

Local Government

Jan Broadway

1945-1974

Following the 1945 local government elections, the Conservatives remained the largest single party, but lost their majority. None of the fourteen candidates standing for the Labour party in conjunction with local co-operatives were successful. The council consisted of 15 Conservatives, 7 Independents, 5 Chamber of Commerce, 3 Labour and 2 Liberal.¹ In the 1946 county council elections, the first since 1937 and in which the turnout was very low, Labour gained St Peters, with Conservative wins in All Saints, Naunton Park and Park wards.² By 1947 the Conservatives had re-established their majority on the borough council.³

In 1946 the council applied to the Local Government Boundary Commission for county borough status, but was unsuccessful.⁴ A renewed attempt was approved by the Local Government Boundary Commission in 1948, but failed with the winding up of the commission in 1949.⁵ Despite opposition from the county council, Cheltenham was granted excepted district status under the Education Act 1944.⁶ The educational scheme, which was eventually agreed in 1949, freed the borough from county council control of education except on financial matters.⁷ This meant that in 1967 the council retained some autonomy over the implementation of comprehensive education in the borough.⁸ The borough also obtained delegated powers under the 1947 Town and County Planning Act.⁹

The police and fire service operated at a county level. The county police headquarters was established at Holland House, Lansdown Road, while the main station remained in Crescent Place with sub-stations for the Tewkesbury Road, St Marks and Bath Road areas.¹⁰ In 1959 the county council approved in principle the erection of a new Police Station and Magistrates' Court on land adjacent to Holland House, which it already owned.¹¹ When the site was found to be insufficient, the magistrates' court was built in St George's Road.¹² The county fire service also established its headquarters in Lansdown Road.¹³ In 1948 the

¹ *Glos. Echo*, 2 Nov. 1945.

² *Western Daily Press*, 4 Mar. 1946.

³ *Chelt. Chronicle*, 8 Nov. 1947.

⁴ *Chelt. Chronicle*, 28 Dec. 1946.

⁵ *Glos. Echo*, 8 Apr. 1948 & 28 June 1949.

⁶ GA, GCC/COU/1/1/23, 17 Jan. 1945; *Chelt. Chronicle*, 9 Dec. 1944.

⁷ *Chelt. Chronicle*, 4 June 1949.

⁸ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 16 May 1967.

⁹ *Glos. Echo*, 10 July 1948; GA, K149/41.

¹⁰ *Kelly's Directory* (1948), A31.

¹¹ GA, GCC/COU/1/1/29, 11 Nov. 1959

¹² GA, GCC/COU/1/1/29, 20 Jan. 1960; Verey & Brooks, *Glos. II*, 242.

¹³ *Kelly's Directory* (1952).

borough's responsibility for electricity supply ceased on nationalisation, when its former electrical engineer became the chief commercial officer of the South-Western Electricity Board.¹⁴ In May 1949 the Cheltenham & District Gas Company was absorbed into the South West Area Gas Board.¹⁵ The North West Gloucestershire Water Board, which took over the Cheltenham & Gloucester Joint Water Board in 1965¹⁶, was itself absorbed into the Severn Trent Water Authority in 1974.¹⁷ In 1964 the borough council lost a case at the Lands Tribunal over the rating of the Hayden sewage works.¹⁸

In the aftermath of the Second World War the council agreed to redevelop the Pittville Pump Room and the Medical Baths, which were seen as important elements in the town's future as a cultural and spa town. By 1950 the birth of the NHS had made the medical baths seem less essential, while councillors opposed spending £13,000 to restore the Pump Room.¹⁹ A modified scheme for essential repairs and interior decoration at Pittville was agreed after several months of debate.²⁰ In 1954 the Ministry of Works agreed a grant of £4,000 towards the work, provided the council spent the same amount.²¹ The Pilgrim Trust and the Dowty company also provided grants. Work was underway by 1958 and the restored Pump Room, housing Cheltenham's one remaining productive well, was officially opened in 1960, having cost £43,000.²² In 1968 leakage of diesel from the central heating contaminated it. After controversy in the council chamber over the expense, £3,000 was spent in drilling a new well so that Cheltenham could legitimately continue to call itself a spa.²³

During the evolution of the post-war Gloucestershire development plan, the council was keen that an inner ring road to improve traffic flows through the town should be included. There was also concern about the 'urban fence', which limited Cheltenham's expansion into the surrounding countryside and farmland.²⁴ The number of buildings proposed for listing for their architectural merit was also problematic, with the borough surveyor warning that potential claims for compensation might limit development.²⁵ The development plan and associated town maps were approved in 1955. The Cheltenham town map area covered both the borough and parts of the surrounding parishes.²⁶

In 1956 the borough council proposed the extension of its boundaries to include the whole of Charlton Kings Urban District and parts of Cheltenham Rural District. This was opposed by

¹⁴ *Glos. Echo*, 2 Mar. 1948.

