



COTSWOLD

District Council

COUNCIL PRIORITIES REPORT

October – December 2025

Our Purpose, visions, priorities and values

Cotswold District Council serves one of the UK's most iconic areas, home to 90,000 residents across more than 100 communities and parishes. We work to protect its unique character, support its economy, and improve lives.

Our Purpose

We provide high-quality services that meet community needs—from planning and housing to climate action and wellbeing. As local government faces significant change, we remain focused on delivering with **purpose, integrity, and ambition**. This strategy sets out our vision to **2028**, when national plans for Local Government Reorganisation are expected to create a new unitary council, and includes an action plan to leave a lasting legacy.

Our Vision

To leave a legacy of:

- Affordable, sustainable housing
- Resilient, connected communities
- A thriving local economy
- A protected natural environment
- Transparent, high-quality public services

Our Values

Everything we do is built on trust, transparency, and listening to our communities. We:

- **Put communities first** – their priorities are our priorities
- **Work as one team** – for residents and businesses
- **Focus on efficiency and value** – ensuring good use of resources
- **Set up for success** – to deliver against our corporate priorities

Our strategic priorities

Between now and 2028, the priorities we've set out to achieve this legacy are:

- Preparing for the future
- Delivering good services
- Responding to the climate emergency
- Delivering housing
- Supporting communities
- Supporting the economy



Preparing for the Future

The Context

Gloucestershire is set to move to a unitary structure in 2028, with Cotswold District Council services transferring to a successor authority. Our focus remains on ensuring a smooth transition while continuing to meet residents' needs. We are driving organisational change, developing our workforce, and progressing a new Local Plan. Engagement with town and parish councils and collaboration with partner authorities is underway to design future services and ensure decisions reflect local priorities.

Actions we are taking

In 2025, the Council launched an ambitious transformation programme to modernise services, strengthen digital capabilities, and prepare for future governance changes. This reflects our commitment to delivering accessible, high-quality services while ensuring financial sustainability and organisational resilience. Against a backdrop of rising demand, technological change, and shifting national policy, our approach aims to create a more agile, efficient, and customer-focused organisation.

The programme is underpinned by a clear vision: improving outcomes for residents, enhancing organisational culture, and ensuring readiness for potential changes in local government. An initial Strategy Action Plan has been drafted and is being assessed to prioritise initiatives based on speed, cost, and scalability. The plan includes proposals for service redesign, restructures, and expanded use of digital solutions, and has been aligned with the ICT development programme. Digital transformation is central to this work, with several AI initiatives being scoped to improve accessibility and support digital inclusion. Workstreams within the technical programme are defining CDC-specific AI and digital projects, with meetings scheduled with Lead Members and ICT to assess feasibility and delivery options.

In parallel, the Council is actively engaged in Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). Proposals for both single- and two-unitary models were considered at Overview and Scrutiny on 17 November and Full Council on 26 November, with Cabinet supporting a single Gloucestershire unitary authority. Planning for the next phase is underway using a new programme and portfolio management approach, supported by officer engagement and a workshop on 10 November. The programme is preparing for statutory consultation, expected to begin in February.

Discussions with Gloucestershire Leaders have progressed, with agreement to continue considering three strategic options for devolution and a strategic mayoral authority until the Government decides on the LGR model.

The People and Culture Strategy has made significant progress. In September 2025, Cabinet approved the Year 1 Implementation Plan, workforce values, and a Communications and Engagement Strategy. Fortnightly LGR updates via the staff portal and six-weekly all-staff briefings continue to support staff engagement. New visuals and content were rolled out in Quarter 3 to embed the Council's values, alongside initiatives such as improved onboarding, a pilot coaching scheme, and enhanced recognition. Publica and shareholder councils have also prioritised reviews of Publica-delivered services to ensure alignment with future governance arrangements.

Looking ahead, the Council is preparing to adopt a new Local Plan, which will provide a development framework for the Cotswold area post-2028. This plan will deliver affordable housing, employment opportunities, and infrastructure for current and future generations, while conserving and enhancing the district's nationally significant landscape. Regulation 18 consultation has now been completed, and evidence remains on track for submission in December 2026.

Delivering Good Services



The Context

The Council is committed to providing high-quality services that offer value for money, tackle climate change, and meet community needs. We've strengthened accountability by bringing key services in-house, advanced a Local Plan update to deliver sustainable growth, and earned positive feedback from the LGA for our progress. Current priorities include modernising waste services, improving digital engagement, preparing for legislative changes, and implementing strategies for parking, financial resilience, and income generation. These actions ensure services remain responsive, sustainable, and future-ready.

Actions we are taking

The Council is driving forward a series of strategic projects to modernise waste, environmental, planning, and infrastructure services, aligning them with wider transformation and climate ambitions. A major focus is delivery of the updated Fleet Replacement Programme, approved by Cabinet in January. This includes replacing the ageing kerbside recycling and food waste fleets and taking early steps towards decarbonisation through the introduction of one electric vehicle and the use of Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil where its sustainability can be assured. Work is also assessing refurbishment opportunities for other vehicles to reduce costs and environmental impact, ensuring the fleet strategy supports future service resilience and the transition to ultra-low-emission technologies.

Improving customer engagement is another priority. The Council is reviewing existing digital tools—including the Waste Wizard and collection day checker—to identify opportunities for a more intuitive, real-time customer experience. In-cab systems are now being rolled out on street-cleansing services to support faster issue resolution and further digitisation of operational data.

The Council is preparing for significant changes in national waste legislation. Current policy expectations are being used to model potential impacts on waste flows and inform the design and capacity of new recycling vehicles, including possible requirements for collecting additional materials such as flexible plastics.

