

**(6) MEMBER QUESTIONS**

Council Procedure Rule 11 - Not more than fifteen minutes allowed for written questions to be put by Members on any matter in relation to which the Council has any power or duties or which affects the District.

Questions have been submitted, and responses provided, as follows:-

(1) From Councillor Lee Searles to Councillor Lynden Stowe, Leader of the Council

'You will no doubt recall that I proposed a motion last October calling for parishes in the Cotswolds villages that wanted some small scale developments to be able to take them as part of the evolving Local Plan. You and your Cabinet unanimously rejected this idea. Are you still of the same view?'

Response from Councillor Stowe

'I can do no better than refer you to the e-mail sent to all Members on behalf of Councillor Nick Parsons, Cabinet Member for Forward Planning, on 11<sup>th</sup> February 2014. However, as the e-mail is not available in the public domain, I have reproduced it below:-

*Dear Members,*

*I hope that you will have seen the note sent out last week reporting on the conclusion of the consultation on the Preferred Development Strategy. I have been asked by a number of you to explain the position with the more rural settlements which are not included in the Strategy as being suitable locations for development.*

*Early on in the Core Strategy consultation process it was agreed that the Development Strategy should only identify settlements for development where a minimum of 40 new dwellings could be shown as achievable over the plan period. Settlements with the capacity for 39 or less will not be included in the Local Plan as being identified for planned development. This does not mean that they will be excluded from further development possibilities.*

*The NPPF allows for small-scale development in rural settlements to meet specific housing needs and within the new Local Plan the route for the smaller rural settlements will be through general, criteria based, policies designed to meet identified housing need where there is community support. This is the most appropriate route for delivering rural housing as it builds in the greatest level of flexibility and does not require the allocation of sites to achieve delivery. However, we must be careful as we cannot 'reserve' such policies to ourselves or the Parish Councils. Once adopted, a policy is available for all to exploit.*

*The Preferred Development Strategy has been based upon a substantial body of evidence, which has been made publicly available throughout the Core Strategy/ Local Plan process. We have looked at a number of distribution options, including one for dispersing development to rural settlements throughout the District. The*

*evidence has led us to focus on those that we have assessed to be the most sustainable settlements and therefore in line with the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in the NPPF. In December 2013, Cabinet endorsed the thrust of the Preferred Development Strategy in the light of representations received from the consultation, along with the latest SHLAA findings. Prior to that, Cabinet had considered, but not accepted, a Motion which had suggested that housing sites be allocated to all communities who desired them. There would be no sense in basing the Development Strategy on this less sustainable approach, particularly as mechanisms exist to deliver rural housing in any event.*

*The evidence compiled to date strongly indicates that a dispersal strategy is neither a sustainable nor a practical option. It is unlikely that we could convince the Inspector at examination that it would be deliverable and so it would be likely to fail the tests of soundness.*

*When the current community based site allocation work has been completed in April, it will be possible for smaller rural settlements to be provided with the site assessment tool-kits to evaluate potential sites which could be promoted to meet identified housing need.*

*Please let me know if you have any questions.*

I will ask Councillor Parsons to respond to any supplementary question that you may have.'

(2) From Councillor DJ Nash to Councillor Lynden Stowe, Leader of the Council

'Some parishes around the Cotswolds are actively seeking small scale housing developments to encourage local people to stay near their friends and families. I see this as a positive way of helping the district's shortfall in housing. A number of Conservative Councillors have now expressed the same view and are asking why your Council is not being flexible over this. What is your view?'

Response from Councillor Stowe

'I would refer Councillor Nash to my previous response to Councillor Searles.'

(3) From Councillor PR Hodgkinson to Councillor Lynden Stowe, Leader of the Council

'Following the latest actuarial 3 year review of Gloucestershire's Local Government Pension Fund which took place on 31 March 2013, can you please confirm the deficit figure for the Cotswold District Council element (as £ and as a % of assets)?'

Response from Councillor Stowe

'The Cotswold District Council share of the Gloucestershire Local Government Pension Fund deficit amounts to £25.5m and comprises liabilities of £73.3m compared to assets of £47.8m. Overall, the

*actuary has stated that this Council's share of pension fund is funded to the level of 65%.*

*When comparing the results of the Gloucestershire Fund with the other LGPS funds supported by Hymans Robertson, the investment returns are above average at 27%. The fact that the overall funding level has remained constant compares well with the other Funds, where some have seen a reduction in funding of up to 5%. Also, the Gloucestershire Fund's common contribution rate increase is in line with the average for the other Funds. The actuary is content that there is a suitable plan in place to ensure the Council's pension obligations will be met now and in the longer term.'*

(4) From Councillor GM Selwyn to Councillor Lynden Stowe, Leader of the Council

'I have asked on a number of previous occasions when the recording of all meetings of this Council will be open to recording by any member of the public. The Government published guidelines last summer requiring local councils to allow recordings of meetings in the interests of transparency. Gloucestershire County Council has changed its constitution to reflect what is required. Why is this Council not adhering to what is required and when will it change its constitution?'

Response from Councillor Stowe

'From memory, this is the fourth consecutive Council Meeting that a question has been posed on this subject and, largely speaking, I would draw your attention to the responses given at those previous Meetings.

