

## Member Questions for Council – 27 November 2024

Question	Response
<p><b>Question 1 from Councillor Tom Stowe to Councillor Tristan Wilkinson, Cabinet Member for Economy and Environment</b></p> <p>In a recent press release CDC claimed that its economic growth strategy had created 500 new jobs in the district. Please could you quantify this claim and confirm where these jobs have been created?</p>	<p>Creating jobs and supporting the local economy is a priority of the Council's Liberal Democrat administration.</p> <p>The Council's Green Economic Growth Strategy was adopted in December 2020.</p> <p>It set out a vision to "nurture a dynamic, vibrant and balanced economy... growing high value, highly-skilled, low environmental impact businesses in our district."</p> <p>Unemployment in the district at that time stood at 1860 people.</p> <p>In October 2024 that number was 1015, so the figure of 500 jobs having been created is on the low side.</p> <p>Around 200 jobs have been created at ZeroAvia based at Cotswold Airport alone and businesses employing over 600 people are now using Watermoor Point in Cirencester.</p> <p>Further jobs have been created as a result of the Rural England Prosperity Business Grant-funded projects across the district.</p>

**Question 2 from Councillor Gina Blomefield to Councillor Juliet Layton, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning**

Cotswold District Council agreed in March 2024 to the implementation of the Second Homes Premium – doubling council tax for dwellings that are no one's sole or main residence.

How many properties are estimated to be second homes in the Cotswold District and what work is being carried out to identify these properties?

There are currently approximately 1,850 properties classified as second homes.

The guidance has recently been published detailing exemptions to the rules.

Revenues and Benefits Officers are working through the guidance with the Chief Finance Officer to ascertain where the Council wants to use its discretion and not apply a 100% premium in line with the decision of the Council on 20 March 2024.

The power to charge a premium on second homes comes into force on 1 April 2025.

<p><b>Question 3 from Councillor Tom Stowe to Councillor Mike Evely, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation</b></p> <p>Many measures recently announced in the Government's budget were devastating for Cotswold Businesses and Residents. What impact will the various measures, including for example, increases in employer NI, have on the CDC budget?</p>	<p>The Council is working with Ubico and Publica partners to assess the impact of the National Living Wage.</p> <p>There remains some uncertainty as to how local councils will be compensated for the increase in Employer National Insurance contributions starting in April 2025. The Government is expected to set out their proposed approach in the Local Government Finance Settlement in December.</p>
<p><b>Question 4 from Councillor Julia Judd to Councillor Tristan Wilkinson, Cabinet Member for the Economy and Environment</b></p> <p>As discussed at the last two Council Meetings, the revised waste collection service in Ermin Ward, implemented on 24 June has improved but continues to be erratic. Please could Ubico be invited to address this Council on this topic?</p>	<p>Senior Managers from Ubico attended the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 4 November together with the Contract Manager and Cllr Evely as the responsible Cabinet Member. You can view the meeting on our website at <a href="https://cotswold.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/919426">https://cotswold.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/919426</a></p>
<p><b>Question 5 from Councillor Tony Slater to Councillor Tristan Wilkinson, Cabinet Member for Economy and Environment</b></p>	<p>I am aware of the incident you refer to which highlighted the importance of leaving empty receptacles in a tidy way at the roadside. This is clearly a disturbing incident</p>

<p>Now that (hopefully) the worst of the missed collections associated with the new bin collection rounds have been resolved and the crews are less rushed, we must now focus on the quality of delivery.</p> <p>I am receiving many complaints about emptied bins and bags being carelessly discarded in piles or even just left on the road, rather than being returned to their original position. I am also aware of a Cotswold resident sustaining severe injuries caused by tripping on recycling bags discarded on the road.</p> <p>The current slap-dash approach not only leaves the council open to compensation claims but also undermines our commitment to fostering "pride in place," often leaving the street scene in a state of disarray.</p> <p>What measures are in place and what training is being given to ensure the bin crews leave empty bins and bags in a safe and tidy position?</p>	<p>and Cllr Every made both the Contract Manager and myself aware of it so we could follow it up with UBICO.</p> <p>We are currently developing the online system to allow residents to report poor container returns which will go directly to the crew in question. This is part of an end-to-end review of how our residents interact with the service. We anticipate the improved functionality for customers to go live in January 2025.</p> <p>In addition, visual crew checks are regularly undertaken by contractor and council staff to ensure a good quality of container returns and services generally.</p> <p>Where poor container returns are seen, crews are retrained as necessary.</p>
<p><b>Question 6 from Councillor Len Wilkins to Councillor Tristan Wilkinson, Economy and Environment</b></p>	<p>Cllr Every apologised several times for missed collections following the round re-organisation, most recently at Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 4 November.</p>

