

DRAFT

Cotswold District Council

Corporate Strategy

2016-2019

Introduction

Introduction by Leader - to include:

Aim : To be recognised as the most efficient council in the country

Priorities:

- **To provide high quality services at the lowest possible cost to Council Taxpayers**
- **To protect the local environment whilst supporting economic growth**
- **To champion issues which are important to local people**

Background to the Strategy

Cotswold people

The population of Cotswold District is 84,367, which given its size of 450 square miles and its largely rural character means that there is a low density of population which in turn affects the costs of providing services.

The District also has an ageing population and has the highest proportion of people aged 65 and over in the County. This will affect things like the demand for suitable housing (eg extra care housing), home adaptations and other service provision. Cotswold District has an under representation of people under the age of 18 and of working age compared to the county average.

- In 2001, 20% of the population was 65 and over. In 2013, it was estimated that 24% of the population was 65 and over.
- In 2011, most residents were White British (95.1%), 1.5% lower than in 2001. The decrease was greater in Gloucestershire (3.2%), the South West (3.6%) and England and Wales (7%) over that period. The next largest ethnic group was 'Other White'.
- In 2011, there were 15.5% of total households in the District occupied by a person aged 65 or above living alone (higher than the county average of 13.2%).

Our Quality of Life

People living in Cotswold District are more likely to experience a good quality of life than elsewhere in Britain. Many parts of the District are in the least deprived 20% in England, with no parts in the most deprived 20%, according to the 2015 Index of Multiple Deprivation. However, some parts of the District experience specific elements of deprivation, with parts in the 10% most 'deprived' nationally in terms of access to housing and services (eg GP's surgeries, post offices etc), and living environment (eg housing condition, number of road traffic accidents) with other areas in the top 20%. The issues relating to access to housing and services are substantially due to the rural nature of the District. By working with others the Council wants to improve the situation in these areas.

Housing

Cotswold District is an attractive area to live, with many second or holiday homes. The area has high property prices and affordability of housing has been an issue for some years. In 2009 average house prices in the area were 10.88 times the average wage. This has now worsened to 11.15 times the average wage. Private sector rents have also risen higher than earnings across the county. Therefore, the demand for affordable housing continues to be an issue in this District.

The Local Economy

The District weathered the recent recession better than many other areas, with lower levels of unemployment. Whilst local people are employed in a wide range of occupations, Tourism is a major part of the local economy. Technology is also allowing large numbers of people to work from home. We recognise the importance of the local economy and will be working to encourage tourism and the availability of high speed broadband which is increasingly important to businesses.

- The number claiming Job Seekers Allowance in June 2015 was 0.6%, compared with 1.7% nationally.
- The wholesale and retail trade is the largest employer (17.3% of workforce), followed by education (10.7%) and health and social work activities (8.3%).
- In 2011 13% of people worked from home (higher than the county average of 8.5%).
- In 2011 almost 14,000 residents commuted out of the District, many to larger employment centres nearby. Conversely, almost 16,000 commuted into the District.

Transport

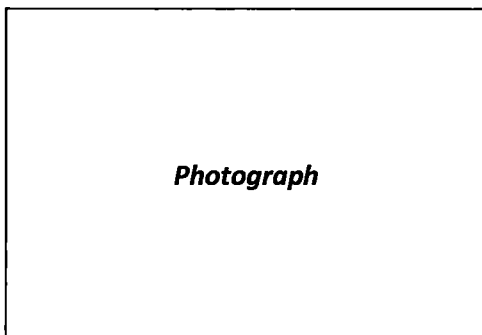
Whilst the District has good road links, with easy access to the M4, a single carriageway stretch of the A417 near Birdlip is a major bottleneck at peak times delaying access to the M5. The Council is working with partners to ensure that proposed improvements, known as the A417 'Missing Link' are implemented. A further cause for concern is the number of accidents on the A429 section of the Fosseway, which provides a major route from Cirencester to the Midlands.

- **Priority – To provide high quality services at the lowest possible cost to Council Taxpayers**

We believe that it is important to help local people by keeping Council Tax and our fees and charges as low as possible. We have managed to reduce Council Tax for the past three years, having frozen it for the previous two years, representing a real terms reduction of more than 25%.

Our grant from central government has been reduced significantly over the past five years and there are clearly more reductions to come. By carefully managing our budgets and putting efficiency measures in place we have been able to not only cope with past grant reductions, but also reduce Council Tax without significant effects on the level of service we offer. We are proposing to take the same prudent approach to our finances in the future.

