

**(6) MEMBER QUESTIONS**

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

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

*'How can Cotswold District Council help Tetbury and improve their relationship with residents, who currently feel let down with the lack of infrastructure – loss of Leisure Facilities, inadequate Elderly Care and Youth Services, a dated GP Surgery and limited Public Transport – given that Tetbury is the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest town in the District, which has recently seen housing stock grow by 7% (April 2019 Completions) with a further 4% (April 19 Commitments) – 11% in total since the last Census in 2011.'*

Response from Councillor Joe Harris

'Tetbury is a hugely important part of our district.

I know many feel let down by the District Council over the past decade or so.

A failure to implement a local plan on time and the time it took to secure a 5 year housing land supply meant that for years the town was at the mercy of predatory developers. This resulted in rapid growth in the town and often without the necessary infrastructure to support development.

I'd like to congratulate Tetbury Town Council on successfully adopting a neighbourhood development plan meaning the Town Council will receive 25% of all community infrastructure levy (CIL) receipts collected in the area for any developments permitted since the adoption of CIL in June this year. The Town Council will be free to invest this money in the infrastructure of their choosing and I will ensure that District Council officers are there to offer support and advice.

I believe that there was a reluctance amongst the previous leadership at this council to 'grasp the nettle' and proactively plan for the future of services such as the examples that you've identified. As a result communication and trust have broken down.

A new administration here at Cotswold District Council is an opportunity for a reset so we can rebuild trust between the District Council and the community in Tetbury.

I really enjoyed meeting with you at the Tetbury Town Council offices recently in your position as Mayor and enjoyed speaking to town councillors and listening to their concerns on Monday.

Continuing this conversation is crucial and Councillor Mark Harris in his role as Cabinet Member for Town and Parish Councils will ensure that this happens. I will ask that he plans a date to come and meet with you and fellow town councillors.

The work that Cllr Jenny Forde has started on a Health and Wellbeing strategy will also be important in setting out what we as a District Council can do for Tetbury and I'll ask her do the same.

So to summarise I see the way forward as establishing a good working relationship between the political leadership of the District Council and Tetbury Town Councillors, then identifying what resident needs, wants and aspirations for Tetbury are and finally planning how we can support Tetbury to deliver these improvements, either directly or through working with the appropriate organisations.'

(2) Question from Councillor Tony Berry to Councillor Rachel Coxcoon, Cabinet Member for Planning Policy, Climate Change and Energy

*'At the Council Meeting on the 3<sup>rd</sup> July, we agreed that my motion to assess the viability of placing PV Solar panels on our Trinity Road building be deferred into an overall 'Climate Change Plan' which would shortly be forthcoming. Nearly 3 months on the approval to recruit a 'Climate Change Manager' has only just been agreed by Cabinet and since it can take up to 6 months to get someone on board should we not take action now given that this is a Council 'emergency'? Moving to solar power is something of a 'no-brainer' as far as climate change is concerned; does Cllr. Coxcoon not think that we should bring this motion forward now?'*

Response from Councillor Coxcoon

'Funding for appointment of a Strategic Climate Change Manager is the subject of a report on this agenda together with funding for consultants to carry out the necessary review to identify projects and changes required to support carbon reduction of the Councils own operations, services and estate.

A high level action plan is being worked up, by officers with experience from across the Council's services, in parallel to this additional request for resources.

The funding requested for consultant support, together with the action plan means that this work will begin immediately and does not have to wait until the new officer is in post.

However, it is essential that a full review of all the Council's properties is carried out, and this work will include a review of the Trinity Road property. The review will enable an energy action plan for the building to be created as a whole, rather than a review of solar PV considered entirely in isolation. It is important for the Council to ensure that we fully understand the balance of on-site consumption vs generation and energy storage, which will of course alter if the buildings become more energy efficient.

In recognition of the desire from members to see progress on our own buildings, we have already sought and received an outline specification showing the maximum generation potential of the Trinity Road buildings (144 kWp) and are meeting with a sustainability consultant to discuss this on the 30th of September. In addition, we have already taken advice from the planning team and conservation team on a proposed layout, to guide us on how the design may have to be altered to be acceptable in planning terms.

This will allow us to progress quickly through planning considerations once the full building review is complete.

