

# Council

Meeting date: 18 March 2024

## Member Questions (25 total)

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

Given this Council's responsibility for cleansing, including street cleaning, what steps does CBC or Ubico take to survey streets and determine which areas need cleaning and how often?

#### Cabinet Member response:

Street cleansing activities in the borough have been carried out for many years and are based on experience of the needs of the borough year on year such as where we get most leaf fall each year. The schedule of activities supervised and carried out by the Ubico crews is of course adjusted annually to meet the differing challenges presented. These challenges come in many forms including climate change and different and extreme weather patterns; peaks in footfall from visitors to our very successful festivals at different times of the year along with unexpected change for us all such as COVID-19.

The Council works closely with Ubico to monitor street cleansing activities across the borough and this happens as often as daily when needed such as over the recent horse racing festival. As part of the digital transformation work taking place within both the Council and Ubico, we will be seeking to further review how best we can continue to deliver high services standards for our residents within the resources available.

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

Can the Cabinet Member state if Cheltenham Borough Council has a Tourism Strategy beyond our Festivals?

#### Cabinet Member response:

Thank you for your question. The last Tourism Strategy covered the period 2017-2022. Since that time, there has been a national re-structure of tourism provision which has led to the creation of Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEP) nationally <https://www.visitbritain.org/resources-destination-partners/local-visitor-economy-partnership-lvep-programme>

Cheltenham Borough Council is now a partner in the CotswoldsPlus LVEP alongside Cotswolds Tourism, Visit Gloucester, Visit Dean Wye, Stroud and Tewkesbury. The LVEP works to a board-approved service plan and is currently developing a refreshed destination management plan for the region. Once this is completed, this will inform the next steps for potential development of a new tourism strategy for the council.

The Place Marketing and Inward Investment service at the council holds overall responsibility for destination marketing and management and this was the subject of a presentation at Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 26 February 2024. Please see the report here for more information about the comprehensive programme of tourism and town marketing carried out by the team:

<https://democracy.cheltenham.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=267&MId=3676&Ver=4>

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

Can the Cabinet Member give us a detailed profit and loss account for the recent Ice Rink in Imperial Gardens?

#### **Cabinet Member response**

Thank you for your question. Cheltenham Ice Rink was located in Imperial Gardens from Friday 17 November to Monday 1 January. It welcomed over 30,000 skaters, including 600 free tickets given to local residents via the No Child Left Behind Scheme. The ice rink was clearly successful in influencing visits and bringing new money into the town centre during the Christmas period, an important time for local businesses. An independent analysis of the economic impact of the event showed the following:

- A total of £1.6m was spent in Cheltenham by all those visiting the ice rink, £860,000 of which would not have occurred without the presence of the ice rink.
- A total of £1.2m additional business turnover occurred in Cheltenham as a result of the presence of the ice rink (indirect and induced). This is new money that would not have occurred without the ice rink being in place. This additional money supports 13 FTE jobs or 17 estimated actual jobs in the town.
- 83% of all those who had visited Cheltenham Ice Rink said it had been the main reason for their visit to Cheltenham / coming into the town.

In addition to this, the innovative approach to power supply developed by the event team and ice rink partners meant the event used only 12.7% of the fuel and reduced carbon dioxide equivalent emissions by 98.7%, when compared to the town's 2021 ice rink.

For a number of reasons, which will be set out in detail in a report to the April Cabinet meeting, in 2023/24 expenditure exceeded income, requiring an investment by the council of £74,276. However, this does not take into account the wider economic benefits I've already mentioned, nor the impact on our own car park income. The economic impact analysis of the event shows a return on investment of approximately £11.50 per £1.00 invested by the council.

#### **4. Question from Councillor Diggory Seacome to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Well-being, Councillor Max Wilkinson**

Is there a future for Tourism, as the rather forlorn Tourist Information pod outside Marks & Spencer, which is, as we have been informed, only open at weekends. Visitors do visit Cheltenham in the week as well, and deserve a better service.