For a number of years, we have shared services with West Oxfordshire District Council, and, for some services, have also joined with Forest of Dean and Cheltenham Councils. We are now working on a project with those three other councils known as 2020 Vision. This Vision is for each of the four Councils to retain their independence and identity, but working together and sharing resources to maximise mutual benefit. This will lead to more efficient and effective delivery of local services. This approach is expected to save this Council £1.65m by 2020, but we aim to ensure that the public will see no reduction in the services they receive.



Objectives

Our objectives for the next four years are to:

- Reduce the costs of services, for instance through implementing 2020 Vision
- Freeze charges for car parking, green waste and pest control until 2020
- Keep Council Tax as low as possible

Key Tasks

- Implementation of 2020 Vision to deliver £1.65m per annum savings by 2020.
- Implementation of a new shared Public Protection service by the end of 2016.
- Improve buildings and asset utilisation to deliver revenue savings by working with key partners in the public and voluntary sector.
- Continue to rationalise under-utilised assets in Council ownership.

Priority – Protecting the local environment whilst supporting economic growth

Cotswold District is a unique area and that makes it a major destination for tourists. The high quality, distinctiveness and diversity of our local environment (natural, built and historic) is also very important to those who live and work here. Alongside this, we recognise the importance of the local economy, and the need to create more high quality jobs, and will support this at the same time as protecting the environment.

Approximately 70% of the District is covered by the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. We also have 6,000 listed buildings and 144 conservation areas. Tourism is important to the area, being a significant part of the local economy.

A key element of meeting this priority is through the development of our Local Plan, which aims to balance the need for economic growth and housing with preserving the distinctive character of the Cotswolds.

The District has been affected by flooding in the past, and our Local Plan will also seek to reduce the environmental impact of development and our vulnerability to climate change, including flooding, for instance by encouraging water and energy efficiency and in the location of development.

We are also working with partners in the Local Enterprise Partnership to help the local economy. We recognise the importance of our towns and villages for shopping, leisure, cultural and community activities and will take action to encourage their vitality and viability.

We also work hard to ensure that as much waste is recycled as possible. In 2014/15, approximately 58% of waste collected was sent for re-use, recycling or composting. The Council's waste and grounds maintenance service is carried out very efficiently by Ubico Ltd, a company we established in 2012 with Cheltenham Borough Council.

Our work on reducing our energy costs and carbon emissions is continuing, for instance in our carbon reduction projects across the Council's leisure/cultural facilities.

Objectives

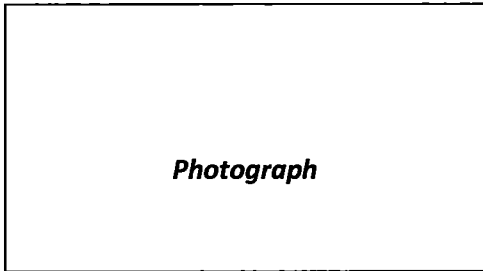
Our objectives for the next four years are to:

- Conserve and enhance the natural, built and historic environment
- Continue to support the local economy by working with the Local Enterprise Partnership and local communities to remove barriers to the delivery of new employment opportunities
- Support sustainable tourism to attract higher numbers of longer stay visitors and increase its economic value
- Reduce waste and increase recycling

Key Tasks

- Submit the Local Plan to the Department of Communities and Local Government for examination by Autumn 2016.
- Assess future car parking demands in Cirencester, and deliver solutions to meet those needs.
- Deliver initiatives to reduce waste to landfill and increase recycling, for instance by improving the amount of composting of food waste, to help meet the Council's targets.

We will support the bid for devolution in Gloucestershire. One of the key aims of the bid is to improve economic growth in the county through better co-ordination of strategic decision making, utilisation of public sector resources and infrastructure development.



- Deliver the Local Plan Strategies including progressing a new strategic development site and associated infrastructure in Cirencester, to support housing and employment needs in the area. The timetable will be as set out in the Local Development Scheme and Housing Trajectory.
- Develop and produce an Economic Development Action Plan for the District to support the Local Plan strategies by 31st December 2017.
- Investigate means of increasing international visitors to the Cotswolds by the end of this Council Plan.
- Work with developers to deliver the comprehensive redevelopment of the Brewery Court scheme in Cirencester during 2017.
- Use locally-focussed budgets to keep the Cotswolds clean.

