

## Council

22 February 2021

### Member Questions (13 total)

<b>1.</b>	<b>Question from Councillor Chris Mason to Cabinet Member Climate and Communities, Councillor Max Wilkinson</b>
	Clean Air Cheltenham have pointed out that it was a legal requirement for local authorities to have an air quality action plan in place by 2020. Could the Cabinet Member for Climate and Communities please explain why Cheltenham does not have an up to date plan?
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	<p>I've met regularly with Clean Air Cheltenham to take their feedback on local proposals for improving air quality. Their campaigning in Cheltenham is important and valued, alongside the work of other environmental groups.</p> <p>When a local authority puts in place a new Air Quality Management Area (AQMA), it has a year to publish a plan. I understand we are on course to have a new plan reviewed by the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) in that timescale. We look forward to hearing Clean Air Cheltenham's view on the plan. Councillor Mason might also wish to get involved and I'd welcome his input – perhaps through the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, of which he is chair.</p> <p>The consultancy working on our Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) is considering how we can go further to hit our environmental goals, including extra monitoring. However, as Councillor Mason will know, the majority of our air quality problems are caused by emissions from motor vehicles. He may wish to ask my counterpart on Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) what is being done by the County, as highways authority, to help reduce air pollution from motor vehicles in Cheltenham. GCC's recently published Local Transport Plan was a missed opportunity to implement many of the suggestions put forward by this authority during the consultation process, to help tackle air pollution in our borough.</p>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Question from Councillor Tim Harman to Cabinet Member Finance, Councillor Steve Jordan</b>
	Can you please update the Council on the decision of the Borough Council to return £3 million to Government in connection with the Portland Street Car Park. Were all options considered and are there any plans going forwards ?
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	<p>To avoid any confusion Cheltenham Borough Council (CBC) hasn't returned £3m as it had not received any money. It has mutually agreed with Homes England to withdraw a bid to the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF). This is because MF Freeman, the owners of the Portland Street site, who would have received the money, have made it clear they now intend to sell the site as a car park and do not intend to develop it for housing which was a requirement of the proposed funding.</p> <p>CBC have been discussing the site with MF Freeman since shortly after they purchased it to help ensure its development for housing while also meeting the condition of 40% affordable homes. CBC were concerned that the amount paid for the site made this unlikely. When the Housing Infrastructure Fund was announced</p>

	<p>to help make sites viable for housing development, CBC worked with MF Freeman on a bid to the fund. While the £3m bid was from CBC it was with the agreement of MF Freeman that they would use the funding to go ahead with a housing development. The bid was agreed and related specifically to the Portland Street site and with a number of milestones set by HE including a completion deadline of March 2022.</p> <p>CBC has continued trying to progress the development and had already agreed with HE to extend the milestone for MF Freeman to get an approved planning permission. However in autumn 2020 CBC discovered MF Freeman were marketing the site when approached by their agent to see if the council wished to purchase it. MF Freeman subsequently confirmed their intention to sell the site as a car park. Since the HIF bid was not transferrable to a different site and had a fixed deadline, CBC then discussed the situation with HE and mutually agreed to discontinue the HIF bid.</p> <p>Given the huge effort put in by CBC to get this site developed, the outcome is extremely disappointing. However, as a council we remain committed to building affordable homes, both working with CBH on our own pledge to build 500 new affordable homes as well as by working with others.</p>
<p><b>3.</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Tim Harman to Cabinet Member Corporate Services, Councillor Alex Hegenbarth</b></p>
	<p>In your Facebook page you state that “To be safe our latest Bishops Cleeve Focus will be online only .”</p> <p>Given that a number of his Liberal Democrat Colleagues have delivered leaflets in Cheltenham in contradiction of guidance being followed by other Political Parties has he discussed their conduct with them and is he aware of the concerns expressed by residents that they have merely sought political advantage under cover of community information which is freely available from public sources</p>
	<p><b>Response from Cabinet Member</b></p>
	<p>Liberal Democrat members of this council have continued to serve their communities throughout this pandemic. In recent weeks, this has included circulating letters to residents that contain critical information such as helpline numbers for mental health charities and opening hours of local food banks.</p> <p>These letters are deliberately free of any political branding and have been delivered by council members in accordance with their key worker status and is in line with government and police guidance, and many residents have thanked councillors for taking the trouble to help them in these most difficult of times.</p> <p>The Conservative tactic here has been to encourage their supporters to report this activity to the police, who have found no case to answer. No fines have been issued. No charges have been pressed. I am disappointed that the Conservatives are prepared to waste police time to score political points, which is why I know Cheltenham is best served under a Liberal Democrat administration.</p>
<p><b>4.</b></p>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Angie Boyes to Cabinet Member Climate and Communities, Councillor Max Wilkinson</b></p>
	<p>The Government sadly decided to end our membership of Erasmus+ as part of their Brexit negotiations. The programme played a huge part in social mobility and youth exchanges between young people in Cheltenham and European partners. It supported youth co-operation, internationalism and broadened the horizons of so</p>