¹⁵ *Glos. Echo*, 31 Mar. 1949.

¹⁶ GA, D3609; *Tewkesbury Register*, 2 Apr. 1965.

¹⁷ Dept. of the Environment, Circular 100/73.

¹⁸ *Estates Gazette Digest of Land and Property Cases* (1964), 9; *Birmingham Daily Post*, 7 Jan. 1964.

¹⁹ *Glos. Echo*, 7 Mar. 1950.

²⁰ *Glos. Echo*, 1 Aug. 1950.

²¹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 2 Aug. 1954.

²² *Gloucestershire CountrySide* 10 (2) (1958), 32; *Birmingham Daily Post*, 5 July 1960.

²³ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 13 Dec. 1971.

²⁴ GA, CBR/C5/4/3/1/1.

²⁵ GA, PF1.2; CBR/C5/4/3/1/1. See Topography, Urban Redevelopment.

²⁶ GA, JF7.59GS.

the district councils concerned and rejected by the county council.²⁷ Although Charlton Kings UDC subsequently approved their inclusion in the proposed Cheltenham county borough in 1959, the opposition of the county council and rural district council continued.²⁸ The Local Government Commissioners were initially unconvinced there was a strong enough case, as the population of the proposed borough was expected to be well below 100,000.²⁹ Following a revision of the population figures after the 1961 census, the commissioners reversed their decision, but the county council remained opposed.³⁰ A public inquiry was held in 1964,³¹ with the decision not to promote Cheltenham being taken in October 1965.³²

In 1960 the post-war proposal for retail development of the Regent Street-Cambray area was revived.³³ A link road from the Promenade via Ormond Place, Cambray Place and Rodney Road into the High Street³⁴ formed part of a plan for a pedestrianised town centre partially surrounded by a dual carriageway with the bus station and multi-storey car parks on the periphery and displaced factories accommodated on the St James's station site.³⁵ Approved by the council and local chamber of commerce, the plan met with considerable opposition leading to a public inquiry in 1967 and its ultimate rejection.³⁶

While council and private house building resolved the borough's overall housing shortage by the 1970s, there was considerable concern about the quality of accommodation provided to private tenants in historic properties in the town centre.³⁷ In 1966 the council established the Regency Properties Fund to provide grant aid for restoration with funds provided by the borough, the county council and the Historic Buildings Council.³⁸ Councillor Charles Irving considered the available grants insufficient, but the council's actions were circumscribed by the limitations of its delegated planning powers.³⁹

In 1957 the county council received approval to begin construction of a new fire station in Keynsham Road.⁴⁰ This subsequently replaced Lansdown Road as the fire service headquarters.⁴¹ Following the redevelopment of the police headquarters in Lansdown Road,

²⁷ GCC/COU/1/1/27, 11 Jul. 1956

²⁸ GA, K149/41; GCC/COU/1/1/29, 20 Jan. 1960.

²⁹ GCC/COU/1/1/30, 19 Jul. 1961

³⁰ GCC/COU/1/1/30, 27 Feb. 1963

³¹ *The Times*, 4 Mar. 1964.

³² *The Times*, 12 Feb. 1966.

³³ See Topography and Settlement, Urban Redevelopment, Post-War.

³⁴ *Birmingham Daily Post*,

³⁵ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 3 July 1965 & 4 Aug. 1967.

³⁶ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 24 Feb. 1961, 1 Feb. 1967 & 24 July 1969

³⁷ GA, PF4.69, 4; see Topography and Settlement.

³⁸ GA, PF4.75, 14.

³⁹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 29 July 1970.

⁴⁰ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 18 July 1957.

