

## Budget Consultation 21/22 questions from members of the public

<b>1.</b>	<b>Received 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2021</b>
<b>1.</b>	<p>Looking over the Cheltenham Borough Council 2021/2022 budget proposal I was incredulous to see that even after the year we have had with Covid 19 causing massive economic disruption and financial hardship to the already overtaxed ratepayer a proposal for an ill judged 2.34 percent rise in rates heaping yet more misery on the hard working ratepayers, it is to be regretted that the author even brags at sneakily limiting the rise so as to avoid democratic scrutiny by other breaching the referendum threshold. It would be better for the borough if the budget cut council tax to ease the draconian burden on taxpayers in these critical times.</p> <p>Three items in particular stand out :</p> <p>The proposal to spend 75000GBP per year on a carbon zero lead, another non job if the role needs doing at all it should be assigned as a secondary duty to an existing staff member in fact the current departmental managers should be doing this anyway. I note also that the role is in the budget for three years how on earth would they fill up their days? Looks like ratepayers money squandered on tokenism given the impact of the whole UK being carbon neutral never mind Cheltenham when compared to the Carbon output of Chins/India/USA is nearly zero.</p> <p>I find it incongruous that in the same document that talks about carbon neutral we have reference to a plan to build 4000 new houses about the most carbon guzzling action I can think of. population increase is a major cause of global warming Cheltenham is full don't build any more houses on greenfield sites even if they are heated by heat pumps that would be Carbon neutral.</p> <p>The proposal to employ apprentices is a good idea if the end result is after an induction period to replace current lowest performing staff with cheaper more performant ex apprentices. If however it's just loading headcount with deadweight then it's a really bad idea. In the former case I would expect to see the future savings in the budget.</p> <p>The proposal to spend 75000 per year on a business development lead, two points ,what on earth does a council know about business ,how could a person whose cost of funding was a paltry 75000 possibly add any value, why not cut/eliminate business rates that would help business more than any crackpot schemes.</p>
<b>1.</b>	<p><b>Response from Cabinet Member</b></p> <p>The proposed level of council tax has taken into account both the funding needed to pay for the essential services provided by the council as well as the general economic situation faced by council tax payers. The council is still maintaining a flexible council tax benefit system to assist where there are problems paying. 4805 people are currently benefitting from this with 3139 getting 100% discount. It is also notable that the proposed rise for Gloucestershire County Council is 4.75% (£60 at Band D) and for Gloucestershire Police it is 4.99% (£12.88 at Band D). This compares to 2.34% (£5 at Band D) for Cheltenham Borough Council.</p> <p>Tackling climate change is a top priority for this council and indeed for the planet. The £75k mentioned is not for one specific post but to help resource carbon reduction projects and help the council to provide the leadership needed on this issue.</p>

	<p>Lack of affordable housing is a major problem for our local community and the council sees tackling it as another top priority. However, in doing this we are aiming for carbon neutrality when building new homes to help tackle climate change at the same time.</p> <p>I welcome the support for the proposed apprenticeships which should benefit both the apprentices in providing new career opportunities and the council.</p> <p>The council has no say in the level of business rates which are set nationally. However, the council is committed to supporting local businesses and investing in Cheltenham. We work closely with the Cheltenham Business Improvement District and have initiated the public/private partnership on the Cheltenham Economic Recovery Taskforce. This is in addition to major investments such as in the Golden Valley project. The fact that in 2019 the council won 'Best Commercial Council' award would indicate some success in the business world. We believe the extra £75k proposed for economic development is particularly important in helping the council play its full role in supporting economic recovery after the pandemic and again is not for one specific post.</p>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Received 12th January 2021</b>
<b>2.</b>	<p>CBC should stop wasting residents money on things that are the County Council's responsibility, highway improvements and economic development schemes that are sub-regional in scale such as the Cyber Park nonsense which in reality will just end up being another trade park. Attempts to create science parks in other places have all failed to deliver the claimed original aims. CBC needs to re-direct much larger resources to climate change mitigation actions that will keep basic services at an acceptable standard, i.e. maintaining parks and green spaces and keeping footways clear of storm debris. Stop trying to be bigger than you really are and do the basic stuff to the same standard that most other district councils manage, some with far less resources than Cheltenham has. If you want to play at economic development money would be much better spent on supporting individuals to progress upwards in the strong local job market than on subsidising big business to do what they will do anyway if there is a real market for more commercial floor space. How about bring jobs to the town centre where there is lots of vacant floor space and where employees will support the retail sector that does survive the current down sizing which in large part is the result of a laze fare approach over the past 40 years to out of town retail development.</p> <p>PS why aren't you doing an accessible budget consultation that actually seeks residents views on your spending plans?</p>
<b>2.</b>	<p><b>Response from Cabinet Member</b></p> <p>Providing local leadership was one of the major reasons why in 2019 the council won 'Best Commercial Council' award. So I make no apology for the council taking a lead of the Golden Valley development incorporating Cyber Central. The jobs and homes provided by this project will be massively important for the future of the town and wider area. The whole project is creating huge interest both locally and nationally. It is the council's involvement that will help ensure that as a new Garden Community the development does help tackle climate change and doesn't become just another trade park. In addition the Supplementary Planning Document already in place for this area sets out the expectations for low carbon development and wider protection of the environment.</p> <p>The council takes pride in quality of all the services it provides. It was interesting to note that a recent independent review carried out by White Young Green commented that the quality</p>