Priority – Championing issues which are important to local people

Our residents by and large enjoy a good quality of life. However, we know that, by its very nature as a rural area, some people have difficulty accessing services like GPs surgeries and Post Offices. Local people and local businesses are also disadvantaged by High Speed Broadband not being available everywhere, and poor mobile phone signals in some areas. We aim to improve people's quality of life by finding ways of maintaining and supporting the infrastructure, services and facilities that communities need.

The lack of public transport in some areas is also an issue, as are problems on our roads such as the bottleneck on the A417 near Birdlip and accidents on the Fosseway. We are actively supporting the proposed A417 'Missing Link' scheme to address the congestion on that road. At the same time we would like to reduce car use, and in our Local Plan we will propose locating developments where there is good access to jobs, services and facilities. We will also support improvements in public transport and walking and cycling networks.

This is an area of high property prices and we expect that the District will continue to be an expensive place to buy a home for the foreseeable future. Affordability of housing is therefore an issue for many, particularly young, people and we are working with developers and Housing Associations to address this in both traditional and innovative ways.

The Council will continue to work with town and parish councils and local communities to ensure that we understand local concerns. One of the ways we do this is through supporting communities in the production of Neighbourhood Plans which allow them to decide where new developments such as homes and shops should be built and what they look like. We also help with the production of Town or Parish Plans which set out a vision for a community and an action plan to address issues raised by local people.

Along with other District Councils we will be engaging with Public Health services at a County level and with the NHS at a local level around health and wellbeing, and supporting our

Objectives

Our objectives for the next four years are to:

- Provide affordable homes for local people, of appropriate types and tenures, including starter homes and homes for life
- Build capacity and develop partnerships with statutory and voluntary organisations to increase resilience to enable communities to help themselves
- Campaign on issues which are of concern to local people, including access to services such as health services, new technologies and community facilities
- Maximise quality of life by seeking to maintain and support the infrastructure, services and facilities needed to support our communities and businesses.

Key Tasks

- Deliver 575 affordable homes between 2015 and 2018.
- Lobby relevant bodies to improve the ambulance service and to improve road links and road safety in the District.
- Implement a Community Infrastructure Levy and associated priorities charging schedule, in order to fund infrastructure required as a result of development by xxxxx

Photograph

- Support local communities to ensure parish priorities for infrastructure requirements are identified and opportunities for developer contributions are maximised. (Joint pilot projects with Gloucestershire Rural Community Council are starting in Spring 2016 with two parish councils.)
- Work with Fastershire and BDUK to improve the roll out of high speed broadband to all parts of the District by the end of this Strategy.
- Work with mobile phone suppliers to improve coverage of their signals across the District by the end of this Strategy.
- Support the work on devolution in Gloucestershire.
- Use locally-focussed budgets to support youth activities.

Our Finances

Medium Term Financial Strategy

Local government funding was changed significantly from 1st April 2013 when the Government introduced the new Local Government Resource Regime. Under the new regime, around 40% of the Council's Government funding comes directly from Business Rates, with the balance from Revenue Support Grant and New Homes Bonus. This is a key strand of the Government's policy to localise financing of local authorities and brings the potential for increased risks or increased rewards depending upon the Council's ability to raise business rate income.

The Council has prepared a three-year financial strategy which takes into account likely reductions to its funding from central government, and other changes which will have a financial impact upon the Council.

A summary of the 2016/17 Budget is set out below:

	2016/17
Net Operating Expenditure	£
Financed by:-	
Investment Income	£
Business Rates	£
Net Government Grant	£
New Homes Bonus	£
Reserves	£
Council Tax	£
Band D Council Tax	£

(This page will be completed when the Budget is approved)

Measuring Progress towards the Council's aim

The Council's aim is to be regarded as the most efficient council in the country. We will measure our progress towards this aim using the following basket of indicators

- Overall cost of council services per head of population (Revenue Estimates)
- Rate of increase in council tax
- Time taken to process housing benefit/council tax benefit – new claims
- Percentage of council tax collected
- Amount of residual household waste per household (kg)
- Percentage of household waste sent for recycling, composting and reuse
- Sickness absence rate (average full-time equivalent days per full-time equivalent)
- Unemployment claimant rate
- Overall crime rate per 1,000 population
- Percentage of major planning applications determined in accordance with relevant timescales

Targets for each of these indicators will be set early in the financial year 2016/17 and quarterly reports made to Cabinet on progress.