

MEMBER QUESTIONS

Question from Councillor Nikki Ind to Councillor Mike Evemy, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance

'Whilst I appreciate the benefits of technology and the cost savings related to cashless parking, following resident's concerns raised with me, could you please confirm that from next April there will be no way for elderly residents or those without an up to date mobile phone or credit/debit card to pay for car parking in the Cotswolds? How does this allow the District Council to ensure all services remain inclusive?'

Response from Councillor Evemy

Our plans to remove the option to pay for parking using cash were included in the Council's budget consultation in January 2020 and in the budget papers presented to Council on 26 February. In the Corporate Plan passed by the Council on 23 September 2020, the action 'Introduce cashless parking in all car parks' was shown with a commencement date of 'July 2020' and a completion date of 'April 2021'.

There are two main reasons why we intend to phase out the use of cash in our car parks: (i) the cost and environmental impact of cash collections; and (ii) the costs and inconvenience to the public and officers of acts of theft and vandalism.

The Council's 2020/21 budget contains an estimated saving of £35,000 from the removal of cash from car parks. Cash collection requires regular journeys around the District to empty the machines with the associated vehicle use. Over the four year period from 2015/16, we have seen nine incidents of theft or vandalism of machines in our car parks. Whilst we can make insurance claims for the theft or damage to the machines, subject to a £1,000 excess, we incur the cost of the stolen cash and any consequential loss in parking revenue while the situation is rectified ourselves. Costs of the latter can be in five figures when the damage is significant as it was at the Beeches in 2016.

With the launch of our new free parking app on 1 October, we took the opportunity to publicise our plans to remove the option to pay for parking using cash by 31 March 2021. I was interviewed on the subject on BBC Radio Gloucestershire and am aware that this decision has caused concern to some residents and visitors to the District. A significant number of these concerns stem from a report in the Wilts and Glos Standard on 3 October which at the top of the story suggested that the only way to pay in future would be by phone. Clearly, that's not the case. Our plans have always included the retention of the ability to pay by credit or debit card using contactless or chip and PIN technology.

However, I'm aware there are residents who would prefer to continue to use coins to pay for their parking. This may be because they don't own a smartphone or a mobile phone or, if they do, they don't wish to use them for this purpose. It may also be because they do not wish to use a card. In response to your point about inclusion, I believe it is reasonable to expect a car driver to have either a credit or debit card. Most payments for fuel, vehicle licence duty, insurance, repair and servicing bills will

be made by card. Access to a basic bank account including a debit card must be made available to all adults.

As part of our administration's plans to rebuild the Council and the services we provide we're committed to improving the parking service and making it easy for people to use. We have seen a considerable increase in the share of car park stays paid for using cards following the first lockdown - between 10% and 16% up on the same months in 2019, with year on year increases in the share of payments by phone/app in September and October of 6% and 8% respectively. These increases coincided with the publicity around the switchover to PaybyPhone and scrapping of the 10p administration charge on 1 October.

However, despite these changes, there are still many people who are parking in our car parks and paying by cash. We want to encourage them to pay using a card or the app and will be working with PaybyPhone on a campaign to encourage this. In recognition of this and the concerns raised by Cllr Ind and others, I have asked officers to bring a report to Cabinet on 4 January 2021 to provide options for a phased approach to the removal of cash payments with an extension to the completion date of this project to January 2022 in advance of the start of a re-tendered cash collection service in February 2022.

Question from Nikki Ind to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council

'With the ongoing COVID situation, would the Cabinet consider a publicity campaign regarding Postal Votes, as it looks likely that next year's elections will take place and many of our residents may prefer to change to this option?'

Response from Councillor Harris

We understand that many people may wish to use a postal vote for May's elections and we are very happy that they should do so. The Returning Officer and the elections team are already planning a campaign to promote postal voting with the aim of ensuring that anyone who wants to has arrangements for a postal vote in place well before the elections.

Question from Councillor Tony Berry to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council

'Last month you gave me details of CDC employees and those working for Publica but dedicated to CDC. Please could you now tell me what the total increase in the CDC Payroll has been since May 2019 including all new hirings and advertised vacancies?'

Response from Councillor Harris

The payroll fluctuates from month to month during the year for many reasons, the most significant change being staff turnover. The estimated annual payroll cost based on actual salaries paid in May 2019 was just under £904,000, including the employer's on-costs. The equivalent estimate in October 2020, taking account of the

2.75% annual pay increase that was effective from April 2020, was just under £834,000. The appointment of our new Chief Executive will add a further sum of just under £133,000.

Our administration has ambitious plans to rebuild the Council and help rebuild our District in the post COVID-19 world; these plans are outlined in the Council's corporate strategy. In order to realise these ambitions we have to have the staff in place to help do this and ensure we're paying them at a level that is commensurate with officers at other Councils.

Question from Councillor Tony Berry to Councillor Rachel Coxcoon, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Forward Planning

1. 'In July 3rd2019 Council unanimously approved the idea of investigating the benefit of putting solar panels on our Trinity Road premises
2. When questioned in July 15th2020 you reported that a review had taken place in April which showed that:
 - a) This would make a 10% reduction in our carbon footprint on the property.
 - b) The investment would pay for itself in 10 years (a 10% return)
3. That a review was being undertaken on the use of the property and all 'options' were being considered.