#### **Cabinet Member response:**

I would like to thank Cllr Seacome for his question and remind him or reassure him that Tourism Information is still available in the Municipal Offices on weekdays. Town tourism literature is also available from local tourist information points at venues around the town seven days a week, including the train station and local businesses.

The Marketing Cheltenham team have begun a programme of measures to increase the access to tourist information for visitors to the town, with actions including:

- A programme of training courses for customer facing staff in local businesses to equip them with knowledge about Cheltenham's offer to support visitors.
- Increasing the scope of places where tourist information literature can be accessed via new literature stands, new venues, and updated marketing collateral.
- Targeted promotional activity in sites around the town to highlight the useful information available on the Visit Cheltenham website.

In response to the question about whether there is a future for tourism, I would draw Cllr Seacome's attention to the recent Overview and Scrutiny report presented to the committee which highlights a comprehensive programme of activity to support tourism and town marketing being carried out by the council team and partners. Indeed, the analysis of visitor data shows that visitor numbers are increasing and are almost back to pre-Covid levels, which is in line with, if not slightly ahead of, the rest of the country.

**5. Question from Councillor Diggory Seacome to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Well-being, Councillor Max Wilkinson**

It was my understanding that the Cheltenham Trust, initially hived off from CBC, was to be self-supporting. I notice that it has just been given another £400,000 just to keep going. It has not done the local arts community any favours by raising hire charges for the Town Hall and Pump Room to a level they cannot contemplate, thereby losing income. Can you not persuade the Trust to re-instate the old 'local charity rate'?

**Cabinet Member response:**

The Cheltenham Trust was set up to ensure that this town could retain, in public ownership, assets such as the Town Hall, Pittville Pump Room, Leisure at Cheltenham, The Wilson and Prince of Wales Stadium. Many other authorities, subject to the level of cuts we have received from Westminster, would have sold off or shut down such buildings. This authority has taken a different approach. As Cllr Seacome is aware, arts and culture has throughout its history required public subsidy. The Cheltenham Trust delivers important services for this town and receives a management fee accordingly from this council.

However, the reality of running those buildings is that in addition to the management fee, this authority pays utility bills which are forecast to be £1.43m in 2023/24. The level of fees the Trust charges for hires is a matter for the Trust management and I would urge Cllr Seacome to raise these issues with the Trust. But he should be under no illusion, this town has suffered huge cuts to its income as a result of his party's decisions in Westminster. Had we not experienced those cuts, neither the Council, nor the Trust, would be having these discussions.

**6. Question from Councillor Diggory Seacome to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Well-being, Councillor Max Wilkinson**

What has the Cheltenham Culture Board achieved in its short existence?

**Cabinet Member response:**

Thank you for the question.

Cheltenham Culture Board was set up to connect the cultural sectors together and to take on the role of producing the cultural strategy for Cheltenham.

The board's first meeting was in July 2021 and since then, it has made significant headway in building a strong alliance across Cheltenham's cultural and creative

communities and there is excitement about its role to advocate that culture and creativity should be central to the economic and social life of Cheltenham.

The aim of the Culture Board is to set and deliver a cultural strategy for Cheltenham which makes demonstrable progress towards the Board’s longer-term vision for the town. The strategy was endorsed by Cabinet in April 2023.

Below is an update against each of the six objectives of the strategy.

<b>Objective</b>	<b>Progress</b>
<p>Forge partnerships and collaboration across the heritage, cultural and digital sectors.</p>	<p>The board has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established action groups to take forward the objectives of the strategy and continues to engage with other groups such as Cheltenham Arts Network and Cheltenham Heritage Network;</li> <li>• Facilitated supportive relationships between board members (e.g. volunteers and venues being shared between cultural organisations, support for fundraising, and scoping ideas for cost saving and joint marketing);</li> <li>• Facilitated a successful bid to Arts Council England for Holst 150 celebrations to take place over the summer of 2024 – with £30k being secured;</li> <li>• Facilitated engagement regarding the Golden Valley development’s social value plans; and</li> <li>• Hosted a funding session with the SW Director of Arts Council England.</li> </ul> <p>In addition, in the discussions about the future of the Lansdown Art Studios, the culture strategy, which notes that the town has a shortage of artist studio space, was used as a key principle to inform the council’s approach to the planning matter</p>
<p>Use culture and creativity to improve the life chances of our young people.</p>	<p>The board has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developed work experience opportunities for University of Gloucestershire students generated by Cheltenham Festivals and the Playhouse;</li> <li>• Formed a School and Education Group action group to coordinate experiences and participatory opportunities for young people via the Cheltenham Education Partnership.</li> </ul>
<p>Promote equity of opportunity to help build inclusive and creative communities.</p>	<p>The board has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitated the development of a doughnut Toolkit (based on <u>doughnut economics</u> model) as a leading cultural accessibility framework and</li> </ul>

