

Council

Meeting date: 15 December 2025

Public Questions

1. Question from Tim Harman to the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay

Cheltenham Borough Council is proposing a consultation on the establishment of a Town Council. Can the Cabinet Member confirm if the Town Council would fund itself by setting an additional precept above and beyond that which Households would pay to a new unitary Council. If so, can the cabinet member give an estimate of likely amount that each household would pay on an annual basis?

Member response

Thank you for the question. The community governance review is not at the point when any decisions could be made about future precepts. Currently, it is premature to predict what the shape of town and parish councils would be in Cheltenham going forward so estimates cannot be provided.

2. Question from Tim Harman to the Cabinet Member Waste and Recycling and Parks, Gardens and Green Open Space, Councillor Paul Baker

Residents and users of Hatherley Park have raised with me concerns about the condition of the lake where the water level seems lower than normal. My understanding is that Friends of Hatherley Park have been involved with a restoration plan but there is no progress at this time. Can the Cabinet Member clarify the situation and assure residents and users that the Council will commit to restoring the lake in this popular and well used Park.

Member response

The water level in the lake dropped very low during what was one of the driest summer and autumns on record exposing large areas of mud and silt which have built up over many years. The lake is not fed from an existing river or brook and is reliant upon surrounding ground water to maintain its level. With the water table so very low it was unable to replenish itself as it would do normally. Hatherley lake is one of three lakes in the area all of which suffered the same effects, a picture which repeated itself nationally as other municipal parks reported similar issues.

When the water level was so very low it was noticeable how much silt was present in the lake, so a decision was made to remove the silt at the earliest opportunity. A planning application has just been made for this to take place, which if successful could see the lake desilted in February 2026. Whilst this will not fix any issues brought about by drought it will create more water capacity in the lake and make it more resilient to dry conditions in the future. When the work is underway, the clay lining and sides of the pond will be checked for leaks.

Further to this I can also report that the underground feeder pipe that channels the adjacent ground drainage water into the lake has been checked and cleared to ensure there are no blockages.

I can also report that throughout the summer, and autumn, the Council's Green Space Team liaised closely with the Friends of Hatherley Park and placed a series of posters up in the park to keep the public informed of the issue. The Friends are kindly donating £5000 of their funds to the desilting project which will see improvements to marginal planting to improve the aquatic habitat and biodiversity of this much valued local amenity. It goes without saying that we are very grateful to the Friends of Hatherley Park for all their hard work and support all year round.

3. Question from Elliot Craddock to the Cabinet Member Climate Emergency, Councillor Richard Pineger

A month or two ago now I had a leaflet from the Liberal Democrats through my letter box and on it, it talked about the state of Balancing Pond just outside Coxs meadow. I'm sure the Charlton Park councillors are fully aware of the state the pond is in and has been in for a very long time now. In the leaflet it said: "Paul is pleased to report that there should be some positive news very soon." Could you please inform me of this good news now?

Member response

Thank you, Mr Craddock, for your question, in response to this I have discussed with my colleague Cllr Paul Baker who has been engaging directly with you as part of his case work for the Ward of Charlton Park and to which you have received a detailed response.

The balancing pond you are referring to is managed by the developer Vistry Group and this relates to the development of Charlton Park (King Arthur, King Henry, and King George Close, and King William Drive) which was built circa 1980's. The pond collects surface water runoff from the estate and during heavy rainfall stores and releases surface water at a controlled rate to the Lilley Brook. This is to balance any potential flood impacts downstream of the estate that could arise due to the introduction of the impermeable surfaces (roofs and roads) on what was previously greenspace.

Working with the Charlton Park Residents Association, Cllr Baker has been supporting local residents, this has included:

- Supporting a meeting between Vistry and residents 13th November 2024
- Engagement with Vistry Group, this resulted in the developer carrying out some minor vegetation work to enable remedial works to facilitate pricing of future works, the commissioning of an ecology survey to identify if great crested newts were present – this concluded none were present.
- The latest update received from the Vistry Group was in November advising that the ecology report needs to be reviewed and that due to work commitments this will take place in January following which a site meeting will be rearranged to take the matter forward. Further to the receipt of your question to Council, officers have reached out to the Vistry Group who have confirmed that a meeting with residents will be reviewed in the new year and that they will carry out such works as deemed necessary to maintain the balancing pond's primary function. The details of this work haven't yet been finalised but will be confirmed in the new year.

