



COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL PRIORITIES REPORT
April 2020 - June 2020

Cotswold District Council Corporate Plan 2019-23

Our Aim

To rebuild the Council so it can be proactive and responsive to the needs of our residents and businesses in a fast changing environment, building for the future whilst respecting our heritage

Our Priorities

- Respond to the challenges presented by the Climate Change Emergency
- Deliver good quality social rented homes
- Present a Local Plan which is Green to the Core
- Ensure that all services delivered by the Council are delivered to the highest standard
- Help residents, businesses and communities access the support they need to achieve their ambitions

Our Principles

- Rebuilding trust and confidence in the Council by promoting a culture of openness and transparency
- Value for money - we will use the Council's resources wisely, but will invest in fabric and future of the District
- Listen, Hear, Act - we will seek thoughts and ambitions from our residents to inform our decision-making

Covid-19 response and recovery

During Covid-19 crisis, the Council has been busy supporting residents, businesses, and local people. During Q1...



543

Residents given emergency support via the Help Hub



34,495

Telephone enquiries dealt with by the Council during COVID-19 lockdown



£36.0M

Total amount in business grants paid out by Cotswold District Council



152,737

waste and recycling containers emptied weekly



£17.8M

Total amount in relief to businesses paid out by Cotswold District Council

Following a period of intense activity to support our communities during Lockdown, the Council started focussing on Recovery in May. It is likely the response and recovery phases will run alongside each other for some months to come particularly if we see a second spike, however we are working to build resilience in communities and help businesses recover.

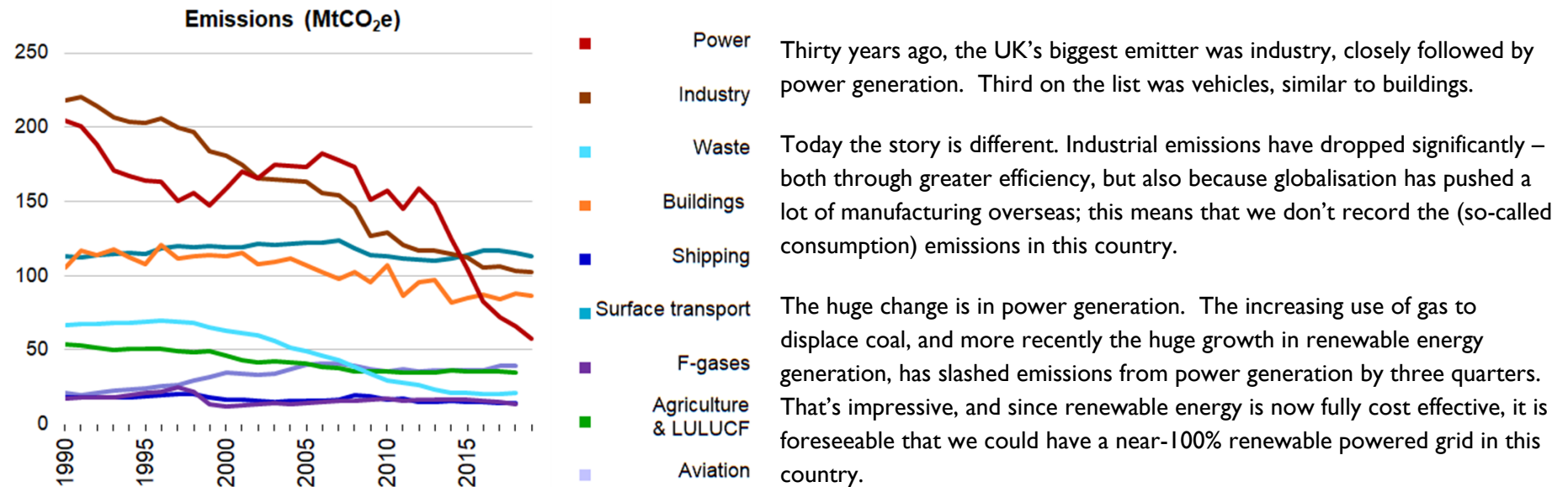
Our Recovery plan focuses on four key themes; Communities, the Economy, the Environment and a sustainable Council services. We have already provided assistance to businesses, helping them to safely reopen, which included the provision of packs including guidance, posters and social distancing floor stickers, which were delivered to around 700 businesses. We then provided support for the hospitality sector providing guidance and posters to around 350 pubs,

cafes and restaurants. We have worked with eleven of the Town and larger Parish Councils to explore opportunities for introducing measures on the streets to widen pedestrian areas and install barriers, signage and pavement marking to encourage social distancing and make High streets safe for shoppers. Schemes are now progressing in Cirencester, Stow on the Wold, Moreton in Marsh, Chipping Campden and Tetbury.