	developed working relationships with Creative United, Drake Music, Inclusive Music Consortium
Celebrate and nurture our community, grass-roots creative talents and ambitions.	<p>The board has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supported the establishment of Cheltenham Arts Network which was set up in January 2023 as a new cross art-form information network for practitioners and arts organisers in the town; and</li> <li>• Provided ongoing fundraising support to help generate funds for Cheltenham Paint Festival.</li> </ul>
Drive our visitor economy and wider place brand.	<p>The board has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinated the planning and delivery of digital delivery platforms to support our visitor strategy via Visit Cheltenham, Chelt Open Studios, Cheltenham BID and Cynam; and</li> <li>• Established a working group of Cheltenham stakeholders to identify ways to celebrate and communicate the unique cultural identity of Cheltenham and sense of place. The group plan to use their influence and connections to build cultural networks, promote opportunities and increase audiences for cultural organisations. The first project the group is working on is the promotion and celebration of the 150th birthday of Gustav Holst in 2024. This presents an opportunity to highlight what can be achieved if partners work together on a common goal.</li> </ul>
Use culture, creativity and innovation to contribute to the Cheltenham Zero and work collectively to address the climate emergency.	<p>The board has:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Established a sustainability working group that is developing a strategy for the culture board to work collectively towards Cheltenham Zero and shared targets; and</li> <li>• Organised and hosted a Cycle Hub network meeting.</li> </ul>

### **7. Question from Councillor Wendy Flynn to Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries**

Have there been any discussions over the last 12 months about closing the Swindon Lane Recycling Centre? If so, what is the predicted saving on an annual basis?

#### **Cabinet Member response:**

I would like to thank Cllr Flynn for her question. Whilst there is a need to find significant savings on the council's spend on environmental services in the borough, there have been no discussions about closing the Swindon Road Household Recycling Centre in

the last 12 months. It should be noted however that Cheltenham are the only district Council in the UK to still provide a designated Recycling Centre for our residents.

**8. Question from Councillor Wendy Flynn to Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries**

How much is the predicted saving over 4 years from bringing in a booking system for the Household Recycling Centre?

**Cabinet Member response:**

I would like to thank Cllr Flynn for her question. You will be aware that on Monday 4 March we launched a new booking system for the Household Recycling Centre on Swindon Road. The decision was made to improve customer experience and because of the positive customer feedback from other Recycling Centres which already have booking systems in place.

As part of its digital transformation, the Council, working with Ubico, is seeking to implement digital technology to improve services to our customers. Although this may result in reduced costs of running the site, financial savings are not the main objective of the changes introduced.

Any financial benefits that are delivered will be monitored and reported at year end. The booking system is intended to improve access to the site for our residents by avoiding cars idling on the road before entering the site. This will not only reduce queueing time, particularly at peak times but also reduce the amount of CO2 released in the area as part of our corporate priority of making Cheltenham net zero by 2030.

**9. Question from Councillor Wendy Flynn to Cabinet Member for Cyber, Regeneration and Commercial Income, Councillor Mike Collins**

In response to a question that I asked the Cabinet Member for Cyber, Regeneration and Commercial Income on 20/12/2022, I was told that 35% affordable housing was included in the financial modelling for the Golden Valley Development, with 70% social rented and 30% Affordable Home Ownership. Is this still the case? If not, what is the current ambition?

