

Council

Meeting date: 18 March 2024

Public Questions (3 total)

1. Question from Nic Pehkonen to the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay

With the future of Gloucestershire Airport uncertain, what would the thoughts of council members be if the airport was suggested as a potential site for the Geological Disposal Facility with the Cheltenham and Gloucester region joining the ongoing, UK-wide GDF siting process? The airport site broadly seems to meet the above-ground surface area requirements and both road and rail transport links could be seen as favourable.

Cabinet Member response

Thank you for your question.

Whilst I accept not all residents may support Gloucestershire Airport, I do not agree with your opening statement that the future of Gloucestershire Airport is uncertain.

Previous studies have found that there is an economic value from having an operational airport, contributing around 475 FTE jobs and £52m of (Gross Valued added) GVA (economic productivity metric that measures the contribution to an economy) to the local area. Closure of the Airport would see these benefits lost from the local area as there would be no alternative for relocation of operators. If the Airport were to cease operations, this could have detrimental consequences for the ability to attract high value companies to the area, including as part of the 'Golden Valley Development'.

The significant investment in the main runway allowed the strategic decision to be taken to close the rarely used north-south runway (thus saving maintenance costs) and release previously sterilised land for development, now known as the CGX Business Park. This will enable significant job creation as part of the economic recovery and be realised through private investment.

Both the Leader of Gloucester City Council and I have made it clear that as shareholders we are disposing of our interests in Gloucestershire Airport on the condition that any potential purchaser continues to operate the Airport as a going concern. For that reason and given that commitment upon a sale, I cannot support Gloucestershire Airport being put forward as a potential site for a Geological Disposal Facility.

2. Question from Tess Beck to Cabinet Member for Customer and Regulatory services, Councillor Martin Horwood

In 2020 an Article 4 direction for St Paul's ward came into force, requiring planning permission for conversion of a property from C3 to C4 (HMO) and this was adopted as part of the Local Plan, item HM5.

This policy is badly needed to maintain a community balance and was the outcome of many years of campaigning by the community and their then councillors. HMOs contribute to a transitory community which makes community cohesion difficult. 2021 census data shows one area of St Paul's 50 % of residents have lived there a year or less – a figure rarely seen outside new build developments or halls of residence. HMOs also contribute to greater density of occupation. 2021 census data shows an area of St Paul's, made up largely of 2 bed terraced houses is the most densely occupied area in the whole of Gloucestershire.

The Local Plan policy states that if there are in excess of 10% HMOs within 100m radius of the property, this is grounds for refusal of planning permission for change of use to HMO. The council would carry out and publish biennial surveys of the number of HMOs in the ward to support this. Unfortunately, the council has failed to carry out and publish these surveys. When I last looked, the only record of HMOs published on the council website was the list of licensed HMOs - which make up only a proportion of all HMOs, as not all HMOs are required to be licensed.

This failure to publish survey data has led to the Article 4 Direction/ Policy HM5 being unenforceable as we have seen in the recent appeal decision regarding 6 Marsh Lane. Although the council and people living in the area were aware of over 10% of properties within a 100m radius of the site being HMOs ($17/134 = 13\%$), the only published data was the list of 10 licensed HMOs ($10/134 = 7\%$). This meant that a refusal of planning permission for change of use to HMO was overturned on appeal with the council responsible for all costs, and yet another HMO in an area already judged to be over the 'tipping point' of 10%.

When will the full survey of HMOs in St Paul's ward be published?

Cabinet Member response

The council's Housing Team most recently undertook an HMO survey in May/June last year. The information is used by the council's Planning Officers to determine HMO applications within the St Paul's Ward. The planning team is currently looking at how to present this information publicly, but is committed to doing this and will do so by June this year.

3. Question from Tess Beck to Cabinet Member for Customer and Regulatory services, Councillor Martin Horwood

The University of Gloucestershire has informed us of their plans to dispose of Hardwick campus at the end of 2025. Residents are concerned about what this will mean for Hardwick Green, a small local greenspace on the corner of Swindon Road and Marsh Lane. This amenity space is much used by residents for recreation and

dog walking, and it is also used by the neighbouring Boys Brigade group for outdoor activities.

What can residents do to safeguard this community amenity as a local green space? And will the council support them in this?

Cabinet Member response

Cheltenham Borough Council is proud to have protected a large number of public green spaces and 16 designated Local Green Spaces in our current Cheltenham Plan, adopted in 2020. We reiterated our support for the protection of urban green spaces important to communities in this way in a motion to council passed unanimously on 18 October 2021.

The land at Marsh Lane is privately owned so our policy protecting public green spaces (saved policy GE1) wouldn't have applied and nor would any equivalent future policy. So the best opportunity for strong protection going forward would be designation as a Local Green Space, which is a designation recognised in the National Planning Policy Framework and which applies regardless of ownership. Local Green Spaces are designated during the plan-making process.

The next opportunity to designate new Local Green Spaces will be as part of the Strategic & Local Plan (SLP), our proposed new shared local plan with Tewkesbury and Gloucester. An initial Regulation 18 consultation on the SLP concluded on 12 March and this was an early opportunity to support designation at Marsh Lane. If you missed this deadline, further consultation is planned. The SLP will not reach its final stages for several years. I know a succession of local councillors of all parties in St Paul's have supported retaining this space for community use and this council would strongly support the designation of the land at Marsh Lane if it meets the criteria for a Local Green Space which include demonstrable support from the local community (National Planning Policy Framework 2023, paras 105 & 106). Bear in mind though that all local plans also have to pass public examination and sometimes legal challenge and that designation of Local Green Spaces must also be deemed to be consistent with the planning of sustainable development.

In the meantime, although this land doesn't enjoy any specific protection, current local Policy D3 of the Cheltenham Plan says that "the development of private green areas, private open spaces and private gardens which make a significant contribution to the townscape and environmental quality of Cheltenham will not be permitted". This policy can be cited in objection to any planning application. Each planning application is nevertheless judged on its merits by planning officers and by the planning committee if the application is called in.