⁴¹ Verey & Brooks, *Glos.* II, 242; *Tewkesbury Register*, 2 Oct. 1964.

the police station in Crescent Place was closed by 1970 and put up for sale.⁴² Converted into offices, it became the national headquarters of the Countryside Commission in 1974.⁴³

1974 - 1991

Following local government reorganisation, Cheltenham borough was joined with Charlton Kings urban district in what was described as a 'shotgun wedding'.⁴⁴ The Conservative party controlled the shadow council, which met from June 1973.⁴⁵ It was agreed to drop 'Spa' from the council's name, Councillor Charles Irving wanting Cheltenham to be known as 'an energetic, virile town' and not to be connected with the 'worn-out old colonel business'.⁴⁶ Borough status was granted to the new council, which took over control of the town on 1 April 1974.⁴⁷ The Conservatives retained an overall majority on the council until 1979.⁴⁸ In December 1979 the mayor, Dudley Aldridge, resigned from the Conservative party, removing their one seat majority on the council.⁴⁹ Days earlier it had been announced that the majority of councillors were boycotting the mayor's charity ball, having been asked to pay for their own tickets.⁵⁰ No party took overall control of the council thereafter.⁵¹

The new borough council assumed responsibility for local planning matters in addition to its already delegated powers of development control.⁵² The Cheltenham Central Area Interim District Plan was drawn up to replace part of the old town map, but was non-statutory and only the section covering 1978-83 was formally approved.⁵³ In it the council planned for a long-term increase in the population of the central area. The sites designated for private housing development were 5 a. of the St James station site and the Athletic Ground, Albion Street.⁵⁴ The borough's local plan, which included the wider area, was the subject to a public inquiry in 1984, at which the relocation of the bus station was a particular concern. The plan, which aimed to attract new light industry and offices to the town and to promote shopping and tourism, was adopted in 1986.⁵⁵ In 1984 and 1985 the council issued yearling bonds worth £0.5 million to fund development.⁵⁶

⁴² Verey & Brooks, *Glos.* II, 242; *Birmingham Daily Post*, 12 Nov. 1971.

⁴³ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 20 June 1974.

⁴⁴ *Glos. Echo*, 2 Apr. 1974

⁴⁵ *Glos. Echo*, 8 June 1973.

⁴⁶ *Glos. Echo*, 20 June 1973.

⁴⁷ Hansard, *HC Deb.*, 28 Mar. 1974, vol. 871, col 187.

⁴⁸ Colin Rallings & Michael Thrasher, *Cheltenham Borough Council Election Results 1973-2012*, 1 [<http://www.electionscentre.co.uk/>].

⁴⁹ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 1 Dec. 1979.

⁵⁰ *Birmingham Daily Post*, 26 Nov. 1979.

⁵¹ Rallings & Thrasher, *Cheltenham Borough Council Election Results 1973-2012*, 2-4.

⁵² GA, PF4.69.

⁵³ GA, P4.70GS.

⁵⁴ GA, PF4.79, 20-1, 59.

⁵⁵ GA, D12676/2/4/4; GA, P4.70(1).

⁵⁶ *Financial Times*, 30 Aug. 1984 & 19 July 1985.

The borough council continued to pursue the expansion of its boundaries, as it was largely reliant on the adjacent local authorities for the provision of land for housing and industry. The council hoped to incorporate Badgeworth, Swindon, Prestbury, Leckhampton, Up Hatherley, Bishop's Cleeve and Shurdington and in 1981 majorities in favour of the expansion were obtained in referendums held in Prestbury and Up Hatherley.⁵⁷

1991 to 2020

In 1991 the boundary of Cheltenham was extended to include the built-up areas of Badgeworth, Swindon, Prestbury, Leckhampton and Up Hatherley.⁵⁸ The Liberal Democrats achieved a majority in 1991, which they retained until 1999.⁵⁹ As a result of the extension the borough council included councillors from the People Against Bureaucracy group, which had been established in 1976 to protect the Green Belt.⁶⁰ The Conservatives gained a majority in 2000 and the Liberal Democrats in 2002.⁶¹ The parish councils of Charlton Kings, Leckhampton with Warden Hill, Prestbury, Swindon and Up Hatherley were retained. The boundaries of the parish councils within the borough were adjusted in 2003.⁶² In 2008 their relationship to the borough council was formalised by charter.⁶³ Between 2004 and 2010 there was no overall control, but since then the council has been controlled by the Liberal Democrats.⁶⁴ The boundaries of all the parishes except Swindon were again revised in 2018.⁶⁵ In 2018 the Liberal Democrats held 32 of the council's 40 seats.⁶⁶