**Cabinet Member response:**

Thank you Councillor Flynn for your question.

You may recall that I sought to differentiate between the separate roles of the Council.

In its capacity as landowner, the Council, in partnership with development partner HBD, is still seeking to bring forward development that reflects the housing policy requirements.

The 35% affordable housing ambition is still currently included in the financial modelling for the project and we hope to maintain this as the project develops.

As I also said previously the eventual housing and tenure mix will still need to be considered in the light of the prevailing economic climate when each of the development plots that make up the whole of the site comes forward. This is a 10 year plus project.

We are at the first stage of this process with the submission of our outline planning applications. Tenure mix has not yet been defined and this remains an ongoing conversation between HBD and the Housing Strategy team. It will ultimately be resolved as part of the Section 106 discussions relating to these planning applications.

Whilst Social Rent is considered to be the most affordable tenure, it also has the most negative impact on land value. The ultimate tenure mix on the project will therefore need to be considered from multiple viewpoints, including from a viability perspective.

As a starting point we would expect the Council's Housing Strategy and Enabling Team to seek a mix of 70% social rented; 30% affordable home ownership. For clarity this means that of the rented homes that we expect to see delivered as affordable housing on this development, 100% of them would be let as a social rent.

In the event that there are financial viability issues (and we are satisfied this has been independently tested) then Officers would have to review our tenure mix. In the first instance, Officers would still prioritise delivering social rent across those homes where affordability is likely to be most acute – i.e. on 1 bedroom homes and 4 bedroom homes or larger, with the remaining rented homes being provided as Affordable Rent.

#### **10. Question from Councillor Wendy Flynn to the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay**

The Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust is asking Gloucester and Cheltenham councils to declare a nature emergency. Tewkesbury has already declared one. A nature emergency declaration will help the three Councils deliver on:

- Building sustainable economies that protect nature and not harm it.
- Making sure our town centres are vibrant, with opportunities for people to experience wildlife.
- Promoting healthy communities through connection to the outdoors.

Given the short timescale for the Strategic and Local Plan, and the huge importance of protecting nature, would the cabinet member declare a nature emergency, please?

**Cabinet Member response:**



Councillor Horwood submitted a motion to declare a nature emergency for consideration on 18<sup>th</sup> March, in recognition of the fact that UK is one of the world's most nature-depleted countries, in the bottom 10% globally. The motion recognises the work that has already been undertaken by the Council and its partners, such as the Gloucestershire Nature Partnership and the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust. Looking forward, it commits to embed nature's recovery at the heart of all strategic plans, policy areas and decision-making processes, including the forthcoming Cheltenham, Gloucester & Tewkesbury Strategic & Local Plan. It contains, moreover, a pledge to develop and agree on an evidence-based strategy and action plan for nature's recovery by 2030, setting clear strategic and measurable goals, alongside an assurance to provide a report on delivery against these targets.

#### **11. Question from Councillor Wendy Flynn to Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries**

The cost of living and fuel poverty crisis have led to many owner occupiers not being able to adequately heat or maintain their homes. What help does the council offer to owner occupiers on low incomes to retrofit or maintain their homes?

#### **Cabinet Member response:**

Thank you for the question.

Cheltenham Borough Council, along with the six other councils in Gloucestershire and South Gloucestershire, is working in partnership with Seven Wye Energy Agency (SWEA) to run the Warm and Well scheme, offering free energy advice to residents in the county.

As well as their energy adviceline, SWEA has dedicated Energy Advocates who work across the county to help people struggling with their energy bills. They hold regular drop ins, work with local community groups and carry out home visits, to tailor their support to residents' needs and they can support residents with a range of issues including:

- Managing fuel debt and large energy bills
- Grant funding for energy efficiency improvements
- Home visits to understand how you use energy at home, and how to reduce it
- Access to further local support services where necessary

SWEA, through the Warm and Well scheme, also work to secure additional funding to meet the scheme's aims and objectives including funding opportunities that arise from regional, national and European sources and particularly from utility providers.