Are we ever going to see this happen?'

Response from Councillor Coxcoon

Tackling the climate emergency is the foundation stone of this administration's plans to rebuild the Council and rebuild our District in the post COVID-19 world.

As everyone is aware, the usage of the Trinity Road offices since the first Covid-19 lockdown in March has been a tiny fraction of the normal usage the office had prior to the pandemic. As a consequence the amount of electricity consumed by the office has also fallen dramatically, and this naturally adversely affects the economics of installing solar panels on the roof of Trinity Road.

The Council has reacted quickly and effectively to the challenge presented by Covid-19, and most Council employees continue to work from home, and will do so for the near future, in line with Publica's 'agile working' strategy.

All this means that we must establish much greater certainty over the way the Trinity Road offices are to be used in the future, before committing to capital investment in solar PV. Making such an investment now, in the absence of that clarity on the

future use of Trinity Road, risks the investment failing to deliver value to the Council, either in terms of carbon emissions reduction, or in financial terms.

We remain committed to making cost-effective investment in renewable energy technology wherever it is appropriate, and the Council is therefore commissioning a review of the opportunity for investment in solar PV across the whole of its building portfolio, to include Trinity Road, in collaboration with other Publica councils.

Question from Councillor Gina Blomefield to Councillor Rachel Coxcoon, Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Forward Planning

‘You recently ran a Climate Change Forum for Parish and Town Councillors, please could you tell me how many people attended this and how many Councils were represented?’

Response from Councillor Coxcoon

29 Councillors registered for the event, and 27 attended, representing 19 Town and Parish Councils between them.

All of the larger settlements were represented (Bourton on the Water, Chipping Campden, Northleach, S Cerney, Moreton in Marsh, Stow on the Wold, Cirencester, Tetbury, Fairford, Lechlade), plus several smaller parishes. Support was expressed for the idea of Parish and Town councils continuing to progress the climate emergency work together, and attendees generated a large number of good ideas for local action.

We are now considering how we move forward with further support to help parish and town councils in the district to act on the climate emergency, including assessing the appetite for further action days in the new year.

Question from Councillor Stephen Hirst to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council

‘Prior to the Lib-Dem assumption of control of the administration at CDC, the previous administration operated with a number of major management posts as shared posts with other adjoining District Councils normally West Oxfordshire District Council or the Forest of Dean District Council. These shared posts proved to be very cost efficient and operationally effective, contributing to major savings in the running of the respective councils. Could the Leader please explain the reasoning behind this cost-effective method of controlling costs being replaced by single individual responsibilities and the added costs of running the Council in this manner’

Response from Councillor Harris.

“Retained staff are working to maximum capacity and will not be able to deliver new and emerging priorities and it is the view of the team that some capacity issues present a real and immediate risk to the council and its ability to operate safely.” -
LGA Corporate Peer Challenge for Cotswold District Council

I think this passage neatly sums up why my administration has had to act in order to ‘bulk up’ our retained staff. This will allow us to rebuild the Council after 16 years of underinvestment by the previous Conservative administration.

Question from Councillor Stephen Hirst to Councillor Tony Dale, Cabinet Member for the Economy and Skills

‘Busy Town Centres are vital to both the economy of our District and the profitability of our many traders.

To support local businesses and traders what measures are being planned to support Cotswold Businesses in the run up to Christmas?’

Response from Councillor Dale

Creating an environment where we can allow businesses to thrive is a key plank of this administration’s plans to rebuild the Council and in turn help rebuild the Cotswolds in the post COVID-19 world.

The District Council has been working to support local businesses across the Cotswolds and specifically with Cirencester Town Council, on its Christmas shopping guide. We have also maintained free after 3pm parking in a number of car parks in the District throughout the festive period.

The Council’s work with Maybe to improve the social media presence of businesses will also help them to improve trade during the run-up to Christmas and indeed some of their webinars have focused on this theme.

The Council continues to promote a Shop Local message through its communications channels. Cotswolds Tourism continues to support businesses in the visitor economy through promotions on the Cotswolds.com website and through its other channels, consistent with enabling a Covid-secure environment.

Question from Councillor Richard Morgan to Councillor Tony Dale, Cabinet Member for the Economy and Skills

‘What impact will the second lockdown have on your economic forecast and return on investment forecasts and calculations with relation to your commercialisation strategy?’

Response from Councillor Dale

The District Council is not an economic forecaster and relies on other organisations with greater expertise and resources in this area to do this, especially as so many factors are beyond its control in the present pandemic.

Nonetheless, with a vaccine now on the horizon and the recovery in global stock markets last week we have seen improvements in our returns, beyond forecast, so remain in positive territory, something I know you will welcome.

Our Green Economic Growth Strategy is designed to ensure that the actions of the District Council and its partners positively contribute to the benefit of the local economy so its growth will therefore be higher than it would otherwise have been. In terms of the Recovery Investment Strategy, there are criteria set out in the report approved by Council which must be met before an investment will progress and the second lockdown does not alter those criteria. They are robust and already agreed and form a key plank of this administration's plans to help rebuild our council and in turn help rebuild the Cotswolds in the post COVID-19 world.

