

Council

20 July 2026

Public Questions

1. Question from Tim Harman to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Wellbeing, Culture and Public Realm, Councillor Izaak Tailford

It is reported that businesses in the Town Centre and in particular the Promenade have seen a 40 per cent reduction in business since the closure of Cavendish House [['We feel forgotten' say Cheltenham traders as shopping street left with gaping hole - Gloucestershire Live](#)] Can the cabinet member indicate what steps are being taken to boost activity in the area both in the short term and the long term?

Cabinet Member response

Thank you, Tim, for your question. Firstly, individual shops experience may differ, but Cheltenham BID data shows that footfall on The Promenade this year is at its highest level for at least the last 7 years - despite the Cavendish House closure in 2024. I think this is a testament to the draw of Cheltenham Town Centre for residents and visitors.

Just last week I brought an update on the [Town Centre and Vacant Units Action Plan](#) to Cabinet. It lists a lot of the ongoing work by the council and our partners to support our Town Centre, including The Promenade.

Some highlights include the council's Marketing Cheltenham / Visit Cheltenham team, whose website had 2.1 million visits last year, with 89,000 followers on social media, c45,000 subscribers to the email newsletter and 80,000 town guides printed and distributed in 2025. I think this is some of the best promotion of our town we could ask for, and helps bring many residents and visitors into the town centre.

While our vacancy rate is only 7.8%, around half the national average of 14%, we are still taking action on persistently vacant units. This includes a consultation later in the year on a proposed area where we could apply High Street Rental Auctions.

As you know, we've also worked with Gloucestershire County Council and Cheltenham BID on the High Street and Promenade Public Realm approach. The survey on this closes today (20th July), but we are also doing a direct engagement session with businesses in August. This work so far has helped protect and reinstate the paving in The Promenade, while also planning for public realm improvements that could be delivered as funding allows.

I'm also very happy to share that our Cheltenham Markets Bill has also just received Royal Assent, allowing us to create a new Markets Policy for a cohesive, enticing and supportive market offering.

These are just a few highlights of the many pieces of work that are ongoing in our town by our council and its partners. So please do rest assured that while many national and international challenges are out of our control, we are doing everything in our power and beyond to help our town centre continue to thrive.

2. Question from Tim Harman to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Wellbeing, Culture and Public Realm, Councillor Izaac Tailford

The Borough and County are currently undertaking a consultation on the town centre and Promenade.

In the context of a new unitary council, can the Cabinet Member consider the appointment of a Public Realm Officer to coordinate and promote improvements to the town centre with an adequate budget?

Cabinet Member response

Thank you again for your question. We do have officers at Cheltenham Borough Council whose remit includes Public Realm, but of course we do not control the biggest impact item of Highways, which is a Gloucestershire County Council function. Our working group with CBC, GCC and BID has proved invaluable in sharing views and trying to coordinate an improved public realm. It matters to us, and it is clear it matters to our residents and businesses.

As the Gloucestershire Unitary authority takes shape, it will be up to the new administration to make decisions on what new positions they may create and what budgets they may allocate. But from my position at CBC, I will advocate for Public Realm to be properly accounted for.

3. Question from Ann Regan to Cabinet Member for Waste and Recycling, Parks and Gardens, and Public Open Space, Councillor Steve Harvey

Can I ask the relevant member for Green Environment why our town is looking exceedingly neglected? In particular:

- the grass cutting is of very poor standard, clumps of dead grass lying along the roads and a danger to blocked drains eventually;
- huge patches on the ornamental grassed areas in Warden Hill left uncut, almost 2ft high in places and dead;
- the epicormic growth around the base of trees along the Gloucester Road and Lansdown Road have not been pruned back for years;
- the entrance roads to our town are looking very poor and unkempt.

The quality and care of our Green Environment need a re-boost – when will this happen?

Cabinet Member response

Thank you for your question although I don't agree that the town looks neglected.

The weather this year has been particularly challenging with a very wet spell followed by a longer period of very dry and hot weather. We all know from our gardens at home that this is difficult to manage and more so when it is borough-wide. I would like to thank all the Ubico staff who have been working outside in very hot weather this year doing their best to maintain standards.

The first grass cut of the season is always untidier as the grass is longer to cut. We do try to coincide our street sweeper in areas where we have cut the grass to clear it but that isn't always possible as sometimes it is needed elsewhere; for example, in advance of heavy rain, street sweepers are deployed in flood risk roads so may not be able to sweep up the grass. Our resources are limited and deployed based on operational priorities. We work closely with Gloucestershire County Council, who are responsible for drains and drain clearance, to deliver road gulley cleaning.

Officers have inspected Hatherley and Warden Hill verges and confirm that they are currently at the correct cutting height, however, dried grasses and flowering weeds are taller and will be strimmed as part of our maintenance programme over the summer.

You have commented on "huge patches on the ornamental grassed areas in Warden Hill left uncut, almost 2ft high in places and dead". Without specific locations, it is difficult to give you more information. You may be referring to areas designated to be wild flower or meadow areas, including locations such as Broad Oak Way, Symphony Road and Chargrove Lane Open Space, which are intentionally managed differently to support biodiversity. Some areas are left uncut throughout the season, with only fire breaks maintained, while others are cut later in the year or left temporarily to allow spring bulbs to die back and recover nutrients.

I have passed on your comments regarding the removal of epicormic growth around trees to Gloucestershire Highways as they are responsible for this, NOT Cheltenham Borough Council. I would, however, like to say that this year's weather is unusually hot and dry and this may have influenced decisions relating to shade around tree roots.