In addition, SWEA also develop and deliver training programmes for frontline community workers from a range of local services and voluntary groups. This helps enable them to understand and recognise issues relating to fuel poverty, especially with regard to the effect on health, and in turn help target help to those in need.

However, there is so much more that we as a council could do with the right government support, equally government could take a range of actions which would alleviate fuel poverty and provide energy security for us all .... Such as....

- A. Remove restrictions on new solar and wind to accelerate the deployment of renewable power, providing more funding, and building more interconnectors to guarantee security of supply.
- B. Convert the Energy Profits Levy into a 40% windfall tax and remove the associated investment allowance, with both changes backdated to October 2021, thus ensuring that gas and oil producers pay their fair share.
- C. Allocate to the development of Marine Energy those revenues from Crown Estates' offshore wind licensing that are to be returned to the Exchequer by HM King Charles III for use in the public interest.
- D. Establish a not-for-profit company, British Marine Energy, with a task force to plan a series of Tidal Range Energy schemes commencing with a "Pathfinder" project.
- E. Ensure that the Electricity Generator Levy has allowances that permit renewable generators to reinvest their excess profits in new projects.
- F. Introduce a one-off levy on the bonuses awarded to oil and gas executives, similar to the bankers' bonuses tax in 2009/10 in the aftermath of the financial crisis which taxed bank bonuses over £25,000 at 50%.
- G. Cut the Energy Price Guarantee to £1,971 for the average household until April 2024 or average prices drop below that level, whichever is soonest.
- H. Continue the existing Business Energy Bill Relief Scheme for a further six months from April.
- I. Empower local authorities to support the expansion community and decentralised energy, including by supporting the Local Electricity Bill in Parliament, reducing access costs for grid connections and reforming the energy network to permit local energy grids.
- J. Undertake an emergency programme to insulate all Britain's homes by 2030, with a central role in delivering this programme being taken by local authorities, cutting emissions and fuel bills and ending fuel poverty, with non-domestic buildings following.
- K. Support households to cut their bills by:
  - i. Providing free retrofits for low-income homes.
  - ii. Piloting a new subsidised Energy-Saving Homes scheme.
  - iii. Graduating Stamp Duty Land Tax by the energy rating of the property.

- iv. Giving councils the powers to develop community energy-saving projects, including delivering housing energy efficiency improvements street by street, which cuts costs.
  - v. Allow homeowners to offset spending on insulation, low-carbon heat sources, EV charging points and climate adaptation measures against their income tax bills.
- L. Establish a Net Zero Delivery Authority sponsored jointly by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and the Treasury to oversee the delivery of Net Zero; coordinate cross departmental coordination; and facilitate the devolution of powers and resources to local governments.
- M. Require all new homes and non-domestic buildings to be built to a zero-carbon standard immediately, and progressively increasing standards as technology improves.
- N. Increase minimum energy efficiency standards for privately rented properties and remove the cost cap on improvements - aiming for rented properties to be minimum EPC Band C by 2025 and minimum EPC Band B by 2030 where feasible.
- O. Appoint Warm Homes and Community Energy tsars in central government to champion these causes.
- P. Accelerate the current Review of Electricity Market Arrangements process to reform energy markets to ensure that households and businesses benefit from the expansion in low-cost renewables, including by:
- i. Decoupling electricity prices from the wholesale gas price.
  - ii. Changing how the standing charge works.
  - iii. Ending the higher costs for prepayment meter customers and giving Ministers the power to suspend the installation of prepayment meters.
  - iv. Considering a social tariff for the most vulnerable.
- Q. Remove restrictions on new solar and wind to accelerate the deployment of renewable power, providing more funding, and building more interconnectors to guarantee security of supply.
- R. Convert the Energy Profits Levy into a 40% windfall tax and remove the associated investment allowance, with both changes backdated to October 2021, thus ensuring that gas and oil producers pay their fair share.
- S. Empower local authorities to support the expansion community and decentralised energy, including by supporting the Local Electricity Bill in Parliament, reducing access costs for grid connections and reforming the energy network to permit local energy grids.
- T. Undertake an emergency programme to insulate all Britain's homes by 2030, with a central role in delivering this programme being taken by local

authorities, cutting emissions and fuel bills and ending fuel poverty, with non-domestic buildings following.