In 1991 the problems with collecting the community charge led to Cheltenham imposing a £40 surcharge.⁶⁷ This resulted in the Environment Minister capping the council's spending plans.⁶⁸ In 1995 the council brought in Reg Ward, former chief executive of the London Docklands Development Corporation as a consultant on the modernization of the town centre.⁶⁹ In order to fund the development of the town centre at a time when interest rates were rising, the borough council took out a loan of £22.5 million at a fixed rate for 15 years in 1996. Subsequently falling interest rates led the council to lose a considerable amount of money, despite rescheduling the loan in 1999, and the district auditor considered taking action against the council for illegal financial speculation.⁷⁰

⁵⁷ Les Godwin, *Lifting the Lid* (Gloucester, 2015), 61-2.

⁵⁸ Gloucestershire (District Boundaries) Order 1991.

⁵⁹ Rallings & Thrasher, *Cheltenham Borough Council Election Results 1973-2012*, 4-5.

⁶⁰ *Glos. Echo*, 22 Apr. 2015; <http://www.pab.org.uk/>.

⁶¹ Rallings & Thrasher, *Cheltenham Borough Council Election Results 1973-2012*, 7-8.

⁶² Cheltenham Parishes Order 2003; Cheltenham (Parishes) (Amendment) Order 2007.

⁶³ *Glos. Echo*, 21 Oct. 2008.

⁶⁴ Rallings & Thrasher, *Cheltenham Borough Council Election Results 1973-2012*, 9-12.

⁶⁵ Cheltenham Borough Council (Reorganisation of Community Governance) Orders 2018.

⁶⁶ *Glos. Echo*, 10 May 2018.

⁶⁷ *Sunday Times*, 22 Dec. 1991.

⁶⁸ *Daily Mail*, 24 June 1992.

⁶⁹ *The Times*, 3 May 1995.

⁷⁰ *Western Daily Press*, 4 Dec. 1999; Godwin, *Lifting the Lid*, 256, 267.

In 1999 the revised Gloucestershire structure plan provided a new framework for development, which emphasised the accommodation of new development within the county's larger towns. The constraints on Cheltenham were relaxed, although all new development was required to respect the town's special built and natural environment.⁷¹ The council commissioned a report into the feasibility of constructing a state-of-the-art conference centre to boost the local tourist trade.⁷² Following the opening of the Centaur centre at the racecourse in 2004,⁷³ the local plan envisioned the provision of facilities to support the further development of the town as a medium-sized conference centre⁷⁴ for which the redevelopment of the Town Hall was seen as essential.⁷⁵ In 2015 £2.2 million was committed to the project⁷⁶, but a considerable funding gap remained.⁷⁷

The borough council adopted the leader and cabinet model with seven deputies from October 2001.⁷⁸ In 2003 a rift developed between Christine Laird, who had been appointed managing director of the council the previous year under the Conservative administration, and the new Liberal Democrat cabinet.⁷⁹ Following Ms Laird's dismissal in 2005, the legal action unsuccessfully pursued by the council against cost taxpayers over £2 million.⁸⁰

Following floods in 1979,⁸¹ it was estimated that some 600 homes in Cheltenham were at risk in a 1 in 100 year flood event. Although the borough council carried out some improvement works to reduce the risk, it lacked sufficient resources to complete the work. In 1996 responsibility for the river Chelt was passed to the Environment Agency, which began a £22 million flood alleviation scheme in 1999.⁸² A 1 in 75 year flood event occurred following heavy rain in June 2007, when the flood alleviation scheme protected the town centre although a number of houses elsewhere were flooded. A second flood in July 2007 overwhelmed the defences and 600 properties were flooded, including 230 within the alleviation scheme area.⁸³ A subsequent flood risk assessment identified a number of sites designated for housing development, which were at risk of flooding.⁸⁴ Prior to 2007 the council's annual watercourse maintenance budget was around £15,000. Thereafter a Civil Emergency fund of £602,000 was made available and a budget of £90,000 over three years

⁷¹ GA, PR4.51GS.54nj

⁷² *Western Daily Press*, 7 July 1999.