We are also working closely with voluntary sector partners and other organisations to identify issues in communities and ensure the right support is in place to help people who have lost their jobs, face financial hardship and may struggle with isolation and mental health problems. This work will help shape the delivery of the Council's priorities going forward as we build on the learning from the Pandemic.

Respond to the challenges presented by the Climate Change Emergency

The Context



The really stubborn emitters are vehicles and buildings. Vehicle emissions have flatlined for thirty years, and are now the biggest single emissions category. The uptake of electric vehicles has started, but has not yet had an impact on emissions, and market forces (such as the popularity of SUVs) has actually pushed us the wrong way in recent years.

Emissions from buildings i.e. heating has barely dropped - energy efficiency is generally poor, and improving energy efficiency will be extremely expensive, requiring the replacement of gas boilers by high efficiency electric heating, and increasing insulation.

Leaving to one side the emissions associated with the overseas manufacturing of the goods we consume, the really hard part of the UK's emissions reduction starts now. The legally binding target of net zero emissions by 2050 requires a much steeper fall in emissions per year from now onwards, than we have achieved to date.

Minimising, and adapting to the forthcoming effects of, climate change is a priority for everyone. The science is settled (climate heating is man-made; net greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions must be cut to zero), and all major international agencies agree that the climate crisis, and the linked biodiversity crisis, is the biggest threat to all our livelihoods. This is captured in CDC's declaration of a climate emergency.

Whilst global CO₂ emissions were temporarily reduced by Covid-19 (by about 5.5%), reaching the Paris target (<1.5C) would require much larger emissions reductions (>7.5%) each year for the whole of this decade. The Paris target is now, in effect, unachievable. Mitigation (drastically reducing GHG emissions) remains essential, and must go hand-in-hand with adaptation (managing the physical, economic and social impacts of inevitable climate disruption). Driving down GHG emissions will require every human activity to change, from transport to energy generation to food to how we use energy in homes and workplaces.

The Cotswold District Climate Emergency Declaration aims at carbon neutrality, also called net zero carbon – that is, where emissions are drastically reduced but those that remain are balanced by natural processes, such as trees growing, which remove carbon from the atmosphere. Eventually the world will have to remove carbon so that GHG concentration doesn't merely stabilise, but falls.

Actions we are taking

GHG emissions from the district are dominated by transport (burning diesel and petrol). The Council is therefore developing a strategy to encourage people who live and work in the district to move more quickly to electric vehicles. Short term actions include installing electric vehicle charge points in car parks. Four electric vehicle bays with fast charging points have been installed at the Rugby Club. In addition, the car park will be a 'park and stride' for permit holders only so everyone is guaranteed a parking space; this will keep cars out of centre, and eliminate the need to drive around looking for parking. The car park will open this summer.

The Council and the District can play its part in speeding up the country's transition to 100% renewable electricity generation. The Council is preparing feasibility studies for solar power installations at sites it controls, and will work with other district stakeholders at other sites.

A significant part of both the council's own emissions footprint, and that of the whole district, is heating buildings (homes and workplaces). Getting off gas and moving to renewable electric heating is a huge challenge, but essential. The Council is preparing to support homeowners and business owners with making this change.

Deliver good quality social rented homes

The Context

The high quality natural and built environment makes the District a desirable place to live. Cotswold District has a high number of properties owned outright (37.8%, vs 30.6% national average) reflecting the attractiveness of the District as a place to retire or to purchase a second home.

House prices and rents are relatively high; at the end of September 2017, the median property price in Cotswold District was £350,000, over 55% higher than the median property price in England and Wales, while the median monthly rent was £848 in 2017-18, nearly 26% higher than the national median (Private rental market summary statistics - April 2017 to March 2018, Valuation Office Agency).

The high house prices and high rents, coupled with the lower than average earning from local jobs, means housing affordability is a significant challenge for residents in the District which may result in the out migration of young people or alternatively encourage people to commute into Cotswold for work, while living in areas where housing is cheaper.

Actions we are taking

The Gloucestershire Local Housing Needs Assessment (LHNA) has been commissioned to identify the housing need and mix across Cotswold District. The findings of the assessment will be presented to Members in August, and will be published once all presentations have been completed at the six Districts. The next step is for Officers to assess the impact of the findings which will feed into the Local Plan review.