Cllr Baker is your active point of contact; further communication will be via the ward member route.

4. Question from Elliot Craddock to the Cabinet Member Climate Emergency, Councillor Richard Pineger

What are the council's current plans for the building and expansion of energy infrastructure, including renewables, which I know is a policy that the Liberal Democrats take extremely seriously? And how can we ensure these changes are kept when moving to the new local government model?

Member response

Cheltenham Borough Council is pursuing an ambitious programme to decarbonise its energy systems and embed renewable infrastructure into the town's future, in line with our 2030 net-zero commitment. At the heart of this work is a commitment to expand solar generation and low-carbon heating across the council estate and new development.

We have installed photovoltaic (PV) panels on the new MX building and are planning PV arrays on the first two new buildings at Golden Valley. All new homes being procured for CBC include PV systems as standard. Across our housing portfolio, including new-build properties already handed over, we now have approximately 830 PV installations, with some larger systems powering communal areas in blocks.

Alongside solar, we are investing in low-carbon heating. At major sites such as Leisure@ Cheltenham, we secured Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme funding to develop a heat-pump solution to replace end-of-life gas boilers—cutting emissions and reducing reliance on fossil fuels for the future. We have also installed Low

Carbon Heating (LCH) systems on some of our properties - including a shared loop ground-source heat pump at one of our sheltered blocks.

We are some ways down the road of developing the first heat network in Gloucestershire with the backing of Climate Leadership Gloucestershire and working with national partners. A heat-network focused on the town centre has been selected building on the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero's (DESNZ) pilot zoning outputs and successive Heat Network Delivery Unit grants to progress detailed project development.

Transport electrification is another priority. Through our partnership with The EV Network, Cheltenham is rolling out rapid and ultra-rapid (50kW to 300 kW) charging hubs in key car parks, St James Street, Bath Terrace and Church Piece, providing residents and visitors with fast, reliable charging capable of a full charge in ~20-40 minutes. Delivery is already underway, with Bath Terrace now in operation, and further sites planned.

To underpin these practical steps, the council commissioned a Renewable Energy Study (with CSE/LUC) to map local potential for technologies such as solar, wind and storage. Its findings are informing the Cheltenham–Gloucester–Tewkesbury Strategic & Local Plan (SLP) now being engaged on, so that upon adoption, policies can give statutory weight to renewable energy requirements in new development.

Continuity through any transition to a new local government model will depend on embedding these priorities in formal planning policy and delivery agreements. By enshrining renewable energy standards in the SLP, securing long-term contracts for infrastructure projects, and aligning with county-wide governance through the Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) led by Climate Leadership Gloucestershire (CLG), Cheltenham can safeguard progress. The LAEP provides a blueprint for integrated energy planning across the county—covering heat zoning, community energy networks and collaboration with distribution network operators - consistent with national guidance on place-based energy planning. These measures create resilience by rooting energy transformation in statutory plans, shared governance and community ownership, ensuring momentum for renewables and low-carbon infrastructure continues regardless of structural change.

5. Question from Gill Hewlett to the Cabinet Member Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries

I notice that there are companies that are not UK owned in line to buy the municipal buildings and I want to know whether priority is being given to UK owned companies and, if not, why not? And also, how much due diligence has been done on the prospective buyers and can they be sure that any contenders do not have links to either Russian or Chinese states?

Member response

Thank you for your question, Ms Hewlett. The preferred bidder for the sale of the Municipal Offices is mostly Cheltenham based. Almiranta Capital, a Spanish firm with UK offices, is a specialist part of that bidding team, operating in the hotel investment sector. The sale itself has been carried out by informal tender process which included a full UK and international marketing process. Throughout the sale process, due diligence is thorough and continuous, supported by independent UK-based property advisors Avison Young and solicitors Anthony Collins.

6. Question from Rich Newman to the Cabinet Member Planning & Building Control, Councillor Mike Collins

Regarding planning proposals, under which circumstances are planning proposals called into committee instead of being decided upon by a planning officer?

