gardens to communicate to the public on the usage of the gardens and detail any restoration work to be undertaken was a good one and this would be raised with officers.

The Chair reminded members that the committee were scheduled to consider the final design of Imperial Gardens at the next meeting (14 September) and agreed to schedule a review of the remedial issues after the next Festival season.

There was little update to offer in relation to the new waste scheme, which the Cabinet Member Sustainability felt was going well. Issues were being worked

through, the garden scheme take-up would be reviewed and the working group would be providing an update at the next meeting. The Local Authority Company was in the initial administrative stage and despite Tewkesbury Borough Council not having signed up to the agreement, joint working at the depot continued. A proposal to form a Joint Waste Board, joining waste authorities under a single committee would be tabled with the committee prior to Cabinet in October.

The Cabinet Member Sustainability and the Director of Operations gave the following responses to questions from members of the committee;

- Various teams at the council were working together, along with the University to trial a new approach to addressing the annual waste issue in St. Pauls which occurred when the large number of students residing in the area, vacated for the summer.
- Benches had been removed from Lansdown following discussions with the Police and local PCSO's. A high volume of anti-social behaviour where the benches were located had caused local residents a great deal of disturbance and since their removal this had ceased. Officer did recognise that this created an issue for those that had put the benches to good use and were looking at relocating them in the near vicinity.

Councillor Wheeldon had reported large scale fly tipping in St. Pauls at 9.30am on Monday (11 July) and it was cleared by 12 noon the very same day, for which he thanked those involved.

There were three items on which the Cabinet Member Built Environment wished to brief the committee, North Place and Portland Street, parking and environmental improvements.

A North Place member seminar was held last Friday (8 July) for which there was good attendance by members. The four initial proposals had been evaluated by the panel and the scores would be reported to the Development Task Force on Friday (15 July) and subsequently Cabinet. The four schemes were all very different and he was confident that there were at least two credible candidates, a decision on which would be fairly swift. The two short listed schemes would be asked to draw-up their final proposals and Cabinet would make their decision on the preferred developer in October. Progress to date had been encouraging and he could see no reason for any movement within the current schedule.

The Cabinet Member Built Environment gave the following responses to questions from members of the committee;

- Constitutionally the preferred developer decision was a Cabinet decision but regardless of the legalities the Cabinet Member Built Environment considered that given the gravity of the decision, it should be debated at Council. He would discuss this with his Development Task Force and Cabinet colleagues, suggesting that a special council meeting in October would be a sensible approach.
- A high profile, 3 week, public consultation would give residents and local businesses the opportunity to consider the proposals.

- The Development Task Force were aware that there was a need for almost 800 spaces on the site given the additional pressure that the loss of North Place and Portland Street would create in St. Pauls.

Parking issues had come to a head with the start of the 'Town Hall zone' statutory consultation by Gloucestershire County Council (GCC). A wider issue was the need for CBC and GCC to agree a joint parking strategy and perhaps there was a need to establish a CBC working group.

County Councillors Garnham and Noble had met with GCC officers who had assured them that the concerns that were being raised had been taken on board and whilst the consultation was ongoing, there was flexibility to amend the proposals. Councillor Garnham felt the meeting had been a positive step forward and hoped that rather than merely addressing parking and increasing revenue, the space would be managed and improved. The Cabinet Member was grateful to County Councillors Garnham and Noble for having taken this action. He felt this reiterated the need for a joint parking strategy and endorsed the formation of a working group on which CBC members were involved.

In response to a member question, the Head of Integrated Transport and Sustainability suggested that the joint parking strategy would need to be completed by Autumn 2011.

The Chair was concerned by the current level of working groups and invited those members that felt they were able, to form part of the Joint Parking Strategy Working Group. Councillors Hall, McCloskey and Garnham volunteered.

Councillor Stewart voiced concerns that GCC were pushing resident parking proposals too hard and too fast to provide residents with sufficient opportunity to voice their concerns.

The final item the Cabinet Member Built Environment raised was environmental improvements, for which £160k had been earmarked in the budget outturn report. Given that the monies were to be put to a practical use his hope was that a flexible approach could be taken to the application process for the funding. Rather than set a funding limit the suggestion was that an indicative figure could be £20k, with a level of flexibility on this. He advocated that a discussion paper be presented to the committee at the September meeting.