As climate change is taking hold, we need to rethink many things. Interestingly, un-cut grass in our open spaces is good for soil, plants, ecosystems and, importantly, trees. We have seen that young trees growing in areas of uncut grass have established much more quickly than trees growing in regularly cut grass. Why, you might ask? Well, the grass seems to act as insulation on the soil, leading to reduced soil temperatures and therefore evaporation of ground water.

I am pleased to confirm that all the gateway routes into the town continue to be mechanically swept as regularly as they have been for years to maintain standards. The grass verges have been cut roughly every 25-30 days this year so far, partly due to the weather conditions, equipment breakdowns and staff absence. Many of our gateway routes cannot be cut too early due to bulb planting.

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

A search on the CBC website under “Sale of the Municipal Offices” shows that a Report to Full Council in April 2015 acknowledged that remaining in the Municipal Offices was not a viable option for the future. As of 30 September 2024, the Municipal Offices were marketed for sale, with the closing date for bids 12 December 2024.

It continues:

We've reached the next stage in the Municipal Offices sale with the council entering into a new exclusivity agreement with the preferred bidder.

A "period of exclusivity" means that we will negotiate solely with one party for a specific duration.

In response to a question at Council on 23 March 2026, Council Leader Rowena Hay said:

The council has entered into an exclusivity agreement for the sale of the Municipal Offices. The preferred bid proposes to re-develop the building into a hotel, spa and banqueting/conferencing destination. The exclusivity agreement continues to progress, and we will provide further updates when a more definitive timetable for the sale is known.

On 21 April 2026, Glos Live hinted at doubts over the sale proceeding although negotiations with preferred bidder Almiranta Capital had been ongoing since May 2025.

Two questions arise please:

- i. What is the "specific duration" referred to above?
- ii. It is now over 11 years since this administration acknowledged the need to vacate the Muni – when will you provide more details of plans to finally vacate the premises?

Cabinet Member response

Thank you for the questions. The two issues are closely linked: the timetable for vacating the Municipal Offices is dependent on the progress of the sale process, including the current exclusivity period and the due diligence now underway.

The current exclusivity period runs until 4 December 2026. This Exclusivity Period was requested to give the preferred bidder sufficient time to complete the technical due diligence required to progress the scheme. This includes surveys and reports needed to inform detailed drawings, costings and the programme.

In practical terms, this time is needed to support:

- further viability and feasibility work;
- progress towards submitting a planning application;
- greater clarity on project timings;

- secure the necessary contractors; and
- finance planning for the proposed development.

This is a complex property transaction because of the unique nature, scale and significance of the Municipal Offices, and because the wider economic and political environment continues to evolve. The Council therefore needs to allow the preferred bidder sufficient time to complete its work, while also continuing to protect the Council's position.

For that reason, the Council cannot give a definitive date for vacating the premises until there is greater certainty about the outcome of the sale process and the associated programme.

In parallel, however, we are taking a proactive approach. This includes identifying a number of potential options, reviewing current office use to ensure it is planned and justified, and decluttering and reorganising space to support more efficient use and enable a smoother transition if required. It would not be appropriate to disclose our potential relocation options prematurely, as doing so could have unintended consequences for the town centre economy, the wider market and the Council's negotiating position.

Given the unprecedented and rapidly evolving nature of the market, it is essential that the Council retains flexibility and avoids presenting any option or timeframe as definitive until the necessary analysis and decision-making processes have been completed.

5. Question from Emma Nelson to Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Wellbeing, Culture and Public Realm, Councillor Izaak Tailford

Until such time as definite plans for the future of Cavendish House are approved by CBC, what does the Cabinet Member think of exploring potential for a collaborative project with Cheltenham BID, the Civic Society and Canada Life to use the empty windows along the Prom as a showcase? Presumably, it will be a while before we see any actual development taking place and that long run of empty windows presents an excellent display opportunity for Cheltenham. Possible projects could be the history of Cheltenham, local schools each having a window, displays from The Wilson Gallery, Local History Societies etc.

Cabinet Member response

Thank you, Emma, for your question. The Cheltenham BID has already worked in partnership with Canada Life to develop artwork for all of the windows, which will be installed in early September. The designs I've seen are perfectly in keeping for the area, including history, images, information and a map to help with wayfinding.

6. Question from Elliot Craddock to Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets, Councillor Peter Jeffries

What is the current status of the ownership of the Cheltenham Lido car park? Is it still owned by the council and leased to the Lido, does the Lido now own it, or something else?

Cabinet Member response

The car park remains in CBC ownership but is leased to Cheltenham Lido. The council granted Cheltenham Lido a new 99-year lease in March 2026.

7. Question from Elliot Craddock to the Leader, Councillor Rowena Hay

Before the 2026 elections, the council argued that the elections should be cancelled in order to save money. Since the elections went ahead anyway, can the council inform us what services Cheltenham hasn't been able to spend money on as a result?

Cabinet Member response

Thank you for your question.

The costs of holding our elections in May 2026 will create additional pressures in this financial year as the national decision was not made in sufficient time for this to be included in our budget this year.

We already had to make just over £1m of savings (where we had a plan to identify in-year savings to meet this gap) and this will have to increase to cover the additional costs of £140k. These will be identified and reported on through our budget management reports presented to council committees throughout the year, with the first report being considered by Cabinet in September.

We will endeavour to identify savings where the impact on service delivery will be minimised as we always do, but when decisions at national level are taken late in the day, our ability to do that is reduced.