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- i. Providing free retrofits for low-income homes.
  - ii. Piloting a new subsidised Energy-Saving Homes scheme.
  - iii. Graduating Stamp Duty Land Tax by the energy rating of the property.
  - iv. Giving councils the powers to develop community energy-saving projects, including delivering housing energy efficiency improvements street by street, which cuts costs.
  - v. Allow homeowners to offset spending on insulation, low-carbon heat sources, EV charging points and climate adaptation measures against their income tax bills.
- BB. Establish a Net Zero Delivery Authority sponsored jointly by the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero and the Treasury to oversee the delivery of Net Zero; coordinate cross departmental coordination; and facilitate the devolution of powers and resources to local governments.
- CC. Require all new homes and non-domestic buildings to be built to a zero-carbon standard immediately, and progressively increasing standards as technology improves.
- DD. Increase minimum energy efficiency standards for privately rented properties and remove the cost cap on improvements - aiming for rented properties to be minimum EPC Band C by 2025 and minimum EPC Band B by 2030 where feasible.
- EE. Appoint Warm Homes and Community Energy tsars in central government to champion these causes.
- FF. Accelerate the current Review of Electricity Market Arrangements process to reform energy markets to ensure that households and businesses benefit from the expansion in low-cost renewables, including by:
- i. Decoupling electricity prices from the wholesale gas price.
  - ii. Changing how the standing charge works.
  - iii. Ending the higher costs for prepayment meter customers and giving Ministers the power to suspend the installation of prepayment meters.
  - iv. Considering a social tariff for the most vulnerable.

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

Could the Cabinet Member give an update on the latest costings for the emergency works on the Pittville Pump Room and what additional expenditure is expected?

**Cabinet Member response:**

I thank Cllr Fifield for his question. The total cost of the remedial works at the Pittville Pump Room is £56,195 including the scaffolding hire to access the plasterwork. No additional expenditure is expected.

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

Could the Cabinet Member provide the amount of lost revenue caused by the emergency works and were cancelled bookings completely refunded?

**Cabinet Member response:**

I thank Cllr Fifield for his question. Questions about the finances of The Cheltenham Trust should be directed to the Trust.

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

Could the member for Cabinet Member please provide a date for when they expect the Pump Room to be reopened?

**Cabinet Member response:**

I thank Cllr Fifield for his question. As reported in our response to a question from Cllr Nelson at the February Council meeting, the works were due to be completed and the building made fully available to the Cheltenham Trust on Friday 8 March in advance of their busy Cheltenham Festival events. I am very pleased to report that this deadline was achieved, and the building was handed back to the Trust on Thursday 7 March. The Council understands the importance of Festival week for the town's economy and officers have worked hard with staff at the Trust to ensure that they can benefit from what is arguably the most important week of the year for any business.

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

Could the Cabinet Member please provide an update on whether bookings that have been cancelled as part of the works done have been provided support to find alternative bookings?

**Cabinet Member response:**

I assume Cllr Fifield is referring to bookings made at the Pittville Pump Room. Bookings are managed by The Cheltenham Trust, as he is aware. Cllr Fifield should therefore direct his question to The Cheltenham Trust.

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

Could the Cabinet Member please confirm whether there are any covenants on the land of Idsall Drive Car Park of any form stipulating what the plot can be used for and what those covenants are?

**Cabinet Member response:**

I thank Cllr Fifield for his question. The only covenant on the land at Idsall Drive car park is any development is limited to no more than one dwelling. There are no other covenants on the land.

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

Could the Cabinet Member confirm how much the council intends to receive from the sale of Idsall Drive Car Park, and whether this money has been earmarked for a particular purpose?

**Cabinet Member response:**

I thank Cllr Fifield for his question. The expectation on marketing the site for sale was that the Council would receive a minimum of £100,000 and this was reflected in the asking price. I can confirm that following the marketing of the site, offers far exceeded this expectation.