7. SECOND ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE GLOUCESTERSHIRE AIRPORT - GREEN POLICY 2010-2011

Councillor Wheeldon, a member of the Joint Airport Scrutiny Working Group (JASWG) introduced the report as circulated with the agenda. The development of the Airport's Green Policy formed part of the conditions of the Runway Safety Project and this was the second annual review.

Three key points contained within the report were, firstly, noise. In the period 1 April 2010 to 31 March 2011, 587 complaints were received, of which 524 were from a small group of regular complainants. In an initiative to reduce the number of formal complaints received, the website is to be improved, to include details about the use of the Airport for military and emergency aircraft, especially out-of-hours. Councillor Wheeldon had personally lobbied the Civil

Aviation Authority to highlight the issue of silencers and the high level of formalities and expense associated with having them fitted to helicopters and small aircraft in the UK.

Whilst aircraft CO2 emissions were down, so were flights. There had been 7,000 less flights on the previous year and this was as a result of weather, the economic climate and a change of focus by the Airport from small light planes to business flights. Emissions from ground operations had also reduced and an innovative Green Travel Plan had been developed, but accurate baselines have still to be established. The Airport had been urged to establish baselines soon, as it is impossible to accurately measure performance without them.

Councillor Fletcher, a member of the Airport Board, advised members that there had been some further developments since the report was produced and circulated. Cycle parking sheds had now been erected. Given that Stagecoach were not prepared to reroute a bus to the Airport, a local company had indicated they would be interested and were awaiting the results of the survey, which at present were very positive. Aircraft silencers were an issue. At present, aircraft entering from the continent had to disable them on entry to the UK. Construction to the runway was now underway.

The members of the JASWG and the Climate Change and Sustainability Officer gave the following responses to questions from members of the committee;

- The report highlighted that there were no timescales for a number of the recommendations and this, therefore, formed one of the recommendations. The next annual review would look back at the previous 12 months and assess progress and performance.
- The electricity consumption figures for 2009-10 could not be considered accurate as not all meters were being measured.
- The development of a comprehensive database of noise complaints would enable the Airport to pinpoint specific noise issues.
- The Airport did meet national regulations for noise.

Upon a vote it was unanimously

RESOLVED that the review report and the recommendations contained within it be accepted by the committee.

8. BUILT ENVIRONMENT COMMISSIONING PROJECT

Cabinet Member Built Environment introduced the paper as circulated with the agenda, which was an extensive report due to the complexity of the project.

Delivery of statutory services such as Planning were often taken as a given but the review was looking at outcomes and considering whether a service was being delivered in the most effective and efficient way. A number of opportunities were being discussed, which could include the devolution of powers to Parish Council's, though this would be problematic in areas of Cheltenham not served by a Parish Council.

One of the big issues being considered as part of the review was finance. The Government were receptive to councils setting their own fees, in order that they more closely reflect the costs of running the service. The exact detail of how

this would work was yet to be finalised, but the review group were aware of the new charging regime and hoped that the announcement would be made before the end of the review. The review would be forced to consider what level of support the council tax payers of Cheltenham could reasonably be asked to provide, which would be an issue if the Planning service was to be delivered solely on fees.

Systems thinking could identify significant efficiencies and whilst not necessarily financial savings it could help streamline the process without impacting the democratic process or customer service. There was a need to make the process more straightforward and therefore accessible for residents.

The Cabinet Member Built Environment hoped that the issue over fees would soon be resolved and the outcome of the review was a streamlined, more customer friendly service.

The Cabinet Member Built Environment gave the following responses to questions from members of the committee;

- Whilst the general conclusion thus far had been that the service was a relatively efficient one, agreeing an accurate benchmark for cost was important.
- Building Control formed part of the joint scheme with Tewkesbury which had improved resilience and produced savings within the service. The support that some of these services provided to other areas of the Council was acknowledged and where a service was cost neutral, the need for change was not urgent.
- Fees were an important issue to get right and the structure needed to be balanced between householders and large scale developers.
- Redesign of the committee process and appeals would not be permitted to compromise public consultation/democracy, but it was possible to make the service more efficient at certain stages of the process.

In relation to fees, one member suggested that there was a case for increasing the fee for retrospective planning approval.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member Built Environment for the update. The committee looked forward to considering the final report.

