

(5) PUBLIC QUESTIONS

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

(1) From Mr P Moylan of Cirencester to Councillor Tony Berry, Leader of the Council

'In 2017, Park Community Group organised a panel debate about the local plan. This was an open meeting and was attended by hundreds of local people. CDC were represented on the panel by Christine Gore, Strategic Director. Everyone agreed that the debate was helpful and worthwhile.

With the local elections coming up in May, we would like to suggest that the council, specifically the Leader and selected prospective candidates including the opposition, take part in something similar, thereby encouraging public engagement and demonstrating a laudable democratic intent. Would the council please undertake to discuss this with Park Community Group?'

Response from Councillor Berry

I do not believe that it is right or proper for the Council to be involved with any 'hustings' that might be held in connection with the upcoming elections - it is vital for the Council, through its Returning Officer and his team, to be strictly neutral and impartial in seeking to deliver effective and well-run elections in which all those involved can be confident.

For my part, I would not be averse in principle to participate in such an event, but I would require more detail along with an assurance that similar opportunities would be afforded to any political party or, indeed, independent candidates that put themselves forward for election.

(2) From Mr P Moylan of Cirencester to Councillor Mark MacKenzie-Charrington, Cabinet Member for Planning and Licensing Services and Cirencester Car Parking Project

'The original deadline for the Chesterton S106 agreements was 10th July 2018. The council has granted several extensions to this deadline; and it is now eight months' late. The public have not been informed and have been kept in the dark about this delay. Can the council tell us what aspects are causing this protracted delay? In answering, can the council let us know the situation regarding the Health Centre negotiations?'

Response from Councillor MacKenzie-Charrington

The S106 negotiations are near completion with progress being made daily. The majority of the Schedules within the agreements have been agreed subject to the specific legal wording. The Primary Healthcare Schedule has been agreed. Positive discussions continue between BDL and the Phoenix Surgery for delivery on-site.

More generally, notwithstanding the fact that a 'completion date' had been identified in the original Council decision, that decision also clearly recognised that an extended period for finalising the legal agreements might be likely. This is not unusual for a complex large-scale development.

Progress has been regularly monitored by the Case Officer, and the determination period for the application has remained under continual review, with the Council responding to requests for extensions of time in a proportionate manner and on the merits of doing so at the time. The relevant correspondence is available on the planning portal.

(3) From Ms M Cobbett of Cirencester to Councillor Tony Berry, Leader of the Council

'CDC's Corporate Strategy Document 2016-19 states that Cotswold District Council wants to be recognised as the most efficient Council in the country.

Its Priorities are to:

- Provide high quality services at the lowest possible cost to Council Taxpayers;
- Protect and enhance the local environment whilst supporting economic growth;
- Champion issues which are important to local people.

That third Priority includes the following statement:

'We aim to improve people's quality of life by finding ways of maintaining and supporting the infrastructure, services and facilities that communities need.'

I support these priorities and as is appropriate to ensure they are met, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee established indicators to measure the council's performance.

These are laudable and CDC has shown great success in meeting their targets.

I would ask the Council members though whether it is not important to monitor the Council's performance against their stated aim, to improve people's quality of life, using indicators set by an outside independent statutory body.

The Government's Social Mobility Commission is one such body. As I am sure members are aware in the State of the Nation Report 2017 Cotswold was ranked 322 out of 324 local authorities in terms of youth 19-25 year olds social mobility. Essentially, this report is saying if you are born in poverty in the Cotswolds, you as a young person are likely to stay there.

We as residents, and you as our elected representatives, cannot let this situation continue. This Commission's report for this year is about to be released and when it is, will the Council commit to reviewing our performance again, develop strategies to support our young people and set indicators to monitor progress?'

Response from Councillor Berry

In short, yes.

We are committed to working alongside our public sector colleagues to address the root causes impacting on social mobility in our District and our County. We recognise this needs a multi-agency approach, and a county-wide social mobility

group has been established to develop a deeper and proper understanding of the root causes, and to take forward some actions which will positively impact on social mobility, for the long term.

Work is underway to ensure that we have a bank of evidenced data across a wide range of issues that impact on the District and its communities to help inform the Council's Corporate Strategy for 2019-2023 and there is recognition that the performance framework that will sit alongside this Strategy should include indicators from other bodies too.

This will reflect that there is a collective responsibility to make the Cotswold District an even better place; and social mobility is a prime example of this shared accountability.

Whilst we absolutely recognise the need to improve social mobility, we should not forget that this is just one factor in determining the 'quality of life' for our residents and there are many other components that are important to people. The Halifax Bank have been tracking a broad basket of indicators over many years - not just picking on one particular aspect. In their latest release of results for 2019, Cotswold District ranked as the seventh best place to live in the UK (up from 43rd place in 2017) and the best place in the entire South West region.