Capital receipts are used by the Council to fund our capital programme, the most recent version being approved by Full Council on 23 February 2024 as well as repaying principal amounts of our borrowing. As you were unable to attend this council meeting, I'm happy to provide the relevant paperwork if needed.

You will recall in November 2020 this Council approved a recovery budget during the pandemic which diverted vital revenue resources to our core services by using the proceeds from the disposal of eight assets to repay debt. Idsall Drive car park was included in this report.

We successfully navigated these financial pressures in 2020/21 and 2021/22 by implementing this strategy and making sure that our services continued to be provided to all residents of Cheltenham at a time of national crisis. We now need to follow through with the funding strategy by disposing of the land in line with the original proposal.

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

Could the Cabinet Member please confirm how many offers were made for Idsall Drive Car Park including the accepted offer?

**Cabinet Member response:**

I thank Cllr Fifield for his question. The Council received 12 separate offers for Idsall Drive car park.

**19. Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Well-being, Councillor Max Wilkinson**

The recent announcement (Echo Feb 22<sup>nd</sup>), regarding future development of Cavendish House by owners Canada Life, is welcome news indeed.

The demise of the Promenade and particularly Cavendish House has, for a long time now, been the subject of much discussion and speculation along with potential plans to rejuvenate the town centre. Why has it taken so long to get to this stage? Residents, BID and many others have long seen (certainly before the sale of House of Fraser to Sports Direct in August 2018), and voiced, the obvious opportunity to redevelop Cavendish House to provide much needed residential space. Why was this opportunity not actioned sooner?

**Cabinet Member response:**

I would like to thank Cllr Nelson for this question and assure her that this authority has been engaged with discussions with Canada Life, the owners of Cavendish House, for some time. However, while the council can offer support, decisions about the future of the building are the responsibility of Canada Life, albeit subject to achieving planning permission.

The planning team is currently in pre application engagement with the agent representing Canada Life with the expectation that an application will be presented shortly. This application has the opportunity to bring forward a mixed-use scheme reflecting the priorities of our corporate plan in respect of regeneration and investment in the town centre.

**20. Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Well-being, Councillor Max Wilkinson**

Cheltenham has many landmark tourist attractions including Montpellier and Imperial Gardens, The Holst Museum, The Wilson, The Old Court House, The Town Hall, The Everyman Theatre, Pittville Park etc etc - Why was the decision taken to remove the traditional black signposts with gold lettering? These were used to clearly direct visitors where they may want to go and are still popular and a proven success in

other Gloucestershire visitor destinations such as Gloucester, Tewkesbury and Bourton.

**Cabinet Member response:**

The work to remove the old black and gold signs commencing in 2013, was part of a wider wayfinding strategy to deliver an array of visitor friendly signs, maps and tourist information around the town centre after extensive consultation with key stakeholders, including Gloucestershire County Council. Well received on delivery, the project was generally felt to deliver on its objective to provide well placed signage to helpfully locate tourists and direct them accurately across the town, including helpful information on walking time to reach their destination.

**21. Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries**

How much consultation and discussion takes place with other towns that are seen to be thriving "destinations" for visitors (eg Stratford, Worcester, Marlborough) to ascertain how they set their parking charges and policies to achieve this? There are many other towns who have better parking facilities and while we all agree more should be done to reduce dependence on the car, the reality is that for visitors to Cheltenham, that appears to be their preferred option. After all, not everyone has access to alternative means of transport. Here in Cheltenham car park spaces are reducing, it can be increasingly difficult to park in the town and when one does find a space, charges are prohibitively high.

**Cabinet member response:**

I thank Cllr Nelson for her question. You will be aware that in March 2023 the Council undertook a consultation on the car parking order to increase our car parking charges. This followed a period of five years where there were no increases in our charging schedule. The proposal which was eventually adopted by the Council was informed by customer usage of our car parks to encourage usage in some of our car parks which were not as popular and reduce queuing in others. This has also helped to increase footfall for those businesses situated nearby to some of the car parks which had lower usage.

