

Cabinet

Meeting date: 17 October 2023

Public Questions (2 total)

1. Question from Mr Steven Thomas to Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency, Councillor Alisha Lewis

The Cheltenham plan details a push towards electric vehicles and commits to having the entire taxi fleet electrical by 2030.

It is my opinion that the extraction process for Lithium and cobalt batteries is not environmentally friendly and I have concerns around the use of child labour in the extraction process. Further there are concerns regarding the spontaneous combustion of these batteries. Lithium batteries can be prone to combustion if they are damaged and this is backed up with evidence supplied by the London fire brigade which show a record rate of e-scooter fires in the capital due to issues with these batteries:

<https://www.london-fire.gov.uk/news/2023/august/new-record-high-of-e-bike-and-e-scooter-fires-in-london/>

Can the Council advise whether it has conducted any assessments to understand the risks and impacts of this policy position? As a member of the public I am concerned about using public transport and taxis in Cheltenham where there is potentially a risk to my health from modes of transport that use lithium batteries.

Cabinet Member response:

Lithium batteries in vehicles are designed with multiple safety features to mitigate the risk of fire or explosion. This includes advanced thermal management systems, battery management systems, and robust structural design to protect the battery cells. EVs powered by lithium batteries are more energy-efficient than conventional vehicles. They can be charged with electricity from renewable sources, further reducing their environmental footprint. The use of batteries in electric vehicles significantly reduces greenhouse gas emissions compared to traditional internal combustion engines, contributing to our fight against climate change.

While there are some limited concerns about the safety of lithium batteries, we live in a world in which vehicles currently drive around our town powered by highly flammable petrol and diesel. These batteries represent a potential step forward towards a slightly safer town and a substantial contribution towards a reduction in

vehicle emissions and improved air quality. They are not a total solution, and we will continue to advocate for more car sharing and the use of public transport to reduce the number of vehicles on the road and encourage opportunities for residents to take up even more sustainable transport options like walking and cycling.

2. Question from Mr Steven Thomas to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Wellbeing, Councillor Max Wilkinson

At the September meeting you stated that vacant units in Cheltenham town centre will be used for housing. I believe this contradicts comments made at the council meeting in July which were supportive of promoting a vibrant high street for businesses.

With costs continuing to increase what efforts are the council taking to drop rents and/or business rates for small businesses in Cheltenham in order that they can flourish?

Cabinet Member response:

Thank you to Mr Thomas for the question. He raises an important issue and this is an opportunity to clarify some common misunderstandings about the power this authority has. Rents are set by landlords and business rates are set by the government. The Council cannot set the rent for buildings it does not own and has limited powers to vary business rates. Despite the limits of the powers of this authority, members, officers and the BID will work ever more closely with businesses and property owners to produce positive solutions to the ongoing issues with empty premises. The good news remains that Cheltenham continues to perform well compared with other areas.