	<p>many young people, including many disadvantaged young people. Learning mobility is more than just formal education and the proposed Turing Scheme, which was thrown together quickly, does nothing to achieve what Erasmus+ was doing in this capacity. The Turing Scheme does little in terms of providing opportunities that the Erasmus+ programme did, at huge cost to the tax payer. Erasmus+ benefitted a lot of young people in Cheltenham and without that support they will lose out on many opportunities. No young person in Cheltenham should be left behind. I would like to ask that as Cabinet Member, responsible for both Twinning and Communities, that you do all you can to ensure that no young person is left behind or disadvantaged as a result. Will this Council commit to reaching out to organisations, students and youth groups (such as those involved in the International Youth Peace Camp) to find out what we can do as a Council to ensure we do all we can to work with them to ensure they won't lose out.</p>
	<p><b>Response from Cabinet Member</b></p>
	<p>I was disturbed not only at the withdrawal from the Erasmus+ scheme, but the way the decision was reached. It is my understanding that the UK government decided to leave the scheme despite Erasmus+ not being part of the EU's negotiating position. This is an inexcusable decision which will be to the detriment of many young people and to the cultural life of our nation as a whole. As long as Cheltenham Borough Council is run by this administration, we will do all we reasonably can to counter the narrow-minded approach of the government. To that end, I'd welcome input from our Twinning Committee on how this can best be done. I hope the dedicated internationalist Cllr Seacome, as Twinning chair, and Cllr Boyes as our representative on the Congress of the Council of Europe will be willing to give guidance. I understand their initial lobbying efforts are being raised at Ministerial level and applaud their efforts.</p>
<b>5.</b>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Angie Boyes to the Leader of the Council, Councillor Rowena Hay</b></p>
	<p>In my capacity as a Borough Councillor who cares about the future of young people in Cheltenham, as the Co-Vice Chair of Cheltenham Twinning who cares about the future exchanges between the young people in our twin towns, as Member of the Council of Europe who cares about sharing European values with our European countries and as an ex-Erasmus student, I would like to call upon you to join me and support my letter to Gavin Williamson MP, Secretary of State for Education. I have asked him and the Government to re-think abolishing a well-established programme that worked so well and if this is not a possibility then ask Government to widen the scheme to ensure that disadvantaged young people can access the new scheme and to widen its scope. I also ask that you contact Government to provide concrete advice on the new Turing Scheme to ensure Cheltenham organisations are prepared to plan for the participation they want to achieve. Cheltenham is an open-minded, internationalist and welcoming town who welcomes exchanges of young people and opportunity. I would welcome your support on this and to ensure our young people are not disadvantaged in any way as a result of this Government decision.</p>
	<p><b>Response from Leader</b></p>
	<p>I am more than happy to support Councillor Boyes letter to Gavin Williamson MP and to ask for further information on the new Turing Scheme, so that as a Council we can help ensure that Cheltenham organisations can be prepared and are able</p>

	to offer the best possible opportunities for young people from all walks of life to be able to participate in international exchanges, particularly to and from our twin towns.
<b>6.</b>	<b>Question from Councillor David Willingham to Cabinet Member, Climate and Communities, Councillor Max Wilkinson</b>
	The University of Gloucestershire states on its website that it is a "globally welcoming institution." and that it is "proud to host staff and students from at least 17 European Countries". The tragic decision not to continue UK participation in Erasmus+ is a retrograde step that harms UK students, UK universities and UK university town's like Cheltenham. Could I please get an assurance from the Cabinet Member, that the Council will do all it can to minimise the harm to Cheltenham by this xenophobic decision, and will consider working with the University to help promote Cheltenham as an excellent choice of study destination for international students and consider using our twinning links to support UK students in being able to broaden their horizons with opportunities to study abroad?
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	The need to maintain educational links is heightened due to the government's decision to end Erasmus+. Given the questions being asked by Cllr Boyes and the lobbying being carried out by the Twinning Committee, I'm certain this is a matter which is being given attention locally. I am keen to help how ever I can. It is my understanding that Twinning has traditionally supported Gloucestershire College programmes with Annecy, Göttingen and Weihai, but new opportunities are now needed. We would hope to work more closely with the University to further develop opportunities to link it with our twin towns. I will take away an action to work with the Twinning Committee chair, Councillor Seacome, with the potential to write to an appropriate contact at the University.
<b>7.</b>	<b>Question from Councillor Mike Collins to Cabinet Member Cyber and Safety, Councillor Andrew McKinlay</b>
	Could the cabinet member please advise on what could be done to prevent the worsening and selfish habit of pavement parking than blights our town? This has now become a major issue that affects all road users including other drivers, cyclists, pedestrians, young families and most disturbingly of all those with mobility issues. I hope that you will agree with me that nobody should be forced onto the highway to avoid a selfishly parked vehicle that is blocking a pavement.
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	I share Cllr Collins' frustrations about the proliferation of pavement parking, which impacts on the quality of life of many of our residents. Whilst the responsibility for enforcement primarily rests with GCC as highways authority, it is recognised that this is a national problem and that there are shortcomings in terms of the legislative framework and associated guidance available to help tackle the issue.  The Department for Transport's undertook a detailed review of pavement parking and the government's response to the <u>Transport Committee's 2019 report on pavement parking</u> was published on 12 <sup>th</sup> March, 2020.  In line with the department's view, the Transport Committee recommended that the government consults on allowing local authorities to enforce against