Although other destinations were used to inform our proposal, there were more local factors which led to the fees being increased in some car parks more than others. Since the new fees and charges were introduced, we have not seen a fall in the usage of our car parks and in particular have seen increased use during busy school holiday periods. Currently there is sufficient capacity within our car parks to meet current demand, however this will need monitoring.



**22. Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries**

To facilitate and encourage Cheltenham residents to support the town centre more, could a "first half hour free" option be introduced in Borough town centre car parks?

**Cabinet Member response:**

I thank Cllr Nelson for her question. Supporting the economic growth and recovery of our town has been a keen focus for the Council since the approval of the recovery budget in November 2020. We have set aside budget underspends for key projects and events which have brought in both residents and visitors to the town centre.

However, we have been mindful that pre pandemic budgets placed significant reliance on car parking income to fund spending – an assumption which was not aligned to our goals around carbon net zero for our town. It is for this reason that in 2021/22 the car parking income budgets were reviewed and other sources of income and investment were sought to bridge the gap.

The proposal of a first half hour free would not only be extremely difficult and costly to enforce but would also be contrary to this principal of reducing our reliance on vehicles coming into the town centre.

**23. Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to Cabinet Member for the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay**

We know the MX project has had to overcome various challenges in its development and was originally due to be completed in summer 2022 at a cost of £5.2m. Last June, we heard the total spend would be over £8.3m with completion "early 2024". When **will** the MX be completed?

**Cabinet Member response:**

Thank you Councillor Nelson for the question. As Cllr Nelson knows, CBC is not the developer for the MX and the responsibility for construction and completing the building rests with Workshop Cheltenham. The current estimate on the construction programme provided by Workshop Cheltenham is that the MX will be completed on the 26 April 2024. Workshop Cheltenham also report that this date is dependent on some factors that are outside of the control of the developer, for example, if there was extreme weather that delayed external works.

**24. Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Well-being, Councillor Max Wilkinson**

Given the delay with the completion of the MX project, why weren't the businesses who will potentially be occupying the MX space when completed, encouraged into the empty sites on the Promenade?

**Cabinet Member response:**

Thank you to Councillor Nelson for her question. The vision for the MX operated by Workshop Group/Plexal is that it will be another important facility which will support and help to further enhance Cheltenham's position as a thriving tech cluster and act as a bridge to support the Golden Valley and the National Cyber Innovation Centre . The building aims to bring together public sector with micro, SMEs and large companies working in cyber tech and adjacent technologies to deliver growth and innovation. This is combined with using the new event space to build Cheltenham's vibrant cultural offer in the heart of our town.

I do not know which specific vacant units Cllr Nelson is referring to on the Promenade but, outside of the Municipal Offices, the Council does not have ownership of units on the Promenade so cannot influence negotiations with occupiers and secondly, vacant retail units tend not suitable for tech businesses to occupy, nor can retail units replicate the compelling offer at the MX.

**25. Question from Councillor Emma Nelson to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Culture, Tourism and Well-being, Councillor Max Wilkinson**

What measures are CBC taking to encourage more "Pop Ups" into the empty units on the Promenade?

**Cabinet Member response:**

I would like to thank Cllr Nelson for this question. I am sure she will be aware of the Cheltenham Vacant Units Action Plan, with its key objectives being to:

- Understand the current and ongoing position of empty shops in the town centre.
- Encourage the conversion of empty and underused space to maximise brownfield residential development.
- Take enforcement against unsightly empty premises to clear up our town centre.
- Work with landlords, agents, and town centre businesses to ensure that stakeholders understand key issues facing town centre development.
- Encourage flexibility of the planning system and future strategic planning to bring more residential accommodation to the town centre.
- Identify opportunities for meanwhile use where appropriate.
- Highlight opportunities for regeneration and recognise the value of key development sites within the town acting as a catalyst for lasting change.

The recommendations within that report, and the associated action plan, provide the answers she seeks. Work is underway with stakeholders including Cheltenham BID, to ensure that Cheltenham continues to be an attractive destination for visitors, residents and investors.