The only significant development since the last Council Meeting saw the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 receiving Royal Assent on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2014. While this Act largely relates to the abolition of the Audit Commission and subsequent audit requirements, it does also make provision about access to meetings and documents of local government bodies. As part of this, the Secretary of State is to be given the power to make regulations allowing the audio/visual recording of local authority meetings and specifying any conditions and/or 'rules' in so doing. However, the relevant section does not come into force until 30<sup>th</sup> March 2014, following which the normal regulation-making process would need to be followed.

In short, we already have a process in place that is in line not only with the spirit of the Secretary of State's previous comments on this matter, but also the most recent legislation. We will await any Regulations and guidance, and then take any necessary action.

I would also suggest that you are trying the patience of our Officers, given that our Constitution provides that a question may be rejected if it is substantially the same as a question which has been put at a meeting of the Council, Cabinet or Committee in the previous six months.'

(5) From Councillor Ms JM Layton to Councillor David Fowles, Cabinet Member for Environment

'Could Councillor Fowles elucidate on what short and long term actions CDC, GCC, the Environment Agency and Thames Water have agreed on in order to prevent further winters of fluvial and sewage flooding in the District? I also ask if there has been any consideration as to the value of working with other Councils and agencies to try and manage the movement of water through the Cotswolds?'

Response from Councillor Fowles

'Residents in Cotswold District have been affected by flooding as a result of the significant adverse weather events that have been experienced during the winter 2013/14. The Council became aware of flooding affecting properties on 24 December 2013. The flooding situation became significantly worse on 4 January 2014, when water inundation of the sewers in Cirencester and South Cerney caused sewer surcharges and difficulties in residents being able to use bathroom facilities.

The situation appeared to improve towards the end of January but became worse again over the weekend of the 8 & 9 February 2014.

A significant amount of external flooding has occurred across the district as a result of:

- rising river levels;
- rising groundwater;
- infiltration of groundwater and surface water into the main sewer system.

There has been a multi-agency response to these incidents, CDC led, through the Gloucestershire Local Resilience Forum (LRF).

The recovery actions required from the relevant agencies need to be managed through the recovery process. At present, the detail around how this process will be managed across the county is being developed through the Gloucestershire LRF and a Strategic Flood Recovery Group will be established.

In addition, and following the recent Gloucestershire County Council Scrutiny meeting in response to the flooding episodes in 2012/2013, a Cotswold Flood Action Group is being set up - this is a multi-agency group with invited Councillor representation. The issues faced during January and February 2014 are very similar to those of 2012/13, and these will be discussed at the Cotswold Flood Action Group's first meeting in March.

The flooding and sewage problems are complex, and this multi-agency approach is essential to achieving solutions.'

- (6) From Councillor JA Harris to Councillor BD Gibbs, Cabinet Member for Customer Services

'It's great to see work being undertaken on the Forum car park to try and improve the service for users. Disabled parking spaces are in short supply in Cirencester. How have CDC consulted with local disability groups to make sure disabled drivers aren't put at a disadvantage in Cotswold car parks?'

Response from Councillor Gibbs

'We have had a very useful and informative meeting with the Access Group in Cirencester and, consequently, a revision to the original proposed layout of the Forum Car Park will be pursued, which includes increasing the number of DDA compliant bays and replacing the steps with a ramp. Our discussions also involved general parking in Cirencester for the disabled.'

- (7) From Councillor JA Harris to Councillor BD Gibbs, Cabinet Member for Customer Services

'My constituents in Park and Watermoor Wards have formed a group trying to improve on-street parking in their areas. How are CDC, through the Cirencester Parking Partnership, helping to resolve the problem of on-street parking in the town?'

Response from Councillor Gibbs

'As you are aware, Gloucestershire Highways hold the remit for on-street parking and are currently working on proposals as part of the Cirencester Parking Partnership, of which Cirencester Town Council are both members and consultees. When these proposals are complete and agreed, we will have a better idea of how the on-street parking problems can be solved.'

For many years, we have offered an off-peak permit, costing just £36 p.a., which enables Park and Watermoor residents to use CDC car parks from 4.00 p.m. to 10.00 a.m. the following day, including overnight and Sunday at the Brewery Car Park. This was intended to help residents who found parking spaces in their streets taken up by non-residents.'

- (8) From Councillor Mrs JL Hincks to Councillor BD Gibbs, Cabinet Member for Customer Services

'Why was a turnstile installed at the Leisure Centre in Cirencester and at no other venue after the transfer to SLM? Can Cllr. Gibbs state what impact there has been since SLM took over responsibility of the Leisure Centre on the businesses currently under lease to CDC at the venue?'

Response from Councillor Gibbs

'Because the Bourton and Chipping Campden leisure centres are dual-use, on school sites, with school students using the gym and swimming pool, it was not practical to install turnstiles. They are, however, used at Stroud, which is the nearest SLM centre to Cirencester, and in many of the larger leisure centres.

As far as the businesses are concerned, we have no access to their accounts, so are not able to make any comment about whether their business has increased or declined. However, we do know that there has been an increased footfall through the leisure centre in Cirencester since SLM has operated the contract.'

Note:

The above questions were submitted by the time by responses are guaranteed to be provided to the questioner at least 24 hours before the Council Meeting (by virtue of the Council's Procedure Rules). As such, written responses will be provided to all Members either in advance of, or at, the Council Meeting.

(END)