In parallel but separate from the Local Plan process, a draft Housing delivery strategy is being prepared and a formal report is expected at Cabinet in September 2020. The aim is to set out how the Council can provide truly affordable housing over its whole cost including rent and running costs to enable local people to remain in their communities and supporting them to gain access to longer term housing provision. The delivery strategy will be cross cutting, linking with other council priorities including climate change and health and well-being and will provide a framework against which potential schemes can be considered.

The strategy will look at all housing provision including homelessness, longer term housing for those on the housing register as well as delivering more broadly on the Council's housing priority. The mix of housing tenure will be determined on a site by site basis depending on the housing need for the area and the financial viability of the site.

A scheme to develop housing in Kemble has previously been the subject of Cabinet decisions and the Parish council and local communities were consulted earlier this year. This scheme will now be progressed in line with the Housing Delivery Strategy and a report will be brought to September Cabinet to agree next steps.

A planning application for 14 affordable homes in Avening was recently approved by the Planning committee which will deliver 9 social rent and 5 shared ownership properties, this scheme will also now be progressed.

A cross party Affordable Housing Board has been set up to review the proposals for housing delivery with its first meeting taking place in late July when the draft Housing Delivery Strategy was discussed.

Present a Local Plan which is Green to the Core

The Context

In July 2019 the Council declared a Climate Change Emergency and in July this year the Council made a further commitment to the environment by declaring an Ecological Emergency. Key to the commitments made in both emergencies is the partial update to the Local Plan and making it green to the core.

Since the adoption of the Local Plan, in August 2018, the National Planning Policy Framework has introduced new guidance. The guidance increases the importance of climate change adaptation and mitigation and the role Planning Policy has to play. In the next few months the Environment Bill and the Agricultural Bill will receive Royal Assent. Along with the Clean Growth Strategy they represent the Government's ambition to combat climate change and give the environment a bigger mandate.

Actions we are taking

The adopted Local Plan has been reviewed and at a meeting of Full Council in June 2020, members unanimously approved to partially update the local plan. A review of local plan policies is the first step in the local plan process and reveals which policies can be left as they are and which policies need updating and the options available to update them. Along with international and national pledges made by Central Government, the update will reflect the work being produced by the other services across the organisation. The Renewable Energy Strategy is a good example of this.

The Local Plan can be seen as the glue that holds various corporate objectives together and provides physical action; it also translates national legislation to a local level. The update of the Local Plan will aid the building of new homes, in the right place, with suitable green infrastructure that promotes the transition to carbon neutrality. It will assist in providing services and opportunities to enhance the area both for the wellbeing of the people living here as well as its visitors. It will also provide the tools to enhance, create and protect the local environment and the biodiversity of the District and its neighbours.

In the next coming months the Forward Planning team will be preparing various plan making documents such as the Local Development Scheme, Statement of Community Involvement which will support a forthcoming Issues and Options consultation. The exact dates of the consultation are yet to be agreed as is the technical detail behind the consultation itself. The next report will provide greater detail on the local plan programme of work and will include commentary on the emerging Issues and Options work and other related plan making activities such as the Council's five year housing land supply.

Ensure that all services delivered by the Council are delivered to the highest standard

The Context

We want our customers to have a great experience. Based on user research and feedback, some of the things we know that customers value include easy access to services when it suits them, prompt delivery of services and for services to be dealt with in a consistent way.

A range of service improvements will focus on people, processes and technology. A customer experience improvement team has been set up to implement a programme which focuses on aligning and improving processes by moving them to a self-serve environment and making them simple for residents to use in particular in Waste services, Revenues and Benefits and Regulatory services.

Actions we are taking

During Q1, members approved the contract award to Civica for a new Revenues and Benefit system for use across the partnership which will deliver effective, efficient and modern Revenues and Benefits Services. A full project plan is in place to upgrade Forest's system, and then to migrate Cotswold (December 2020) and West (January 2021) to Civiva in time for annual billing and benefit uprating. In May 2020 all three systems will be merged which will allow officers across the partnership to access all cases. There are two major benefits:

- customers will be able to self-serve for example, notify the Council of changes online; this will reduce the need to send out paper documents which is costly, and in turn will reduce our carbon footprint.
- the streamlining of processes and the ability to perform one annual billing process and one benefit uprating process across the partnership, saving huge amounts of time and effort.

Our Salesforce platform is used by Customer Services across the partnership and every day it manages over 1500 customer interactions.

The Live Chat capability which was launched on the Council's website in January allowing customers to interact in real time with Customer Services, also proved useful in supporting the CS team to handle the demand created by Covid-19 as well as the change to the waste contract.