<p>Whilst waste is a statutory service for CDC to deliver, our green bin service is contractual between CDC and residents who opt for the service. In view of the recent problems with Green Bin collections, especially in rural areas, is CDC going to apologise to residents and offer either a repayment of part of their annual charge or a reduction in next year's charges?</p> <p>If the anticipated £500,000 annual savings from the reorganisation of rounds comes to fruition surely some token should be forthcoming.</p>	<p>A small number of properties received multiple delayed collections, but over 99% of garden waste collections following the change were made on the scheduled day.</p> <p>The green waste service fee residents pay is equivalent to £2.46 per collection and its value for money is evidenced by over 22,000 subscribers taking up the service.</p> <p>It would not be either viable or practical to provide a refund to garden waste customers whose collections were delayed.</p>
<p><b>Question 7 from Councillor Jeremy Theyer to Councillor Tristan Wilkinson, Economy and Environment</b></p> <p>Please could you confirm what happens to the cardboard that is collected kerbside by UBICO on behalf of CDC, what onward processing is carried out and where does it take place?</p>	<p>Cardboard is separately collected and taken to Thamesdown Recycling in Swindon. Cardboard will go to a reprocessing mill to be washed and pulped and turned into other cardboard products.</p> <p>All destinations and tonnages of materials can be found on <a href="http://www.wastedataflow.org">www.wastedataflow.org</a></p>
<p><b>Question 8 from Councillor Daryl Corps to Councillor Joe Harris, Leader of the Council</b></p> <p>We have all seen the new and extensive rebranding of Cotswold District Council.</p>	<p>To clarify, there has not been an extensive rebranding of Cotswold District Council.</p> <p>As part of the process to repatriate council staff and services from Publica back to the council, the council undertook a procurement exercise which resulted in commissioning a company called Whistlejacket to conduct a focused review of the</p>

From the redesigned Crest to the 'new look' social media campaigns being rolled out, new email signatures and stationery, new security cards and straps for members and staff, printed branded bags, notebooks and water flasks, the list goes on!

Please could you confirm all costs and officer time incurred so far with this exercise and whether any external companies or consultants were employed in any way to create the new rebrand?

council's brand. This "light touch" review primarily involved updating the council's style guidelines, as it was clear there was little consistency which was resulting in a confused picture. The refresh to the council's logo was to ensure it is more scalable and effective in digital formats.

The council's existing style guide was outdated, unclear, and inconsistently applied, leading to inefficiencies and a lack of cohesive identity. A refresh of branding elements, such as the logo and style guide, helps to improve efficiency by ensuring designs are adaptable across modern digital platforms, reducing duplication of effort and promoting a consistent and professional identity.

Furthermore, as part of our commitment to being an employer of choice, having a clear and modern brand is essential. A strong, cohesive brand not only reflects our values and professionalism but also helps to attract and retain talented individuals who want to work for an organisation they can feel proud to represent.

The costs incurred to date is around £20,000 and this includes refresh of external internal and external signage that would have been updated anyway. Further costs will come through during the year as the Council works through all the relevant items to update.

The cost of the refresh is being funded using the forecast underspend on the Trinity Road Offices so there is no additional cost to Council Taxpayers.

<p><b>Question 9 from Councillor David Fowles to Councillor Tristan Wilkinson, Cabinet Member for Economy and Environment</b></p> <p>Following the decision to close a number of the public toilets in the District and the reaction from Stow Town Council, what reaction have you and your predecessor had from other Town Councils, residents, the hospitality sector and tour operators?</p>	<p>Cllr Evemy met with the Chief Executive of Cirencester Town Council to discuss the plans as well as with Members of Stow Town Council on two occasions. All three of these meetings were prior to the closure of facilities on 30 September.</p> <p>Members will be aware of the petition regarding the Market Square toilets in Stow which was considered at the Council's meeting on 25 September. Since the closures, we have received seven complaints from members of the public, five regarding the closures in Cirencester and one each about the closures in Stow-on-the-Wold and in Tetbury.</p> <p>I would like to remind members that provision of public conveniences is a non-statutory service and many councils have closed all their facilities. Our decisions have retained one set of toilets in all our larger settlements with two in Bourton-on-the-Water to meet the needs of the large of number of visitors to the village.</p>
<p><b>Question 10 from Councillor Daryl Corps to Councillor Juliet Layton, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning</b></p> <p>Have the Grampian Conditions relating to Thames Water/Sewage on the Dunstall Farm development in Moreton in Marsh been breached?</p>	<p>No. Condition 27 of planning permission 19/02248/FUL comprises a Grampian condition relating to foul/sewer water network upgrades. Information sufficient to discharge this condition was approved under reference 24/02789/FUL on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2024</p>
<p><b>Question 11 from Councillor David Fowles to Councillor Mike Evemy, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Transformation</b></p>	<p>I am surprised that Cllr Fowles has raised the question in this manner since he was one of 30 members who supported the decision taken at Council on 31 July 2024 to dispose of the Old Memorial Cottages.</p>