	<p>obstructive pavement parking, with a view to making such an offence subject to civil enforcement under the Traffic Management Act 2004. They also recommended that, in the long term, the government legislates for a nationwide prohibition on pavement parking across England, outside London, enforceable by local authorities.</p> <p>Subsequently, the government has consulted on the options to help local authorities to tackle this problem and the result of this process is awaited.</p> <p>Three options have been proposed:: making it easier for councils to ban pavement parking in their areas; giving councils powers to fine drivers who park on paths and an outright ban. The public consultation period closed on 22nd November, 2020 and the government has committed to publishing a summary of the responses within 3 months.</p>
<b>8.</b>	<b>Question from Councillor Mike Collins to Cabinet Member Cyber and Safety, Councillor Andrew McKinlay</b>
	<p>I have been contacted by several residents who have expressed concern about the ongoing and increasing developments around our town and the affects that they might have on our many public footpaths. They have particular concern about the affects the Cyber Park development and those taking place in the Brizen Farm area may have on the Cheltenham Circular path. Given this councils policy on improving walking and cycling routes around and within our beautiful town, can I have the cabinet members assurance that everything will be done to protect these important public rights of way?</p>
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	<p>There are legal procedures which apply when rights of way are affected by development. The effect that a proposed development will have on a right of way must be considered by planning authorities when deciding whether or not to approve an application for planning permission.</p> <p>The Connecting Cheltenham strategy shows our commitment to improving walking and cycling around and within Cheltenham. Furthermore, the Golden Valley Development SPD clearly highlights our desire to pursue the highest standards of sustainability, including that of a permeable network of streets and lanes, which respects existing Public Rights of Way, to help to encourage active and sustainable travel choices.</p>
<b>9.</b>	<b>Question from Councillor Mike Collins to Cabinet Member Economy and Development, Councillor Victoria Atherstone</b>
	<p>Given the fact that this council has declared a climate emergency, what can be done to ensure that more is done to install additional Electric Vehicle (EV) charging points around our town. Can the cabinet member explore the possibility of including EV charging points as part of both new commercial and domestic planning developments as part of the application process, possibly by way of a planning condition?</p>
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	<p>The council is looking at options for the installation of more EV charging points in its own car parks and the procurement and partnership delivery options, having regard to the cost and feasibility of these in relation to the sufficiency of local</p>

	<p>power supply infrastructure.</p> <p>Planning policies can be used to facilitate future growth and the development of place. Long term planning strategies can incorporate policies to encourage the transition to ultra-low emission vehicles and there are several approaches we can take, including planning conditions, permitted development and new parking standards in the local plan.</p> <p>The Government has already amended permitted development rights to allow the installation of EV charge points in certain situations and amendments to the national building regulations are currently being consulted on, to ensure that all new developments with parking also have EV charge point provision. I will explore with officers how our local plan can best help shape the transition towards a low emission future. <a href="#">e</a></p>
<b>10.</b>	<p><b>Question from Councillor Mike Collins to Cabinet Member Cyber and Safety, Councillor Andrew McKinlay</b></p>
	<p>As a member of this councils Licensing Committee, we often receive applications for the introduction of A-boards and other street furniture to advertise businesses that are “off the beaten track” usually off the High Street and The Promenade. These items can often look untidy, nonstandard and generally clutter up the street scene. As part of our towns post Covid-19 rejuvenation plans would the cabinet member commit to contacting the Cheltenham Chamber of Commerce and the Business Improvement District (BID) as well as any other interested or influential bodies to discuss the possibility of installing a number of signposts that could accommodate a flag that could indicate the direction, name and type of business, as well as the distance from the signpost’s location? These need not be as grand as the regency poles that have been installed to direct visitors to the Town Hall, Library and Museum etc. Each pole could accommodate several flags, one for each individual business and these businesses could be asked to make a contribution to the cost of the installation and maintenance of their individual flag, which could be offset from the cost of the otherwise necessary licensing application fee.</p>
	<p><b>Response from Cabinet Member</b></p>
	<p>You need permission under the Highways Act 1980 to place an object on the public highway that will cause an obstruction. Both the High Street and Promenade are areas of public highway. An ‘object’ includes ‘A’ board advertising structures, these are therefore subject to licencing application and approval. The Council has an approved policy for considering ‘A’ boards.</p> <p>Ensuring a strong and positive recovery from the pandemic is the highest importance to the council. We will take on board the ideas and share them with the BID (Business Improvement District) and the CERTF (Cheltenham Economic Recovery Task Force), however our current policy is to minimise street clutter and maintain a consistent approach to the streetscape, especially within key areas such as the High Street and the Promenade. Furthermore, if signage was placed for the purpose of advertising particular premises then planning permission is likely to be required.</p> <p>Signage of this form and scale is likely to be very costly to the council and would require high officer input to monitor, manage and maintain as business occupants turnaround. We currently have approximately 5,000 businesses within Cheltenham, of which ~700 are retail and ~400 food services, so I do not think this could be supported unless we can identify how the total number of signs</p>

