

Public Questions – Cabinet 21 October

Question 1:

"In September 2023, my partner Taj and I opened the Tourist Information Centre as a 12 month trial, to test to see if reviving the lost service was viable. The results were a success.

In 2024, we built on the progress of the first year, improving our operation and digging into the numbers to ensure that it was self-sustaining with its revenue and costs.

At the end of the second year, we were in a strong enough position to pay for the third year in a single instalment and hire a new full-time salaried employee.

When I started this experiment, I did not know anything about the Civic Quarter plans, and it was only relatively recently, in the last 2 months or so, that the details of that development have really started to emerge, and I am now in a predicament, as it looks as though the success we have achieved is going to be driven over the edge of a cliff.

Since the old TIC closed in 2020, it is clear that the need and value of Tourist Information Services in general have been underestimated and overlooked, which is also apparent from the Civic Quarter plans.

And so, my challenge now is having to try to get the Council to recognise and understand what it is we do, and to make a plea to the decision-makers to incorporate us into the plans for the future of the Guildhall.

Can the members of the Cabinet who are the relevant decision-makers please let me know how and when I can make this pitch to them, and to open a constructive dialogue about how the Council can help us to continue throughout these upcoming changes?

I have been putting together the case for the TIC which includes: Cost/benefits to the Council and society, footfall generation, revenue generation, and data collection, in-person public services 7-days-a week, over 350 5-star google reviews, witness testimony and more.

We have added undoubted value to the visitor economy and experience, and want that to continue throughout and beyond the development.

As well as that, there is a case to be made that using the space for a TIC will create more revenue and overall benefit for the Council than converting it into a rentable office / meeting space, which I also examine in my presentation.

In the Cabinet papers from 25th September 2025 it was recommended that the Cabinet:

(page 9) 1.1. III: "agrees to develop technical designs with traders and stakeholders"

And that the plan is for:

(page 10) 2.1, 4: "opening up the Guildhall to the community".

There is now a strong community presence already alive in that area of the Guildhall, which was not there before September 2023, and we want to protect and nurture it.

I hope we can begin a productive process of collaboration over the TIC which will benefit the Council and let us continue providing the benefit to the community which we serve.

Question 2:

The North Cambridge Framework for Change is an important initiative which is indicative of the forward-looking approach of Cambridge City Council in the aim to provide residents with safe, secure and 'fit for purpose' housing and accommodation north of the City, an area which requires positive attention and a project for redevelopment.

1. Could Cabinet please confirm that the traders of Arbury Court will be supported in this project, for it is vital for residents to retain the current traders in situ. The butcher, baker and Budgens, along with the other small businesses – including the post office - making up Arbury Court, are vital to residents of Arbury, West Chesterton and Kings Hedges at least. Traders need firm and clear assurances in writing that in any requirement to remove from their current premises during rebuilding and refurbishment will enable them to continue trading and to return to Arbury Court to resume trading. In particular, where equipment is central to trading (eg butcher) there needs to be clarity on financial and other support, just as there are clear and firm assurances to residents of Arbury Court and Kingsway Flats that they will be provided with financial and other support during the transition period.
2. Could Cabinet please confirm that the oversight by the Council will be maintained at a level that ensures that this project, which involves a substantial public outlay, will not be left in the hands of the relevant officer in charge. The officer's qualifications are recognised, and at the same time the Council and Councillors engaged in the Council administration have responsibility for the deployment of finances and cannot leave oversight to one Cabinet member despite their substantial qualifications. There must be support from Councillors involved in the administration which is directed to ensuring positive oversight of the Project and residents will require confirmation of this.

Question 3:

Agenda Item 6 - Arbury Court Redevelopment

I wish to ask the following questions:

Support for Traders

It is gratifying to see that residential tenants and leaseholders are to be offered considerable support in finding and transitioning to new homes including financial support and compensation where appropriate.

The report acknowledges the importance of the shopping centre as a vital part of the community but it does not seem to recognise the special role played by the small, independent shopkeepers which make it unique. If we lose them, the community will lose something special and they will lose their livelihoods. It is therefore disappointing that no similar financial support seems to be on offer.

Will the traders:

- a) be guaranteed to have new premises which are comparable in size, cost and footfall to what they have currently?
- b) be assisted with the costs of having to fit out new premises?
- c) be compensated for business disruption, including disruption due to changes and delays in the project?

Will the building contracts include specific requirements to protect the traders' businesses and pay compensation if these are not met?

New Homes and Service Providers

The report envisages a doubling of homes from 205 to 410. At Arbury Court the number of homes will increase by 182 units.

Has an impact assessment been made to give assurance that there will be sufficient capacity in terms of doctors, pharmacies, dentists, schools and child-care facilities to support this?

Programme Management vs Project Management

Project management of building contracts is usually focussed on building to cost and time objectives, often at the expense of impact on the wider community. Residents, and businesses especially, experienced this during the Milton Road reconstruction.

On the other hand a Programme Manager has responsibility to ensure that a complex set of community benefits are achieved overall.

Will a Programme Manager be appointed with overall responsibility to ensure that community objectives are written into contracts and delivered?