Finally, we are also awaiting further advice on potential community financing structures, such as a community share offer, to pay for any PV systems on the roof. This would allow the Council to secure extra finance and create opportunities for genuine community involvement in such a project. For illustrative purposes, the likely cost of a PV system on the Trinity Road buildings is £150-£160k, and this is within the scale of similar projects financed, either wholly or partly, by community share offers in other parts of England.'

(3) Question from Councillor Stephen Andrews to Councillor Mike Evemy, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance

*'The government's transparency programme aims to hold public bodies to account in order to deliver better value for money in public spending. As part of the programme, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government instructed all local Councils to publish details of all their supplier spending over £500 on a monthly basis, no later than 30 days after the month end.*

*In the interests of transparency and since August 2012 the previous Conservative administration had published details of all payments, not only those of £500 or more.*

*As at the date of submission of this question (13th September, 2019) the Liberal Democrat administration at CDC has failed to publish any details of expenditure whatsoever, as required, since they came to power in May.*

*Nothing has been published for May, June, July or August, 2019.*

*What are the Cotswolds Liberal Democrats trying to hide from us and the taxpayers of the Cotswolds?'*

Response from Councillor Evemy

'Thank you for bringing this to my attention. I apologise to members of the Council and any members of the public that this information was not published within 30 days of each month end as required. The information had been prepared for publication, but was awaiting a check to ensure no personal data was published. On receipt of your question, officers were made aware of this omission and the information was published within two hours.

The Chief Finance Officer and I have met to discuss this and have agreed a new process to ensure that this information is published on time in future.

Our Liberal Democrat administration is committed to transparency with members and the public, working with officers to rebuild the Council's reputation as a listening and responsive organisation.'

(4) Question from Councillor Richard Morgan to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council

*At the last full council meeting on 3 July 2019, Cotswold District Council (unanimously) passed a motion regarding the Valley Trading planning application in my ward (Grumbolds Ash with Avening).*

*The motion resolved Cotswold District Council would:*

- 1. Seek clarification as to whether the Valley Trading application is in direct conflict with the Tetbury and Tetbury & Upton Neighbourhood plans, and if it is, write to GCC questioning why the application has not been rejected on these grounds.*
- 2. Write to GCC seeking confirmation that, should the applicant be approved, the Valley Trading plant would be defined as a "major development" and of "strategic scale" by their own Waste Core Strategy and should therefore be located in Zone C (and it is not appropriate for its current location).*
- 3. Write to GCC and confirm Policy GWCS14 states that major development in AONB must be in the "proven public interest" and planning permission only granted in exceptional circumstances following the "most rigorous" examination. Furthermore the letter should state that CDC does not feel this application is currently being subjected to the "most rigorous" examination.*
- 4. Write to GCC and ask for a fully independent survey to be conducted over multiple random days to ascertain the exact level of HGV movements along the A4135 and how many of these movements are Valley Trading vehicles. Once the survey has taken place, these results should be made public".*

*As I have not heard anything about this motion since 3 July 2019, could the Leader of the Council confirm these points have been actioned. In addition, would he be willing to give me a copy of the outgoing letters, and any replies CDC have received?*

#### Response from Councillor Joe Harris

‘Further to your request for additional information regarding the resolution made by Council regarding the Valley Trading planning application submitted to GCC I understand that Nigel Adams has provided you with the detailed information required to answer the points raised.

However for clarity and in answer to your specific points:

- 1. Seek clarification as to whether the Valley Trading application is in direct conflict with the Tetbury and Tetbury & Upton Neighbourhood plans, and if it is, write to GCC questioning why the application has not been rejected on these grounds.**

Officers did write to GCC as per the motion. The application will have to be determined on the basis of the policies of the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise, but this is a matter for GCC as decision maker.

- 2. Write to GCC seeking confirmation that, should the applicant be approved, the Valley Trading plant would be defined as a "major development" and of "strategic scale" by their own Waste Core Strategy and should therefore be located in Zone C (and it is not appropriate for its current location).**

The application is considered to be a "major" proposal.