We should celebrate all that is good about living within Cotswold District whilst also recognising that there are always areas of improvement.

(4) From Ms C Bloomer of Cirencester to Councillor Tony Berry, Leader of the Council

'At this Council meeting last year the then Leader told me that "the Council would continue to work with town councils, Gloucestershire County Council and all other interested bodies to explore opportunities for the provision and/or improvement of bus services.'

What work has this Council done to improve bus services over the last year?'

Response from Councillor Berry

Public transport provision represents a difficult challenge for local authorities - both operationally and financially - especially in rural areas but even in urban ones.

Responsibility for the provision of bus services is vested in the County Council. The main way in which we as a District Council can influence matters is through our adopted Local Plan, and securing developer contributions towards provision, where appropriate, in the approval of applications. Local Plan Policy INF3, which supports development that assists the delivery of the County Council's Local Transport Plan, enables the Council to guide development to those locations that actively support travel choices through the enhancement and promotion of safe and recognisable connections to existing walking, cycling and public transport networks.

By way of an example of this - within the S106 agreement with the County Council relating to the development of the Chesterton strategic site, the developer is required to make a contribution of £1,836,912 towards public transport.

Insofar as Cirencester is concerned, the Town Centre Master Plan seeks to help realise the ambitions of the Local Plan. This will provide a forum and mechanism to look at the town holistically and across a wide range of issues, including traffic and public transport - indeed, opportunities for a purpose-built public transport hub/interchange in the Southway - Forum area have already been identified in the adopted Local Plan (Policy S3). The Master Plan work is a partnership venture with the Town Council, which could also benefit from the work being undertaken on the Cirencester Futures initiative. Details are available at www.cirencesterfutures.org.uk

More generally, the Council will seek to respond to any diminution of current services and, with others, explore opportunities for the provision and/or improvement of bus services.

(5) From Mr G Selwyn of Cirencester to Councillor Tony Berry, Leader of the Council

'There are local elections this May. What steps are the Council taking to encourage full-time employed people to consider standing at these elections?'

Does the Council recognise that this meeting, and all other meetings of this Council, are scheduled during the working day? Many excellent potential Councillors need to work full time, and would be unable to consider standing.

Has the Council considered changing the times of meetings to enable working people to play a role in helping their communities?'

Response from Councillor Berry

As I have previously stated, I believe it is important that the Council is not seen to be seeking to influence the democratic election process. As such, while I consider it vital that we make it easy for people who want to stand for election to find out how to get involved, what the rules are, and what they have to do to comply with those rules, I do not believe that, as a Council, we should seek to influence the profile of candidates.

I know that the Council, through its returning Officer and Elections Team, will make available a wide range of information, via different channels, and also to hold events for prospective councillors.

In an ideal world, local communities would be represented by a diverse pool of councillors - quality individuals who are capable, vibrant, energetic and engaged, and with a commitment to local people.

It should also be remembered that what might be a barrier to one prospective candidate actually helps another, including the issue you have raised.

There is nothing in our Constitution that dictates the timing of any of our meetings. This enables the greatest flexibility and also allows each committee etc. to determine its own start times, based on a number of factors including the specific needs of its membership as well as operational issues. This is also true of Council Meetings.

In summary, I think it would not be appropriate for the 'old' council to try to dictate to the 'new' and believe that the existing approach provides the greatest flexibility for all.

(6) From Ms L Spivey of Preston to Councillor Stephen Hirst, Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Leisure

'I have been hearing a lot about local crime in the villages near me - Ampney Crucis, Poulton, Down Ampney - and would like to know what Cotswold District Council are doing to help the Police in tackling rural crime in the Cotswolds?'

Response from Councillor Hirst

Cotswold District Council, along with other partners including the Police, is part of the Cotswold Community Safety Partnership which aims to reduce crime, anti-social behaviour and the fear of crime. The partnership's work is action-led and the sharing of resources supports a joined-up approach to tackling rural crime.

Gloucestershire Police has dedicated rural beat officers throughout the County and the Council provides support in running joint operations, for example roadside checks for detecting fly-tipping and waste carrier licence offences.

The Police team comprises four Rural Crime Officers, one in each rural policing area, supported by 23 Rural and Environmental Crime Officers (RECLOs) and volunteers. Their role is to prevent, detect and investigate incidents of rural and wildlife crime and they will be working with members of the community and partner agencies.

The Council's Community Safety Officer and Environmental Wardens attend regular meetings with Gloucestershire Police to discuss rural crime, cross boarder crime and how best it can be reduced by working together in partnership.

