

Other responses to the consultation

1) Weston sub-Edge Parish Council

CDC Budget Consultation – Budget 2021/202

Weston sub-Edge Parish Council has the following comments against the CDC budget documentation issued in mid-November 2020

“Our Plan”

£750k allocation to climate change

No problem with the principle but difficult to comment when there is no detail.

Eg Electrical charging points – What is the plan? ie How many, where, and when will they be available? How much money is allocated?

Time frame for the review of offices etc – when will a report be available and how much will the production of the report cost? How much of the spend will go to external consultants?

Who is responsible and accountable for identifying the use of assets to support the climate strategy. How are the deliverables defined? What is the time scale? What is the spend?

What cost reduction targets have been set to provide funding in support of climate action?

Accountability, how much by when?

£740k over 3 years to review (and presumably revise?) the local plan

The need is accepted but there should be a costed plan with an accountable officer and councillor to deliver in place together with milestones to demonstrate sufficient progress, particularly as last budget £850k was allocated for this purpose but was not spent in its entirety. Response to the question indicated that the £740k is a carry over of underspend from last year. How is the money to be spent this year? How much is with external consultants?

£100k over 2 years to develop better, greener transport options.

Again, no problem with the principle, but what will be delivered?

What is the costed plan with deliverables, time scale and accountability?

How much external spend?

£23k towards helping people with complex needs.

No problem with the principle.

How exactly will the money be spent?

£350k over 3 years to fund the investment strategy

Great in principle but where is the detail?

The overriding comment is that the Plan is not a plan, but a list of areas of activity with some allocation of funds. Plans have clearly defined objectives and deliverables with how they will be achieved. It is impossible to comment sensibly on the budget without any detail. It also seems odd that you are consulting on a supposed budget without knowledge of HMG funding.

The so called "Plan" is not a plan, since it is impossible to determine what the deliverables of the Plan are: as last year, it is a "wish list" exemplified that little progress was made against the local plan review.

It is disappointing that the electorate is expected to tolerate an increase in council tax without being told what they will get for the increase.

The survey associated with the provided budget documentation seems to be a survey for the electorate to agree the priority areas for spend and nothing more.

The CDC budgetary session 24 November was billed as a Q&A session. However, there was limited time for a Q&A session since the bulk of the time was taken presenting the already distributed information with some amplification. It is reasonable to assume that the attendees would have read the documentation, had discussions in the case of town and parish councils, and prepared questions accordingly. The opportunity to challenge any of CDC's responses to any of the questions was not available so no discussions were possible.

"As part of the Budget Consultation we would like to invite Town and Parish Councillors and Clerks to a live Q&A session about the proposed 2021/22 budget with Cllr Mike Every, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Jenny Poole, our Chief Finance Officer."

In the absence of any other opportunity to discuss "Our Plan" Weston sub-Edge Parish Council would welcome a response.

Weston sub-Edge Parish Council

03 December 2020

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2) Email received:

"Do you have to pay to use The Barn for some of your discussions? If so why not use the council chamber? Might be a saving there?"

3) Email Received (**Feedback in red text**)

Climate change

£750,000 towards addressing climate change. Kickstarting our action plan to make the Cotswold district “green to the core”. Including:

- encouraging residents to switch to electric vehicles by delivering charging points
- Reviewing our use of offices and buildings as large numbers of staff continue working from home
- identifying opportunities to use our land and property to support our climate strategy by generating green energy
- supporting climate action taken by our communities and local businesses

I am not happy with you virtue signalling with tax payers money by ‘encouraging residents to switch to electric vehicles by you delivering and taking on through life support costs for charging points. The use of electric vehicles should be self-supporting without tax payer subsidies on infrastructure investments. It’s not that long ago since we were being ‘encouraged’ by Government to switch to diesel and look where that got us! Put the £750000 into road surface improvements across the region. Or allocate it to other priorities – some ideas follow.

Reviewing your use of offices and buildings should be done by your own policy staff an net zero cost.

You should be supporting local business & landlords to install solar powered generation on office and premises roofs through business rate incentives. Penalise office owners that keep lighting on in their premises all night – St James’ is a prime example.

Local Plan

£740,000 over the next three years towards [reviewing our local plan](#). To ensure any new development suits the needs of our communities, and protects our landscapes and heritage.

How on earth can you justify spending £740000 on reviewing a plan when that review should be conducted and produced by the Executive staff of the Council. I would be deeply opposed to this being used to hire expensive consultants who will interview your staff and managers to get their ideas based on their practical experiences, then write it down to feed back to you and collect a handsome cheque in return. Yes I have bitter experience in this field! Trust your staff and do it in-house. If you have noone competent to do this work internally that is an indictment of your staff training plan and leadership.

I cannot see any justification for spending more than £100000 a year over the 3 years for facilitation costs (Workshops, Public involvement, publication and publicity.)

Fly-tipping

£35,000 each year to continue our fight against fly-tipping.