Member response:

The Planning scheme of delegation, which is part of the council's constitution, and which can be found on our website, details the circumstances in which planning applications are referred to the Planning Committee. It is a lengthy document that cannot be repeated verbatim here, but in summary it states that an application is called to committee when:

1. It is contrary to the provisions of the development plan and is being recommended for approval; or
2. It is a proposal which the officer supports but the parish council objects and does so prior to the end of the statutory consultation period giving public interest and planning reasons for that objection - *unless* the Chair and Vice Chair consider that committee is not warranted; or
3. It is an application which any CBC Member has requested be called to committee provided that they do so within 21-days of publication of the relevant 'weekly list' of newly registered planning applications and provided that public interest and planning reasons for that request are given; or
4. It is an application submitted 'by or on behalf of' CBC or GCC; or
5. It is an application submitted by a member of the council, a director or a member of staff within the communities and economic development division; or
6. It is an application which the Planning Committee has formally resolved should come to committee; or

7. It is an application which the Director or Head of Planning themselves consider should be determined by committee.

7. Question from Rich Newman to the Cabinet Member Planning & Building Control, Councillor Mike Collins

Does CBC have any precedent for overturning a planning proposal decision made by a planning officer? Can this even be done, is it possible?

Member response

It is assumed that this question refers to the revocation of planning decisions after they have been formally issued, as opposed to the planning committee making decisions contrary to the officer's recommendation (which happens often).

Yes, it is possible to revoke a planning permission; Section 97 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 gives local planning authorities the power to do this. In practice however, this power is very rarely exercised as an authority will often be liable for paying substantial compensation to any party disadvantaged by the revocation i.e. the developer and/or recipient of the permission.

8. Question from Emma Nelson to the Cabinet Member Major Developments & Housing Delivery, Councillor Alisha Lewis

The Strategic and Local Plan, currently out for consultation, includes reference (p15) that "Cheltenham will become the new cyber capital for the UK". What impact will the winding up of the NCSC for Startups Program (formerly known as the GCHQ Cyber Accelerator Scheme), have on the future of the Cyber Park?

Member response

Thank you for your question, Emma. The NCSC for Startups programme ran from 2017 until it closed in March 2025. Its purpose was to act as an 'accelerator' for cyber start-up firms, enabling them to access technical guidance, expertise and contacts whilst helping to address national cyber security challenges through collaboration with other startups and Government agencies.

Whilst the programme was based in Cheltenham, Startups came from around the country to be involved. Upon concluding their time on the programme, the startups would then return to their hometowns and cities.

Golden Valley's vision is, in part, to replicate the success of this programme but on a larger scale and in a less formalised fashion. The facilities at Golden Valley (particularly at IDEA – the National Cyber Innovation Centre) are being designed and curated to deliver an ecosystem with collaboration and innovation built into its DNA. Industry, government, academia and start-ups will be brought together into the same space, with tailored programmes and events aimed to foster collaborative working and knowledge spillovers.

The role of GCHQ and NCSC in this ecosystem will be critical. However, the specific NCSC for Startups programme has never been a central requirement. Indeed, with the right blend of facilities, people and businesses, Golden Valley will replicate and amplify the benefits seen in accelerator programmes by providing an ongoing accessible ecosystem that attracts and drives growth.

9. Question from Emma Nelson to the Cabinet Member Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries

The Echo recently reported (October 23rd) that CBC had paid a total £782,468 over just three years on 25 Non Disclosure Agreements (NDA's). Whilst I appreciate the need to protect potentially commercially sensitive information around recent disposal of high value assets, why is this figure so large?

Member response

NDAs ensure that organisations can share investment proposals with us in confidence. Working in this way not only enables us to explore opportunities, test proposals and negotiate terms without risking the release of sensitive commercial information, it also ensures that partners have confidence knowing that their intellectual property and business models are safeguarded.

While there are many ways in which NDAs can be used, part of our success story is how we've built confidence with partners by protecting commercially sensitive information.

There are occasions when negotiations break down or contracts are terminated and as a result a financial settlement may be reached. Whilst the figure quote may sound high it must be balanced against potential investment opportunities as well as future potential for growth.