

# Council

**Meeting date: 19 June 2023**

**Deadline for questions: 08 June 2023**

## **Member Questions (5 total)**

### **1. Question from Councillor Tim Harman to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Well-being, Councillor Max Wilkinson**

Following his response to my question at the last Council meeting with regard to Tourism, will the Cabinet Member urgently look at the signage that is in a number of locations which shows that the Tourist Information Centre is located at the Wilson which it has not been for some time which is potentially misleading ?

#### **Response from Cabinet Member**

Through this question, Councillor Harman has rightly raised that, at the time of asking, a number of signs in the town centre still referred to the Tourist Information Centre which was previously based at the Wilson Art Gallery and Museum. Some months ago, officers removed all fingerpost directional signage and reported to me that this had been dealt with. It has since come to officers' attention that there were some residual totem signs which referred to this location but had been missed at the time. This was an oversight but I can confirm that these have now been updated temporarily with a longer term, more permanent, redesign in the process of being commissioned.

I would like to take this opportunity to update members on the reinstatement of seven-day-a-week in-person tourist information provision, which has been a subject of debate in this chamber and elsewhere. I thank members of this council and members of the public for raising this important issue. I'm happy to report that we now have uniformed Visitor Welcome Assistants in the town centre on weekends and bank holidays during the key footfall hours of 11am-3pm. Based at The Cheltenham Pod on the High Street, the staff provide information, directions and a friendly welcome. This initiative has been well received and they are providing an important service for both visitors and residents. This is in addition to the in-person information provided by reception staff at the Municipal Offices on weekdays

## **2. Question from Councillor Tim Harman to Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Street Services, Councillor Iain Dobie**

It is good news that three trees have now been planted in the Bath Terrace Car Park entirely funded by the splendid Suffolk Traders.

It is also good news that other trees have been planted and funded from other sources across the town including from the County Council Build Back Better Fund.

Since declaring a Climate Emergency, how many trees has the council planted and funded itself?

### **Response from Cabinet Member**

#### **Response from Cabinet Member**

Bath Rd Traders generously gave £500 towards the cost of installing the trees in Bath Terrace car park.

Glos County Council paid for the trees themselves, as well as providing the planting accessories (stakes, cages etc).

CBC paid for the actual planting, whilst also providing aftercare and watering.

#### Tree planting numbers since 2019:

2019: 2,600

2020: 2,500

2021: 1,800

2022: 2,100

These tree planting numbers are for trees planted by this council only within the Cheltenham borough.

The numbers must be taken in context and do not necessarily reflect the number of trees which will reach maturity.

Many of the planted trees are very small (approx. 1.2m high). These were planted by public volunteers as mixed native species groups of trees. As the trees establish and grow, many of them (>80%) will need to be “thinned out” so as to retain the “best” trees for the space in which they will be planted.

CBC plants “large” (3-3.5m high) trees as “landscape features” in parks, gardens and open spaces. Many of these trees will be replacements for trees felled/removed.

Approx 40 such trees are planted each year. These combine a mix of native and exotic, long and short lived, large and small tree species. This wide palette gives a wide range of arboricultural interest, as well as helping to mitigate the impact of

climate change and newly introduced pests and diseases (e.g. ash die-back, red band needle blight, *Phytophthora ramorum* etc).

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Similarly, a proportion of the trees will fail to establish, be vandalised, or simply become suppressed and die as a result of dominating more vigorous neighbouring tree(s).

Tree planting numbers are only the very start of the journey towards the canopy cover target for the town. Subsequent to planting, there is a relatively high level of husbandry (watering, mulching, occasional fencing etc) so as to help ensure successful tree establishment.

Members of public are able to “sponsor” the establishment of a tree (£350). Tree sponsorship numbers have remained relatively constant over the years (approx. 25 per annum).

Gloucestershire Highways (with a 50% financial contribution by CBC) plants 70 x 3.5m high mixed species trees each year. The majority of these trees are replacement trees for trees previously removed.

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### **3. Question from Councillor Stephan Fifield to Cabinet Member for Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Well-being, Councillor Max Wilkinson**

Could the cabinet member please give an update on waters at the Pump Room and when they will be made accessible to the public?

#### **Response from Cabinet Member:**

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Thank you to Cllr Fifield for his question. I know he takes a keen interest in this matter. The spa water at Pittville Pump Room is unfortunately still not available to the public due to presence of bacteria in the water.

Work is underway to understand whether the bacteria is coming from the water source or the system. If we find the source of the water is contaminated then my understanding is that it is unlikely that the water will ever be made fit for human consumption.

If the source is not contaminated, then there maybe scope to disinfect the system. However, the UV filters have been cleaned and replaced a number of times, and the system has been disinfected but bacteria was still present.

An alternative option might be to replace the whole system, but clearly that would come at some cost to local taxpayers and if the source is indeed contaminated this work would still not result in drinkable Spa water being available.

For clarity, Cheltenham Borough Council is responsible for the building works that may arise and the repairs and maintenance of the system.

The Cheltenham Trust, which has responsibility for the testing of the spa water, has asked a specialist contractor to undertake a site visit within the next two weeks to review the system condition. That contractor has been asked to supply an options and costs proposal.

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**4. Question from Councillor Stephan Fifield to Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries**

Could the cabinet member please give an update on the status of Idsall Drive Car Park? Back in 2020 it was common knowledge that the Council was looking to sell the car park. Could the member give an update on whether this is still a possibility?

**Response from Cabinet Member:**

Thank you for your question Cllr Fifield, It is a matter of public record that in November 2020 as part of the Council's COVID-19 Recovery Budget there was a recommendation to note a list of assets for disposal which included Idsall Drive car park. This recommendation was approved by Full Council as part of the report which identified a total of eight sites for disposal. The proposal to dispose of these assets to generate a capital receipt were put forward for the benefit of the whole Borough and to ensure the ongoing viability of the Council and the delivery of our key priorities, for the benefit of our residents across Cheltenham.

In 2021/22, negotiations for the sale of Idsall Drive car park to Prestbury Parish Council halted. Whilst the car park remains earmarked for disposal, on the grounds that it is surplus to our operational requirements, no scheme has been brought forward for its disposal. Work is ongoing in relation to this asset disposal and the Cabinet have given a commitment to both Ward Councillors that they will be directly consulted before any proposals are brought forward.

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**5. Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to Cabinet Member for Waste, Recycling and Street Services, Councillor Iain Dobie**

It's good to see the hanging baskets going up around the town recently and the formal beds in front of the Municipal Offices being planted up.

Please would the Cabinet Member confirm whether there will be the usual window boxes on two floors at the front of the building and the hanging baskets in the window archways?

**Response from Cabinet Member:**

Thanks to Councillor Nelson for her question. I am pleased to confirm that the hanging basket and window boxes that were installed on 15<sup>th</sup> June at the Municipal offices are the same as we have done in recent years.

I hope all members will agree that the floral displays across Cheltenham including all the wind flowers, look amazing and I would like to thank the Ubico staff for all their hard work planting up and installing them, even in this heat.