**3. Write to GCC and confirm Policy GWCS14 states that major development in AONB must be in the "proven public interest" and planning permission only granted in exceptional circumstances following the "most rigorous" examination. Furthermore the letter should state that CDC does not feel this application is currently being subjected to the "most rigorous" examination.**

As advised above the decision making context is set out in law and must be followed if any subsequent decision is not to be liable to potential challenge.

**4. Write to GCC and ask for a fully independent survey to be conducted over multiple random days to ascertain the exact level of HGV movements along the A4135 and how many of these movements are Valley Trading vehicles. Once the survey has taken place, these results should be made public".**

The concerns regarding traffic impact appear to be shared by Gloucestershire County Council in that it is understood that they have requested (but not yet received) the submission of a Transport Assessment by the applicant. Following submission, they anticipate a further period of consultation on the submitted document. The application has therefore not moved on in any sense whilst awaiting that essential document. The deadline for reports is 6 weeks prior to their Committee Date. I am therefore informed that it is unlikely that the proposal will make even the November Committee.'

(5) Question from Councillor Richard Morgan to Councillor Mike Evemy, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Finance

*Could Cllr Evemy please confirm the exact level of financial reserves, and the approximate level of investments available to CDC at the end of the 2018-19 fiscal year, and if there was a financial overspend or underspend for this financial year.*

*Furthermore, could he clarify if the council has overspent or underspent against budget forecasts at the end of Q1 in the current financial year (2019-20).*

*Finally, could he confirm that the new Lib Dem administration are aware that longer term central government funding is under review and income to the council could (hypothetically) be reduced in 2021/22 leaving a financial shortfall in the event of particularly severe changes to local government funding? Can he confirm that the CDC MTFs report from February 2019 - 14.13 Section 10 states "The Council has sufficient revenue reserves to be able to develop contingency plans while the impact of changes to central government funding post 2020/21 becomes clearer".*

Response from Councillor Evemy

'The Council's audited Statement of Accounts is due to be considered by the Audit Committee tomorrow (26 September). As set out in those Statements, at the end of the 2018/19 financial year, the Council held the following balances in financial reserves:

· General Fund Balance	£4,910,148
· Revenue Earmarked Reserves	£8,308,575
· Capital Receipts	£14,611,756
· Capital Grants	£59,749

These balances are as at 31 March 2019 and do not reflect funding commitments, approved by the previous Council, which will impact in later financial years. The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy is a forward looking document which is currently in the process of being updated.

As at 31 March 2019, the Council's investments were valued at £25.5 million. The investment portfolio reflects the cash which the Council holds, both for its own operational purposes and as a result of being the collection agency for Council Tax and Business Rates. Cash is therefore held on behalf of others such as central government, Gloucestershire County Council, Gloucestershire Police and Crime Commissioner and Town and Parish Councils and should not be confused with useable reserves (set out in the bullet points above) which are available for the Council to use to fund activities which support its priorities.

The Council set a budget for 2018/19 which included a contribution of £7,811 to the General Fund Balance. At the end of the year, the actual contribution to General Fund Balance was £9,172, reflecting an underspend against the budget of £1,361.

At the end of the first quarter of 2019/20, the Council reported an underspend against profiled budget of £8,697.

I can confirm that our administration is fully aware of the potential changes to central government funding in 2021/22 and we are working with the Chief Finance Officer on an update of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. This will include our administration's plan for addressing the financial challenges we face whilst delivering our priorities.

Our plans will be subject to scrutiny through both the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and a full public consultation process before we agree our revenue and capital budgets when we meet on 26 February 2020.

Later on today's agenda in the debate on motion 7 'Council Finances' I will outline this administration's approach to the budget making process and how we intend to respond to the legacy of the financial decisions made by the previous Conservative administrations.'

(6) Question from Councillor Mark Annett to Councillor Andrew Doherty, Cabinet Member for Waste, Flooding and Environmental Health

*"Under Conservative leadership and in the interest of transparency, the full council twice debated changes to garden waste collections in December 2018 and February 2019.*

*At the February meeting the Conservative Group committed to a public consultation later this year to ask the people who pay for the service whether they wanted to continue with a weekly service or change to a fortnightly*

service.

