

# Council

**Meeting date: 19 June 2023**

## **Motions (2 total)**

### **Motion A**

**Proposed by: Councillor Max Wilkinson**

**Seconded by: Councillor Victoria Atherstone**

### **Honeybourne Line extension**

#### **Council notes:**

That the extension of the Honeybourne Line from Cheltenham Spa Station south to Shelburne Road has been an ambition of this town for almost four decades.

That the current proposal to extend the line requires partnership working between Network Rail (landowner), GWR (developer), Gloucestershire County Council (transport authority) and Cheltenham Borough Council (authority responsible for managing the Honeybourne Line).

That as delays to the project were experienced, costs increased significantly due to inflation in the construction market, as well as other factors, including the specification of the project.

That this project is a key part of Gloucestershire County Council's wider sustainable transport ambitions, linking Cheltenham to Gloucester in one direction and to Bishop's Cleeve in the other.

The strong support from Cheltenham people for this extension.

#### **Council regrets:**

That after significant progress, the project is currently delayed indefinitely after government funding cuts to the rail industry.

That the identified funding gap will require further contributions from various sources.

That this authority does not typically benefit from budgets for strategic transport, has a budget gap of its own to meet, and therefore does not have any scope for funding this project from general budgets.

#### **Council supports:**

The petition by Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Cycling campaign, signed by more than 1,000 residents.

Work with partners in the project, primarily Gloucestershire County Council, to explore ways to bridge the funding gap, including reviewing the opportunity to prioritise the Honeybourne Line Extension as an allocation for Community Infrastructure Levy funding.

**Additionally Council notes:**

The potential for a northern extension of the Honeybourne Line, between the Prince of Wales Stadium and Swindon Lane.

That this land is owned by Gloucestershire Warwickshire Steam Railway, but remains unused.

That Gloucestershire Warwickshire Steam Railway's historic ambition to extend the steam railway track into the town centre is unlikely to be realised for various practical reasons.

**Council recognises:**

The potential for this corridor of land to become a sustainable transport link and linear park as far as Swindon Lane, improving public health and boosting the environment.

The potential for this land to help link the main railway line and the town centre to Gloucestershire Warwickshire Steam Railway, boosting local tourism.

**Council instructs:**

Officers engaged in strategic planning to explore policies to protect this corridor of opportunity.

Officers to engage with Gloucestershire Warwickshire Steam Railway to discuss the extension of the Honeybourne Line northwards with a view to pursuing opportunities for the environment, leisure and tourism in a way that is mutually beneficial.

**Council asks:**

Officers to report back on progress with planning policies, and discussions with Gloucestershire Warwickshire Steam Railway at, or before, the Council meeting on 11 December.

## **Motion B**

**Proposed by: Councillor Paul Baker**

**Seconded by: Councillor Tabi Joy**

On the 25th March 2019 this Council unanimously supported a resolution, proposed by Councillor Wilkinson and seconded by Councillor Boyes, to recognise the work done by Cheltenham Welcomes Refugees (CWR) and for Cheltenham to adopt the title of Town of Sanctuary.

In doing so, the authority sought to take practical steps to welcome and include refugees and to support them wherever it can. It also pledged to deepen its work with Cheltenham Welcomes Refugees, to build new links between them, the council's partners and other local organisations to support and provide inclusive and accessible activities.

It further committed to supporting activities that promote the education and training of refugees, enabling them to better integrate into the town and play an active role in the success of our local economy and creating sustainable communities.

Since 2019 the Council has been a very proactive Town of Sanctuary offering a place of safety and welcoming both refugees and asylum seekers from across the world.

### **Actions include :**

- Providing homes for 31 Syrian families and 7 Afghan families and looking to house a further 20 Ukrainian families and 1 Afghan family this year
- Working in partnership with GCC and the 6 district councils to see how we can best respond to support people seeking asylum, this includes attending regular meetings e.g Migrant Resettlement meetings and Gloucestershire Operations Partnership Forum meetings.
- Working in close partnership with Gloucestershire Action for Refugees and Asylum Seekers (GARAS), CWR, the South West Strategic Migration Partnership and Clearspring Ready Homes
- Facilitating meetings to discuss support for asylum seekers with for example CTFC and CBC Communities Partnership and Wellbeing Team, undertaking a survey of newly arrived asylum seekers to see what activities they would be interested in and contacting local football and cricket teams.
- Worked with the Everyman Theatre and other partners to organise the 'Walk with Amal' for Refugee Week 2022, a festival to remind us all of the displaced children worldwide who are forced to flee their homes due to war or

violence. The procession by the 'Little Amal' 3.5 m puppet was a huge success.

- In addition a considerable amount of work has gone into supporting those fleeing from Ukraine with housing and supporting hosts.

## **MOTION**

To further enhance Cheltenham's strong record of welcoming, supporting and helping both refugees and asylum seekers we now request that the council appoints up to 4 Refugee Champions. The role of these Champions will include but not be limited to :-

- Promoting the work of GARAS and CWR with Council colleagues and within their communities.
- Helping to forge new links within our communities and schools to support and engage with refugees and asylum seekers.
- Correcting the rhetoric and highlighting the positive contribution that refugees and asylum seekers can play, and do play in our town, they are an asset, not a liability.
- Working with CWR to support new initiatives to help and support refugees and asylum seekers in our community
- Inspiring groups such as residents' associations to run events to raise funds for refugee charities and to support refugees and asylum seekers within their local community

Sadly Government language towards refugees and asylum seekers is often unhelpful, inaccurate and unashamedly hostile. Cheltenham Borough Council seeks to distance itself from such rhetoric. We recognise that refugees and asylum seekers are fleeing their homes due to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. We recognise that no one would want to leave their homes, their communities, their families and friends and everything they have ever known and enjoyed unless they were in fear of their lives. We absolutely believe that refugees and asylum seekers should be treated with respect, understanding and kindness.

## **Finally this Council resolves to :-**

- Condemn the Illegal Migration Bill which it considers to be a breach of the fundamental tenets of international human rights law;
- to write to our MP, calling on him to do everything he can to withdraw this appalling legislation :

- To commit to resourcing an asylum system that can deliver fair and timely asylum decisions, so saving millions of pounds of tax payers money on temporary and often unsuitable accommodation.
- To allow refugees and asylum seekers to work at the earliest opportunity so they can begin to rebuild their lives, become more independent and contribute to our society and our economy.