

Cllr. Tony Slater – District Council Report for Parish Council Meeting 12th December 2023

CDC: At both the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S), and full council meetings we reviewed the intension of CDC to break up the joint company (Publica) owned by them and three other district councils, with a view to bringing the staff and processes back under the direct control of each council. This is a highly complex piece of work for which the councils don't have the experience or capacity, and means they will have to employ external expertise to provide the project management, pensions transfers, HR and legal implications.

When I challenged the council Leaders and Financial controllers on the likely costs, they said they didn't have enough information to be able to provide even a high level estimate.

Despite this lack of detail (which for a project of this magnitude, in my experience would easily cost £2-3m!), and a motion by O&S recommending a review when costs were known, the council voted to proceed with haste on the work. This is very concerning, and I consider it reckless because it effectively amounts to a blank cheque where the project costs, long term financial implications, and benefits of proceeding are not even known! There are also differing opinions on which council is actually driving the change.

Visit to AIS - I was lucky to be invited to a tour of Air Salvage International – a highly successful private company operating out of Cotswold (Kemble) Airport. The company specialises in breaking redundant aircraft for spares (the value of which are invariably higher than the original intact aeroplane), and recovery of crashed planes around the world. The owner gave a fascinating presentation and personally took our group around their various facilities at the airport. It's pleasing that a company such as this can thrive in the south Cotswolds, an area which is primarily known for the beautiful landscape and not for a highly skilled industry such as ASI.

The **Public Conveniences Review Group** has received costings to refurbish each convenience, and to install pay machines where they are not currently present. There is some additional work needed to understand the payback period for the work on each unit, or the reduction in ongoing costs where income won't fully cover these costs. The group will be presenting the findings early next year so that the Cabinet can decide on the future of the services.

Roads - I am pleased to say that GCC now have a much better system for reporting potholes, and it is linked to the 'FIX My Street' app, so it's never been easier to report road issues.

Didmarton: TBC.

Councillor Tony Slater

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Other updates and information:

Car park fraud

Car park users in Gloucestershire are being warned against an emerging fraud threat. Fraudsters have been replacing QR codes displayed by car park payment machines with fakes. Customers scanning the fake QR codes are taken to a fishing website where they are invited to enter payment card details, under the guise of paying fees to the car park operator.

If you choose to pay make online payments in local car parks, make sure you follow one of the routes below:

*Download the PayByPhone (or other operator app) directly from the App Store or Google Play

*Visit the operator's website by PayByPhone.co.uk (or other operator web address) directly into your browser search bar

Most car park machines also accept payment cards. If you do use a QR code, check that it appears on official signage and does not appear to have been doctored.

Planning Fees

Following the recent government announcements as part of the Levelling Up Act, Planning Fees are to be increased to assist Councils with respect to providing the Planning Service. This is to be welcomed and will assist in reducing the overall cost of delivering the planning service (planning fees only account for approximately 50% of the total cost of running the service).

The Fees for householder development will rise by 25% and all other application types will rise by 35%. The fees will be reviewed yearly and will be increased in line with inflation.

The Government has also removed the free go provision for planning applications and has introduced a tighter planning guarantee which means that any applications over 16 weeks old with no extension of time agreed will be liable to a refund.

The increase in fees (and other aspects) take effect on the 6th December 2023.

Planning

Under the government's criteria for designation, a planning department must decide over 70% of its planning applications on time in order to avoid being placed into special measures. In April this year CDC was only just under the required 70% rate required at 69.6% of applications processed within the required timeframe and was warned therefore of being at risk of being put into special measures. The levelling up secretary gave the authority until June 2023 to "demonstrate improved performance" before formally designating their planning department. When a planning department is put into special measures, applicants may send their planning applications directly to the Planning Inspectorate, rather than the local planning authority. CDC has escaped intervention after improving their planning performance on non-major applications. Chief executive Robert Weaver said it was "highly unfair" as the CDC rate was only 0.4% below the threshold. Despite this, he added that "considerable work" has been done to improve planning performance. Regardless, the DLUHC has insisted they will continue to monitor the performances of all nine planning authorities under the threat of official designation. Cotswold District Council - capital grants up to £10K for village halls and community buildings. Capital grants of between £2000 and £10,000 for village halls and community buildings, with 20% match funding required. The councils are keen to support decarbonisation, energy efficiency, and digital connectivity, but all capital projects for community buildings will be considered. The deadline for applications is 8th January for the first round of funding, and then 12th July for a second round of funding. If you need support with your application, contact info@grcc.org.uk

https://www.grcc.org.uk/news-events/news-events/post/273-cotswold-district-councilcommunity-infrastructure-grants-now-open?fbclid=IwAR1GXSjuhB3Hr-55G8C9EQjuEJeBUBFNsnwc4EDMs6_gRQvs-3W0IVJ -kU

Biodiversity Action for Parish Councils

Under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, Parish Councils have a duty to take biodiversity action before 1 January 2024. But what does this mean? What must local councils do to satisfy this duty? The Gloucestershire Association of 11 Parish and Town Councils (GATPC) hosted an informative online session on 7 November for town and parish clerks to demystify this. Andrew Maliphant, Environmental and Sustainability Advisor the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) joined the session, together with officers from DEFRA and the Stroud Valleys' Project. Find out what all local councils need to know about this action and be part of the creation of a model biodiversity policy. Work on installing 1,000 electric vehicle (E V) charging points in Gloucestershire over the next three years has got under way. I am not aware of any plans to install points in the Grumbolds Ash with Avening ward.