9. STREET CLEANSING SATISFACTION

The Environmental Maintenance Manager introduced the paper as circulated with the agenda, which detailed the results of the survey used to measure the level of satisfaction with Town Centre cleansing operations by members of the public. The survey, by way of a questionnaire was carried out in the Regent and Beechwood Arcades over a 4 day period.

The results were shown in appendices 1 to 5 and generally were good, however, a number of residents responses were rather influenced by the change to the refuse collections and charging for garden waste collections, etc and scores were lower, presumably as they were unhappy with other aspects of the council.

The service was currently being reviewed in an effort to identify improvements and ultimately deliver a more efficient and effective service.

The Environmental Maintenance Manager and the Director of Operations gave the following responses to questions from members of the committee;

- 'crews bar 61' within the report referred to a crew consisting of two men with a vehicle undertaking other duties.
- The town centre was cleaned everyday, up to 3 times a day, with the most significant effort being put into the early morning clean. Unfortunately officers were unable to prevent littering between visits, though the future aim was to dovetail enforcement with operations to change the behaviour of those that litter.
- The Councils responsibility for clearing litter from along the A40 ended just before the M5 junction, but this area was often addressed by the County Council.
- The annual steam-clean of certain areas equated to a significant spend for the service and chewing gum was a major issue for the council, as it was for many authorities across the country. The Tidy Britain group were lobbying hard to get manufacturers of chewing gum to pay a levy towards the clear up operations or develop a non-stick gum.
- Officers worked with residents to clear cars in an area in order to undertake a complete deep clean and also tried to work with GCC to clear gullies. It took an hour in total and residents would be impressed by the results.
- The bi-annual Place Survey, on which the council used to rely to measure public opinion of services such as street cleansing had now ceased. There was no doubt an issue when undertaking a survey in the town centre that people would refer to the town centre rather than the street where they lived. Locations outside the town centre could be considered in future.
- The questionnaire was attached to over 800 individuals in a mail-out by the Chamber of Commerce and only 2 responses were received.
- There was a dedicated rapid response team for the town centre, though, all street cleansing teams had mobile communications and could address issues during working hours. Members needed to consider that street cleansing was very objective.
- Removal of weeds from gullies was the responsibility of Gloucestershire Highways, however, two sprays a year were included in the councils service level agreement. A contact herbicide spray was used in around April and again in September, but this would only kill what it touched and would not affect anything that was yet to germinate. When to carry out such services was always a dilemma and in an ideal world, the Council would like to undertake four sprays a year, but Gloucestershire Highways would not fund any more than two.
- Chewing gum boards had been considered in the past, but this was certainly something that could be trialed in the high street for a nominal sum.
- There were no notices prohibiting the feeding of birds but this was discouraged and whilst action could be taken against individuals, the council could attract negative press for taking such action.

- There were informal arrangements already in existence by way of residents who reported issues in their neighbourhood. There were also a range of communication channels for reporting issues (website, email, phone, etc). The service could consider more formal arrangements with individuals within a neighbourhood.
- The service could purchase a machine to remove chewing gum, but this would be very costly and require manpower. Multi-functional machinery was often purchased that met many needs.
- There was a voluntary code of practice for Cheltenham businesses to sign up to. One of the more successful was 'food on the go' which saw, for example, Burger King, providing and maintaining a litter bin.
- The service consisted of 20 staff in total, however, unfortunately there were currently 4 vacancies being filled by agency staff.
- When the cleansing service moved from a regular to a responsive service the Director of Operations understood that the information on the website had been changed. He apologised that this was not the case and would ensure the issue was rectified as soon as possible.
- The survey had been more labour intensive than the Place Survey but it had been a worthwhile exercise as it had highlighted certain issues and would aid the current review of the service.
- Details of the operational service changes as a result of the review would be reported to the committee in May 2012.

The Chair accepted that the service was no longer in a position to offer regular cleansing teams but felt that when they did respond to issues, the results were of high standard.

10. ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PLAN 2011-12

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

Councillor Fletcher suggested that the committee may like to reconsider the plastic bag issue after her recent observations that the use of plastic bags was on the increase. The committee agreed for this item to be added to the work plan. The Chair proposed that this be scheduled for November.

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

There were no urgent items for discussion.

12. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday 14 September 2011.

Penny Hall
Chairman