I was very sad to read on the front page of the Standard on 14th November that the Living Memory Historical Association Museum have been evicted from the CDC owned cottage they have occupied for a number of years.

Beyond helping them financially with the storage of their artefacts, Could the Deputy Leader brief us on what support we are giving to the museum in their quest to find a new home?

The timing of the request for vacant possession allowed the Living Member Historical Association (LMHA) to keep the museum open to their planned timetable.

Officers and Cabinet Members have been working with LMHA through this period to assist them to find a new location.

Unfortunately, the Council does not own any other accommodation which would be suitable for housing the museum collection.

The Council has made contact with a number of landlords who own potentially suitable properties in Cirencester and has also contacted local letting agents to seek suitable alternative space for LMHA. No suitable, affordable alternative space has been identified so far.



**Question 12 from Councillor Dilys Neill to Councillor Juliet Layton, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning**

I believe that Cabinet will be reviewing the Council's empty property strategy.

A recent article from the BBC reported that there were about 700,000 empty properties in the UK, 260,000 could be regarded as long term empty. Earlier this year, it was reported that therefore more than 900 known empty properties in Cotswold District.

In addition, in my ward, while there has been some building in Stow over the last twenty years, the number of permanent residents has declined due to the proliferation of holiday lets.

Members of this council represent the opposition parties in National Government. Can we challenge the current government's policy that the only way to deal with the national housing shortage is by building 1.5 million new houses?

From the Council's own experience, simply building more homes does little to reduce house prices or improve housing affordability.

Earlier in 2024, the council challenged the Labour government's proposal to build 1.5 million new homes (300,000 a year) to solve the national housing shortage in its [response to the consultation on proposed reforms to The National Planning Policy Framework and other Changes to the Planning system](#). The council provided similar challenges in its responses to the previous Conservative government's consultations on the [Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill: reforms to national planning policy](#) in 2022 and the [Planning for the future White Paper and Changes to the current planning system consultation](#) in 2020, both of which also wanted to deliver 300,000 homes a year.

Likewise, the council challenged the previous Conservative government's [consultation proposal to introduce a new planning use class for short-term lets](#), highlighting the impact this would have on places in Cotswold, such as Stow-on-the-Wold.

Whilst the Council continues to do what it can to challenge the Government on this issue, it cannot rely on the government to provide the solutions for Cotswold District. The most effective way to resolve the situation is to lead by example and take positive and proactive action. In this regard, the council is fighting on various fronts to deliver more genuinely affordable homes across the District and reduce the impact of short-term holiday lets and empty properties, especially in places like Stow.

**Question 13 from Councillor Angus Jenkinson to Councillor Juliet Layton, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning**

Cotswold Gate in my ward is an example of a development suffering under the effects of a developer failing to comply with their obligations under a Section 106 agreement on a development with a large public open space (POS) offering ecological, flood, and community benefits to the whole town. As development neared completion the developer was required to obtain a certificate of compliance with its varied obligations before occupancy of the final properties. Trees, roadways, meadowland and more should have been finished. The land should have been offered to the Town Council and to CDC. An annual payment of £10,000 p.a. (index linked from planning permission) was required for 10 years. A maintenance company with only residents as directors was to be set up. None of this happened! It has cost residents over £250,000. It has been and remains stressful despite CDC now tackling the issue energetically. I am advised that this is a national problem.

What is the scale of this issue in the Cotswold District and do Government legal and financial provisions enable us to tackle it adequately?

The public open space issues which have arisen in relation to the Cotswold Gate development are currently limited to this scheme and the Local Planning Authority is not aware of the same issues having arisen on any other development in the District which have required the planning enforcement team to intervene.

Whether the legal and financial provisions made by central government to address this kind of issue are adequate, is a subjective judgement.

However, it can be observed that there has been a broader move away from Local Authorities being willing to adopt and maintain public open space in new development. This move broadly aligns with the need for Councils to reduce their spending and liabilities as part of cost cutting measures since the 2008 financial crisis and the associated reduced funding from central government to fund Local Authorities operations.