*However, I read in a press release that the Liberal Democrat Cabinet has now decided to proceed with a fortnightly service without undertaking any public consultation whatsoever.*

*Whereas the Conservatives involved all members of the council in the decision-making process and planned to consult widely with the public, Cotswold Liberal Democrats decided to restrict debate to their 9 person Cabinet - more than half of whom weren't even CDC councillors a few months ago.*

*Am I right in assuming that Cotswold Liberal Democrats can't be bothered to listen to the views of the people of the Cotswolds who actually foot the bill for the service?*

*Is consultation and transparency now dead at CDC under the Liberal Democrats?"*

Response from Councillor Doherty

'No, it is not.

The question suggests some confusion about the original timing of the consultation and fortnightly service launch. The resolution is clear that consultation would happen after the launch of the fortnightly service. That resolution had cross-party support and seemed a reasonable attempt to assess resident's feelings on the fortnightly service once it was introduced. Nothing in the revised timetable changes that. Without some form of time-travel it seems difficult to get residents' feedback on a change that hasn't yet happened, but I'd be very open to any suggestions on how we might resolve that.'

(7) Question from Councillor Stephen Hirst to Councillor Lisa Spivey, Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness

*'It is important that the target for the completion of Affordable Homes is achieved.*

*For the past three years Cotswold District Council whilst under Conservative control have reached and exceeded their Affordable Homes target.*

*Can we please be advised of the projected total of Affordable Homes that will be completed during the 2019/2020 period and whether the annual target will be achieved?'*

Response from Councillor Spivey

'As the previous portfolio holder for Housing, I am sure that Cllr. Hirst is well aware that the target for delivery of affordable homes as set out in the Council's Housing Plan 2016-2020 is 150 per year and I am pleased to say that currently, we expect to exceed that target and deliver 154 affordable homes in the year 2019/2020.

The vast majority of affordable homes delivered in the District under the previous administration were as a result of S106 planning contributions on developer-led sites. The rate of delivery of affordable homes has been dependent therefore on the rate of delivery and sales of market homes. The previous Conservative administration did not have clear policies encouraging the delivery of affordable homes. The delivery of affordable homes was by default rather than by design.

As developments take a number years from planning consent to completion, the higher rate of delivery seen over the last 3 years, in contrast to previous years, is largely as a result of speculative planning applications received when the Council did not have an adequate 5 year land supply or an adopted Local Plan. This failure to implement a Local Plan meant that for years the District was at the mercy of predatory developers. The Conservatives may have been the party nominally in charge of the Council, but they were certainly not in charge of the number of homes built in the District, both affordable and market. A failure which has seen some of our towns, notably Moreton and Tetbury, grow rapidly without the proper infrastructure in place to support development.

Approximately 270 of the affordable homes delivered over the past 3 years were not planned, but on sites where the Council had refused planning consent and subsequently lost on appeal. Without these, the Council would not have met its target in 2016/17 when 117 of the 262 affordable units completed were on appeal sites.

This administration has made it clear, through its manifesto and its emerging corporate strategy that it is committed to the direct delivery of social rented homes to the residents of this District.'

(8) Question from Councillor Stephen Hirst to Councillor Rachel Coxcoon, Cabinet Member for Planning Policy, Climate Change and Energy

*'Already our Market Towns are bulging at the seams with estates of new homes. There is a feeling that these towns have already achieved sufficient new homes for many years to come without parallel increases in school places and local infrastructure. Will the new administration take this situation into account when reviewing the existing local plan?'*

Response from Councillor Coxcoon

'I understand the concerns you raise and it highlights the importance of ensuring the Council has an up to date Local Plan that proactively meets the needs of the local community and businesses. As you will be aware, the lack of five year housing land supply and an out of date Local Plan (between 2011 to 2018) placed control into the hands of developers at the expense of local community aspirations and infrastructure.

This Council is committed to reviewing the Local Plan to ensure that we provide the community with a strong voice to direct development. The review will also empower the community to identify the type and scale of infrastructure that they believe is required in their towns and villages. The Community Infrastructure Levy, which went live in June 2019, also provides a new tool and source of funding to deliver much-needed infrastructure. Areas



that have a Neighbourhood Plan will receive 25% of the locally collected Levy (15% for areas without a Neighbourhood Plan) to spend on their infrastructure priorities.'

Notes:

(i) 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.

(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 Member 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.

(END)