⁷³ *The Guardian*, 15 Mar. 2004.

⁷⁴ CBC Onlione, *Cheltenham Borough Council Local Plan Second Review* (2006).

⁷⁵ CBC Online, *Tourism and Marketing Strategy* (2011).

⁷⁶ *Glos. Echo*, 17 Apr. 2015.

⁷⁷ *Glos. Echo*, 19 July 2018.

⁷⁸ CBC Online, *Cabinet Minutes*, 23 Oct. 2001.

⁷⁹ *Western Daily Press*, 1 Apr. 2003; *The Times*, 29 May 2004.

⁸⁰ *The Times*, 16 June 2009; *Glos. Echo*, 7 Dec. 2011.

⁸¹ *Glos. Echo*, 31 May & 28 Dec. 1979.

⁸² Environment Agency, *Cheltenham flood alleviation scheme: Your questions answered* (2003).

⁸³ CBC, *Strategic Flood Risk Assessment for Local Development Framework Level 1* (2008), 39-40.

⁸⁴ CBC, *Strategic Flood Risk Assessment for Local Development Framework Level 1* (2011), 35.

was allocated to flood risk work.⁸⁵ A surface water management plan was produced in 2011 and work on protecting a number of homes in Whaddon began in early 2012.⁸⁶ In 2014 the council established a network of volunteer flood wardens.⁸⁷

In the present century a number of council activities have been delegated to separate organizations. Cheltenham Borough Homes (CBH) was set up as an arm's length company to take over responsibility for the maintenance of the borough's housing and homeless services in 2002.⁸⁸ In 2018/19 CBH managed 5,082 homes and 685 garages.⁸⁹ In 2011 Ubico Ltd. was established in collaboration with Cotswold District Council to provide waste collection, recycling, and street cleansing.⁹⁰ The Cheltenham Trust was established as a charity in 2014 to manage the Town Hall, the museum and art gallery, Pittville Pump Room and sports centre.⁹¹ In 2017 the council agreed to loan the trust £1.5 million for improvements to the sports centre.⁹²

In 2015 the council purchased Delta Place, Bath Road for £13.75million to provide new municipal offices, although existing tenancies prevented occupation until 2023.⁹³ In 2016 the council agreed to increase its investment in property for income generation from commercial rents.⁹⁴ In 2018/19 the council owned investment property with an estimated worth of just under £76 million, including Delta Place and Ellenborough House, Oriol Road.⁹⁵ In 2016 the council joined with Gloucester and Tewkesbury to develop a cyber park for hi-tech businesses and housing to the west of Cheltenham.⁹⁶ By 2020 45 hectares of land adjoining the GCHQ site had been purchased by the council for £37.5 million to ensure the cyber park project would proceed.⁹⁷

Following the decision in 2016 to close courts in Stroud and Gloucester, Cheltenham became the only magistrates' court in Gloucestershire.⁹⁸ The county constabulary, having transferred its headquarters operations to Quedgeley, put most of the Lansdown Road site up for sale in March 2016. The town's main police station remained there in 2020, with some functions transferred to the Hester's Way police station.⁹⁹

⁸⁵ CBC Online, Briefing Note, Cabinet 22 June 2010.

⁸⁶ CBC Online, Flood Protection Update, Environment Overview & Scrutiny Cttee 29 Feb. 2012.

⁸⁷ *Bristol Evening Post*, 19 Mar. 2019.

⁸⁸ Companies House, 04587658.

⁸⁹ Cheltenham Borough Homes Ltd., *Report and Financial Statements* (2019).

⁹⁰ *Glos. Echo*, 1 Feb. 2012; Companies House, 07824292.

⁹¹ *Glos. Echo*, 1 Oct. 2014; <https://www.cheltenhamtrust.org.uk/>.

⁹² *Glos. Echo*, 28 Mar. 2017.

⁹³ *Glos. Echo*, 26 June 2015.

⁹⁴ CBC Online, Cabinet, 6 Dec. 2016, Property Portfolio.

⁹⁵ CBC Online, Statement of Accounts 2018/19.

⁹⁶ *Glos. Echo*, 11 Nov. 2016.

⁹⁷ *Glos. Echo*, 14 May 2020.

⁹⁸ *Stroud News & Journal*, 11 Feb. 2016.

⁹⁹ *Glos. Echo*, 5 Mar. 2016.