The Strategy does include some borrowing for infrastructure purposes at a time when debt costs are perhaps the lowest they have ever been. The latest forecast for 50 year gilts shows the rate to stay below 1% for the next three years and beyond. So although we did not choose a second lockdown, the continued low cost of debt continues to create a 'once in a lifetime' opportunity to invest in the renewal of the infrastructure of the Cotswolds that has been neglected for so long. We will not miss that opportunity.

Question from Councillor Patrick Coleman to Councillor Mike Evey, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance

'Could the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance please advise the Council of:

- a) the numbers of stays in this Council's car parks so far in the current financial year 2020/21;
- b) the revenue received from them so far in the said financial year;
- c) the impact of the price rise implemented on 1 September 2020.'

Response from Councillor Evey

- a) The table below shows the number of paid parking stays by month in 2020/21 with comparator figures for 2019/20:

	2019/20	2020/21
April	96,001	95

May	98,601	293
June	94,541	28,538
July	103,869	66,181
August	102,239	88,452
September	95,256	86,119
Oct	96,977	85,685
Total	687,484	355,363

Parking charges were suspended between 26 March and 31 May 2020.

- b) The table below shows the revenue (excluding VAT) received from car parking charges by month in 2020/21 with comparator figures from 2019/20:

	2019	2020
April	£169,080	£85
May	£173,790	£191
June	£172,768	£42,747
July	£182,852	£108,455
August	£185,597	£148,088
September	£170,693	£167,857
Oct	£167,703	£168,739
Total	£1,222,483	£636,161

- c) The figures above show that September and October were better months for the number of paid parking stays than August, with over 90% and 88% of the previous year's totals compared to 86% in August and 64% in July as we were coming out of lockdown. So, despite concerns raised by Conservative councillors and some businesses, there is no evidence to support their fear that the rise implemented on 1 September would put people off using our car parks and visiting our towns and enjoying what they have to offer. Indeed, the rise has boosted car park income and enabled the monthly revenue to exceed the 2019 figure for the first time in October. I'd like to thank those people for continuing to support our local businesses and for spending their time and money in our towns.

Question from Councillor Andrew Maclean to Councillor Clive Webster, Cabinet Member for the Planning Department, Town and Parish Councils

'The section 106 agreement for the main Upper Rissington development states in Part 4:

The Owner agrees:

1. To provide a minimum of 1500 (one thousand five hundred) square metres of floorspace to shell and core for Employment Uses prior to the Occupation of the 300th Residential Units.

The only employment space provided to date are two converted RAF buildings which have a combined floorspace of less than 1,000 m2. Why were the developers not held to this agreement and what steps can and will the council now take to ensure the full quota of employment space is provided before the developer leaves the site?'

Response from Councillor Webster:

As Cllr Maclean correctly highlights, the Outline planning permission requires the provision of 1500sqm of employment floorspace to be provided by the time that the 300th home is occupied. This requirement remains in force and the amount of homes now built is in excess of 300. Planning officers are therefore in the process of seeking a position statement from the developer in respect of the amount of floorspace provided to date and any remaining shortfall if found to be the case. I will, of course, update Cllr Maclean as soon as I receive the confirmation and, pending that response, I will arrange to meet with him to appropriately address any further action necessary.

The following question was received on 16 November, after publication of the Agenda, but prior to the deadline for receipt of Member Questions:

Question from Councillor Andrew Maclean to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council

In 2016, I, along with the majority of voters in the Cotswolds, voted to remain within the European Union. Our representative in Westminster has ignored the expressed will of his constituents and supported his party leaders in driving forward the most disruptive departure from the European Union possible. Now, with only 43 days until we leave the transitional arrangements, we can only end up with an incredibly meagre deal, or no deal at all.

This is our final council meeting before this calamity is inflicted upon our residents, with all the negative impacts upon their rights, their freedom of movement, their jobs,

their environment and their security. In the light of this terrible situation, what can and will this administration do to mitigate the catastrophic impacts that our government's actions are about to unleash upon the Cotswolds.

Response from Councillor Harris

Like Councillor Maclean I voted to Remain and I still passionately believe that the United Kingdom would be better off within the European Union.

It is my expressed hope that in my lifetime the UK will rejoin however I don't believe now is the right time to begin the campaign to rejoin. A period of national healing is needed and I fear that reopening the debate now will only serve to divide people further.

I believe it would be in residents' and the Council's best interest for the Government to seek an extension to the transition period so we can retain the status quo for a while and focus on tackling the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Council has a Brexit risk register that we keep updated to try and evaluate what the potential threats to the Council are arising from the uncertainty around Brexit. I will ask for officers to share this with you.

As always seems to be the case with Brexit the uncertainty caused by the Government's flip-flopping makes it very hard to know what to plan for.

I'm confident though that thanks to Cllr Evemy and Jenny Poole's financial prudence in seeking to rebuild the Council's finances we have the financial resilience to weather a 'no deal' Brexit.

(END)