In July, the Salesforce Einstein BOT was introduced to the Live Chat process which allows the customer to connect to an AI BOT which will attempt to automatically answer the questions. This service is available 24/7, although during working hours, our customers will still have the option of conversing with a real person.



Cotswold District Council

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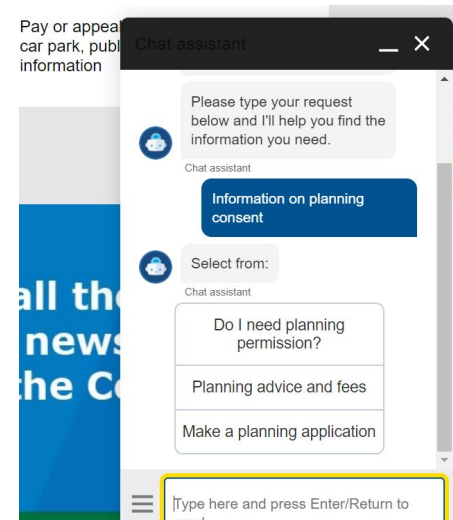
COVID-19 Grant Application

* Was the business trading on 11th March 2020?

Yes

No

[Next](#)



In May, Salesforce was used to support the Discretionary Business Grants process. An online form /flow was built in less than two weeks and was able to perform eligibility check so that we only received valid grant applications.

Once the application was received, for the first time, Salesforce was used by both Customer Services and the Back Office to process the application.

Salesforce was also used to create the necessary payment files for processing through the General Ledger and our BACS payment systems.

Help residents, businesses and communities to access the support they need to ensure a high level of health and wellbeing

The Context

Cotswold District has an aging population; over the last 10 years, it has experienced greater growth across all 65+ age groups compared to England and Wales. Many of our older residents live alone, and coupled with the rurality of the District, loneliness and access to services are issues for the District.

During the initial Lockdown, a significant number of staff were redeployed so that the Council could respond to the needs of its communities, and many staff continue to support communities in both the response and recovery phases.

Actions we are taking

The impact of Covid-19 on residents, particularly those residents living alone has led to an upsurge in community and voluntary sector activity.

Working in partnership has been key to responding to Covid-19. Throughout lock down, the Community Wellbeing team met regularly with a small group of key voluntary sector organisations including the Churn, North and South Cotswold Foodbanks, Cotswold Friends, Cotswold and Stroud Citizens Advice, Cotswold Counselling, Home Start, and GRCC, which has enabled the team to gain valuable insight into need of local communities and also to offer our partners support where and when it was needed.

The Community Wellbeing team contacted all Town and Parish councils to understand their support networks and what measures were in place to support residents, and from this information, a toolkit was developed. The toolkit helped the team to respond quickly to referrals from the Gloucestershire Hub as local voluntary and community groups and appropriate Town and Parish councils could be easily identified. During Q1, 543 residents were supported with shopping, picking up prescriptions and social contact.

Early in Q1, the Council launched a Community Resilience Grant scheme, with resource delegated by Gloucestershire County Council and backed up by the Council's own investment, to support those organisations incurring significant additional costs supporting residents through the Covid-19 crisis. In Q1, the Council provided funding totalling £45.5k to a number of organisations including the Churn, Cotswold Friends and the Citizens Advice. This scheme has ensured that vital services have been able to adapt and continue to support vulnerable people, for example Citizens Advice needed to deliver services virtually; and that new services could be delivered to meet the specific challenges of Covid-19.

The Council has also been supporting local businesses. Throughout May and then June the Council processed a total of 3035 business grant applications under two separate schemes, awarding a total of around £36 million to support businesses which had been forced to close during lock down. It has also applied Expanded Retail Relief to 1,228 businesses, totalling around £17.7 million, and Nursery Relief to 17 businesses totalling £76,188.

The Council has supported the High Streets to re-open by developing and delivering business support packs to 700 shops and businesses. It has also consulted with businesses to identify temporary highway solutions for the District's larger town centres to make shopping safe and to encourage customers to return. In addition the Council has developed and issued guidance packs for pubs, cafes and restaurants to support the re-opening of the hospitality sector.

In addition to the Covid-19 related work to support communities and businesses, Officers are making good progress on the Leisure Strategy. A review of local strategies and plans has taken place, as well as facilities audits of current provision. There has been a good level of engagement with an online consultation with stakeholders and residents. The next step will be to analyse all the data gathered to determine what the emerging themes are. Early indications suggest climate change and carbon footprint, encouraging active travel, reducing obesity and reducing isolation/loneliness will be key themes.