	<p>of the parks and gardens in Cheltenham was not seen anywhere outside the royal parks in London. We would not wish to lower our standards.</p> <p>National planning laws over decades have made it more difficult to protect the town centre over out of town locations. Despite this the council has always seen the town centre as a priority and it is pleasing to see that it is still seen as a good place to invest. However it is clearly true that there is a rapid change in retail demand and there is reducing need for physical shops. One of the key roles for the Cheltenham Economic Recovery Taskforce, which brings together many key stakeholders, is to develop future options for the current retail area.</p> <p>The budget consultation follows all the rules set down and has included briefing meetings with various interest groups as well as the details being advertised on the council website. Given the circumstances of the pandemic and having only agreed a Covid Recovery Budget in November we haven't on this occasion carried out a wider public engagement exercise. However, this is something we do every few years particularly where any major changes are proposed to council spending plans.</p>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Received 11<sup>th</sup> January 2021</b>
<b>3.</b>	<p>Cheltenham Borough Council declared a climate emergency in July 2019. As a result of the climate crisis and ecological breakdown (the current covid crisis is a manifestation of both), we must move:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) towards diversity and away from monoculture</li> <li>b) towards long-term thinking; and</li> <li>c) away from a separation of sectors and disciplines towards an interrelationship between all sectors/disciplines.</li> </ul> <p>This must happen locally, as well as globally.</p> <p>Much of the councils' ambition for revival and employment seems to be centred on the Golden Valley project and employment in cyber. My concern is that this inadvertently produces another monoculture when what we need for covid recovery and to prepare for the greater impacts of the climate and ecological crisis is multi-culture.</p> <p>Society (like ecology) thrives on diversity. For a resilient, inclusive community, therefore, we must diversify. We have a university with one of the best ecology departments in the country (the University of Gloucestershire was named the most sustainable university in the country). Two agricultural colleges who could be pivotal in helping Cheltenham become self-sufficient in food and thrive off local produce. These are areas that Cheltenham must be integrating into its future plans. The talent and the capability is there, and council needs to show confidence in that talent and capability through investment and backing. The council could consider apprenticeships in this area (treecare teams are severely under-resourced, for example).</p> <p>Not only that: At the "Big Conversation" debate for Gloucestershire 2050 a few years ago, 14 to 24 year olds in Gloucestershire stated very clearly that they wanted jobs which helped people and protected and restored our environment rather than destroyed it. Future generations will be hit hardest by the impacts of climate and ecological breakdown and play a pivotal role in community resilience and development. For that reason, feedback from young people must be listened to and acted upon holistically at borough level, as well as county</p>

	<p>level. Because if all young people are being offered is another, slightly different monoculture, we will not be making the most of all of the talent our town has to offer. We will repeat the cycle of underemployment and fail to stop the exodus of young people to other parts of the country. We will perpetuate imbalance instead of balance, which is what our response to the climate and ecological emergency requires us to achieve and then maintain.</p> <p>The government's own website refers to the pandemic as "unprecedented" (as does the Council's). If it is "unprecedented", it requires an unprecedented response, which means diversifying employment and sectors and involving the diverse talents of as many people as possible so we are fully agile. Focusing so heavily on one sector does not achieve that.</p> <p>We also need to be moving away from the idea of "economic growth" as the measure of success. Our current covid crisis is a clear demonstration of what happens when GDP is the focus to the exclusion of all else. Instead we should be concentrating on increasing well-being and happiness in the town. Prosperity will follow.</p>
3.	<p><b>Response from Cabinet Member</b></p> <p>Thank you for taking the time to respond to the consultation. You have raised some important points. The declaration of a climate emergency and the target of a 2030 carbon neutral council and borough is central to everything the council is doing. The council has a duty to pursue these goals in a way that also provides good quality homes and jobs for people – including precisely the young people you mention. The Golden Valley development can help provide these homes and jobs in a way that benefits nature and biodiversity as part of a low carbon development. Indeed, the indicative proposals included in the SPD feature a nature reserve and the emphasis on nature and the environment is clear throughout the document. These principles were made clear in the Supplementary Planning Document for the development and our future development partner(s) will have to work within these non-negotiable constraints. The cyber industry certainly touches on and impacts many cultures, though we know that Cheltenham's richness of culture across other sectors will benefit from the innovation and dynamism brought by the Golden Valley.</p> <p>We agree entirely that GDP cannot be the sole measure of the success of our town and that will never be the only aim for the council. This is demonstrated in no better way than the work we are starting on the climate emergency response, focusing on the environment, and initiatives like No Child Left Behind, focusing on the wellbeing of children.</p> <p>Your comment on the interrelationship of different sectors is entirely correct and one we are already taking forward. The Cheltenham Zero partnership will bring together businesses from varying sectors, as well as community groups from different parts of the town and with different areas of interest. This includes, naturally, the expertise of the university – should it wish to be involved. I have been contacted by a student who has offered to be involved and I am awaiting further contact. Furthermore, the Cheltenham Economic Recovery Task Force has two environmental experts and an environmental expert representing the voluntary and community sector. This makes the environment the most represented topic on the Task Force. There will of course need to be a key thread of environmental custodianship as part of its work.</p>