	could be fairly and efficiently controlled with tangible benefits to the businesses. There are however other solutions that the council could and are exploring to support our town's recovery.
<b>11</b>	<b>Question from Councillor Louis Savage to Cabinet Member Clean and Green Environment, Councillor Chris Coleman</b>
	<p>The ongoing COVID lockdown and school closures are having having a disproportionate impact on the mental and physical health of children, with those from disadvantaged families affected most.</p> <p>Council parks are essential to the mental and physical health of children and their parents, especially those not fortunate enough to have their own garden.</p> <p>Can the Cabinet Member confirm that all Cheltenham Borough Council's parks and play facilities remain fully open?</p>
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	Yes, all parks and play areas remain open.
<b>12.</b>	<b>Question from Councillor Louis Savage to Cabinet Member Climate and Communities, Councillor Max Wilkinson</b>
	<p>Since 2014 the Chinese government has pursued a policy in which it is estimated that 1 million Uyghur Muslims have been held in secretive detention camps without due legal process.</p> <p>The oppression of the Uyghur Muslim minority in China has been described by leading human rights organisations as the largest systematic persecution of an ethnic or religious minority group since World War 2.</p> <p>Can the Cabinet Member undertake to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ensure any contact between Cheltenham Borough Council representatives and officials of the Chinese government is brought to the attention of Full Council in advance (for example the 2018 trip to China made by the then Chief Executive)?</li> <li>- That any such contact will always include a formal expression of this Council ongoing commitment to fundamental human rights, including religious freedom?</li> </ul>
	<b>Response from Cabinet Member</b>
	Cllr Savage has raised an important issue that should give us all pause for thought. While the business of international relations will primarily fall to the Government, it is of course correct that Cheltenham Borough Council is mindful of its responsibilities and does all it can to promote human rights. I would like to think these points are raised as part of our discussions with twin towns, but I respect the independence of the Twinning Committee, which is chaired by Cllr Seacome. I will investigate the potential for a protocol relating to future trips and how these are reported back.
<b>13.</b>	<b>Question from Councillor Louis Savage to the Leader</b>
	<p>Cheltenham is of course grateful for the deep and enduring friendship of the people of Weihai, China, and will note particularly the generous gift of 10,000 face masks received from the people of our twin town at the height of the pandemic.</p> <p>Twinning visits to Cheltenham will offer visitors from Weihai the chance for free</p>

	<p>and open exchange of information and political opinions, something which is regrettably not always possible in their home country.</p> <p>Can our twinning links, now or in the future, be used to demonstrate our commitment to and promotion of democracy and fundamental human rights?</p>
	<p><b>Response from the Leader</b></p>
	<p>Engagement and visits to any towns or places twinned with Cheltenham are led by the Twinning Association and its Executive Committee which is independent of the Council though with representation through three elected members and one officer.</p> <p>The principles of the Twinning Association are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ promote and foster friendship and understanding between the people of Cheltenham and the people of its twin and friendship towns and overseas visitors in general</li><li>▪ encourage visits by individuals and groups of all ages to and from its twin and friendship towns and to broaden the mutual understanding of the cultural, recreational, educational and commercial activities between the link towns</li><li>▪ promote and support the Council's sustainable community strategy and partnerships by working together to create a great future for Cheltenham</li></ul> <p>Cheltenham has been at the forefront of the post-war twinning movement and has sought to encourage friendships and education and sharing of cultures between people living in Cheltenham and its twin and friendship towns as a means to encourage peace and mutual understanding.</p> <p>As such the Twinning Association's activities are non-political in nature. Arrangements for twinning visits are typically made with local administrations rather than national governments.</p> <p>Any change to this approach of the Twinning Association and its future role would be a matter for the Executive Committee.</p>