You could do more yourselves to reduce fly-tipping at source if you made it easier and cheaper for businesses to legally tip and recycle. You have sought to reduce the cost of running garden recycling by effectively doubling the cost by reducing the frequency of collections. Use some of your 'climate change budget proposal' to increase recycling accessibility and operational hours – how does it help if I have to drive a 25 mile round trip to the GCC Recycling centre at Fosse Crosse because you want to reduce collections to save money.

£35000 a year is clearly inadequate judging by the amount of fly-tipping I see around the area. Take £100000 per year from Climate Change and feed it into this budget. Invest in removing the desire to fly-tip e.g. push for 7 day opening at GCC Recycling centres. Set up Webcams in popular tipping spots to catch offenders then punish them to the maximum in law and shame them in the press.

Green transport options

£100,000 over two years to plan and develop better, greener transport options, including cycle and walking routes and innovative bus options.

Recovery investment strategy

£350,000 over three years to fund our Recovery Investment Strategy which aims to make the money we have go further and maximising our support in Covid 19 recovery. We will invest in:

- specialist skills and expert advice on how we can invest in economic recovery
- giving our workforce access to training to build skills and knowledge fit for the new working environment created by Covid 19

If this is about hiring more 'experts', then you need to identify and introduce an effective Benefits Realisation Policy and Management Process. Make contract payment for that advice entirely dependent upon realisation of the benefits identified in any investment recommendations. Gain share or Win/Win we use to call it.

- giving access to property for new businesses to start up in a green and sustainable way
- enabling the production of new truly green energy supplies and delivering additional social housing

I hope this doesn't include covering the Cotswolds with Solar Farms where the panels are shipped at great environmental costs from China – I refer you the Kemble Solar Farm

proposals. Solar is going to be a major contributor but it is not truly green when you take the environmental costs of production, build, operation and eventual disposal into account. It also robs us of green space, places to walk in the country side and has a detrimental visual impact. How about utilising the roof space available on commercial and private properties?

Open space review

£25,000 towards championing a review of Open Space. Working with housebuilders and residents on good maintenance of public open space on their estates.

What on earth is this – another pointless review! Take this £25000 and put it into Support for people with complex needs – it will certainly do more good there and have a greater potential impact than producing yet another consultant's report that will gather dust.

Support for people with complex needs

£23,000 towards helping individuals with complex needs, that are facing homelessness to access secure accommodation and support.

You should make this more of a priority and invest from the areas I would suggest you cut.

How we will pay for this plan

In order to pay for these investments, meet funding challenges and provide financial resilience, we need to increase revenues. We plan to do this in three key areas:

Increasing Council Tax

Council Tax rates in the Cotswold district are historically low. For every £100 residents spend on Council Tax, we get £7.40 (the national average for district councils is £11).

An increase of £5 a year for the average household (Band D) works out as just 10p a week. Our Local Council Tax Support Scheme means this rise will not be paid by those on the lowest incomes.

Setting our fees and charges at commercial rates

We charge for many of our services, for example, car parking, planning advice and garden waste collection. Where these services provide a direct benefit to users, in most cases we will charge as if we were a private company, covering our costs as a minimum.

You are a Public Service body NOT a private company so should not be seeking to make a profit on your operations – cover the costs, having made them as low as possible through efficiency measures, and that's it. If officials start thinking and acting as if they are running a business they need to get out of the public sector and get a job in Industry.

This is based on the principle that those services which do not benefit all residents should not be subsidised by other taxpayers. Where we choose to charge less than the market rate, councillors will give clear reasons for their decision.

I don't disagree with the principle but you are not applying it equally across all of your services. I refer you to 'Support for people with complex needs'. The investment you put into this worthwhile activity does not benefit all residents and I along with all other tax payers am supporting this initiative, So by your own principal you should not be subsidising it. Your principal is clearly wrong as expressed as it ignores the benefits of social justice, which is why tax payers money is channelled to those with the greatest need.

Recovery Investment Strategy

As well as charging for many services as if we were a private company, we want to make a better return on the money we have. To do this we will:

- invest in developing the local economy (including help for local businesses to recover from Covid-19) and in green technologies

Here's a proposal for you for free – make car parking across the region in our towns completely free. Give our retailers on the high streets a welcome boost by attracting visitors back into our towns and make them feel welcome and valued. Provide more and free Public Conveniences, park and ride schemes, improved tourist information..

Fund it by transferring money from your Climate Change budget if necessary to GCC if that's the only way of achieving these measures because you are not directly accountable for them.

- work to deliver housing for local people at rents they can afford

And how about at prices they can afford to buy their homes. If not we will increasingly become a destination for the London second home market. How about a punitive second home charge based on the rateable value multiplied by 10.

- work with partner councils and contractors to make our services more efficient

In partnering with other councils you are losing touch with who votes for CDC councillors – it's not the residents of Oxford or the Forest of Dean. I want my council to be run by my elected officials and their executive branch – as an embodiment of local democracy. I fully support getting value for money from contracts but that does require a more innovative approach to through life contract management and perhaps the operation of baselined Catalogue service offerings. That of course would require a coordinated national effort across all councils to set up and operate – not much chance of that happening any time soon!