Whilst there may occasionally be spikes in criminal activity, we should rest assured that Cotswold's police reported crime rates are the second lowest in the county, based on 2017/18 data; and The Ampneys & Hampton Ward has one of the lowest rates of crime in the district.

(7) From Mrs N Ind of Tetbury to Councillor Stephen Hirst, Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Leisure

'How are Cotswold District Council going to assist communities in providing Day Centre facilities for the elderly, to help combat loneliness?'

Is there any support available towards counselling/mentoring for our young people within the District, to improve their mental health?'

Response from Councillor Hirst

The provision of day centre facilities is outside of this Council's remit. We do however provide some funding to organisations that provide community services for older people and organisations who recruit older people as volunteers to support others.

This Council recognises the pressures in Gloucestershire County Council's social care system and sees its impact on residents in the locality. We are committed to working with partners and communities themselves to find sustainable and local means to support older people.

Through youth activities funding, many small groups and organisations have been supported and have provided support for young people in terms of mentoring. It is not likely that the Council will fund counselling as such - but is more likely to help with less formal support opportunities. The Council made funding of approximately £40,000 available in 2018/19 specifically for young people, and we are committed to continue to support youth activities.

(8) From Mr C Webster of Moreton-in-Marsh to Councillor Tony Berry, Leader of the Council

'ANPR cameras reduce dangerous speeding through towns and villages, as has been proven in Rodborough and Whiteshill (Stroud District). Moreton-in-Marsh Town Council is currently considering funding for up to two cameras, while Bourton-on-the-Water Parish Council will be installing a unit soon.

However, while Gloucestershire Constabulary is overwhelmingly supportive of ANPR cameras, it offers no funding for the £9k capital cost and £1k/year operating cost. Gloucestershire Highways offers 50% match-funding for the capital cost only. This could still make the system unaffordable for smaller parishes that nonetheless suffer excessive and hazardous speeding. For example, 24 speeders were caught in Bourton-on-the-Hill last month according to the latest Police figures, with speeds of up to 48mph in a 30mph zone.

Would Cotswold District Council therefore consider full or partial funding for ANPR cameras in smaller parishes, with the aim of not only making village through-roads safer, but placing ANPR cameras in locations of strategic value?'

Response from Councillor Berry

The Council recognises the need to improve road safety on our District's roads, of which speeding is a significant factor. Whilst the Council cannot commit to any ongoing operating costs, I will refer the request for support towards the capital cost to the Community Safety Partnership. Given the costs involved and the mobile nature of ANPR technology, I will suggest one or two units be considered, to be shared across the District, as opposed to a per parish basis.

It is pleasing to see community interest in this important issue and this practical guide to improving road safety in Gloucestershire has some excellent ideas to consider, all designed to influence driver behaviour and contribute to a reduction in speeding on our roads:-

<http://www.grcc.org.uk/downloads/community-assets-and-services/2017.08-grcc-cars-toolkit-2017.pdf>

Another option you may wish to consider is a Community Speed Watch group, which I understand have proved successful in other parishes, and are much cheaper and involve local participation.

(9) From Mr D Bowie of Upper Rissington to Councillor Mark MacKenzie-Charrington, Cabinet Member for Planning and Licensing Services and Cirencester Car Parking Project

'What additional budget/resource for 2019/20 have you included in the planning and enforcement team to deal with the contamination issues that have been discovered at the Upper Rissington and Bourton-on-the-Water housing sites and may be evident elsewhere in the District Council's area?'

Response from Councillor MacKenzie-Charrington

Managers within the Planning & Enforcement Team and within Environmental & Regulatory Services monitor and review resources and workloads within the teams to ensure that the Council is able to deliver good quality services to our communities. Currently, the teams are appropriately resourced to handle any matters associated with the Council's responsibilities for contaminated land investigation, remediation and planning enforcement; and there is therefore no need to allocate additional budget or resources to the services. This has been helped by a budget proposal to make permanent a previously temporary planning enforcement post. We will of course keep the situation under review and respond if appropriate.

Notes:

- (i) Questions (1) - (8) above 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.
- (ii) If the questioners are present at the Meeting, they will be entitled to ask one supplementary question arising directly out of either the answer given or their original question.
- (iii) The Member to whom any supplementary question is addressed will try and answer any supplementary question at the Meeting; but if this is not possible, then the Members will answer as much as possible at the Meeting and then provide a full response within five working days. If, for any reason, a full response cannot be provided within those five days, then a holding response will be sent to the questioner, along with the reason for delay and a likely timescale for the full response.
- (iv) Whilst Question (9) above was submitted after the deadline by which a response could be guaranteed to be provided either in advance of, or at, the Meeting, this has been achieved; and a copy of the response has been sent to the questioner.

(END)