In planning, the Council continues to implement recommendations from the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) peer review. Q3 activity focused on recruitment following the restructure of Development Management, Enforcement, and Planning Policy teams. New reporting mechanisms have been introduced to monitor stakeholder response times, pre-application fees have been reviewed ahead of the next financial year, and work is underway to refresh the pre-application service for April.

Digitisation of development management processes has reached a key stage, with testing of the new Enterprise system currently in progress. These improvements support more efficient case management, enhanced enforcement, and opportunities to pilot AI tools to streamline correspondence and reporting.

Work is also progressing across parking services. The new Car Parking Strategy has been approved and has now moved into implementation and business-as-usual. Capital investment works across car parks are complete, with ongoing maintenance and cross-service collaboration to address operational issues. Charging mechanisms have been introduced at all Council-owned public toilets, except Northleach pending discussions on future ownership and management.

Responding to the Climate Emergency



The Context

The climate and ecological crises pose existential threats. A report published by Defra on the 20th January 2026 stated ecosystem degradation is occurring across all regions and every critical ecosystem is on a pathway to collapse (irreversible loss of function beyond repair). The report states the consequences of this ecosystem degradation include geopolitical instability, economic insecurity, conflict, migration and increased inter-state competition for resources. Cotswold District Council declared a climate and ecological emergency in 2019 and adopted its Climate Emergency Strategy (2020–2030), setting ambitious targets: an 80% reduction in emissions by 2030 and net zero by 2045.

Actions we are taking

The Council has made strong progress in cutting operational carbon emissions, achieving a 41% reduction since 1990, from 4.7 million kg CO₂e to 2.76 million kg CO₂e in 2022–23 (latest data). Key initiatives include:

- **EV infrastructure:** 24 new EV chargers have been installed across Stow-on-the-Wold, Moreton-in-Marsh, Tetbury, and Cirencester, bringing the total to 49 Council-installed chargers out of 150 public chargers in the district. This supports residents without off-street parking and aligns with the ambition for an EV charger within a 10-minute walk wherever possible.
- **Embedding climate action:** A Climate Board was established and met for the first time in November 2025, considering options to reduce emissions from buildings and waste services. Actions are being integrated into service planning, with several already progressing.
- **Waste fleet decarbonisation:** Waste and environment services account for 43% of Council emissions. To address this, the district's diesel waste fleet will be replaced with 30 lorries running on hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) and one electric vehicle—part of a £7.8m investment supporting long-term decarbonisation.
- **Solar and retrofit schemes:** The Cotswold Home Solar scheme has enabled 53 installations, with 26 more in progress. A countywide retrofit support service launched in January 2025 is providing tailored advice and vetted installers, supported locally by a Retrofit Engagement Officer. Further retrofit events are planned through Spring. Draft planning policies promoting renewable energy deployment are progressing through the Local Plan process, informed by the 2025 Renewable Energy Study to ensure the plan is "Green to the Core."
- **Climate resilience:** A Climate Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (CRVA) has been published, providing evidence on current and future climate risks across Gloucestershire and highlighting best practice and next steps for adaptation. Planning for priority follow-up actions is underway.
- **Community engagement:** Carbon literacy training, behaviour-change campaigns, and funding opportunities such as Crowdfund Cotswolds continue to support local climate action. Partnerships with housing providers, including Bromford, are helping strengthen climate resilience in affordable homes.



Delivering Housing

The Context

Cotswold faces a severe housing affordability crisis, with property prices far exceeding local incomes and a shortage of genuinely affordable homes. Many residents, especially younger people, are forced to leave the area, threatening community resilience. The council is committed to delivering good-quality, affordable housing, prioritising social rent and homes for young people, families, and veterans. New homes will be energy-efficient and carbon-neutral to reduce costs and support sustainability. Tackling homelessness and ensuring long-term housing solutions are central to our strategy because secure housing underpins health, wellbeing, and strong communities.

Actions we are taking

Meeting sharply increased government housing targets while protecting the Cotswolds' unique landscape remains one of the Council's most significant challenges. National policy now requires planning for 18,650 new homes by 2043, more than double previous requirements, despite over 80% of the district being designated National Landscape, severely restricting where development can occur. In response, the Council is rapidly updating its Local Plan. Regulation 18 consultation is now complete, and nearly 200 sites were submitted through the Call for Sites process. Strategic options under consideration include a new settlement near Driffield, extensions to several towns and villages, and smaller-scale developments distributed across the district. All work remains on track for submission of the updated Plan by December 2026.

Alongside meeting housing targets, the Council remains committed to delivering genuinely affordable homes. High land values and property prices, often more than 16 times average rural incomes, continue to create barriers, but partnership working with housing associations and parish councils is ongoing, and the rural exception site pipeline continues to grow. Recent schemes, such as the Avening development opened by HRH The Princess Royal, demonstrate how high-quality, energy-efficient homes can be delivered in rural settings using technologies such as air-source heat pumps and solar panels while maintaining traditional Cotswold character.

The Council's Housing Strategy focuses on meeting diverse housing needs, expanding affordable housing supply, and creating sustainable, climate-resilient homes. Work to refocus the strategy on strategic actions is progressing well, with the first draft achieved in October 2025 and alignment with Local Plan activity underway. Quarterly reviews of H-CLIC data continue to inform emerging trends and ensure that the strategy responds to changes in housing demand.

Preventing homelessness remains a core priority. The Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2025–2030, adopted in September 2025, is now being implemented and monitored. The Council already prevents more than 200 households a year from becoming homeless through early intervention, landlord negotiation, and targeted support. Rough sleeping remains extremely low in the district due to proactive outreach and rapid response arrangements. Ongoing monitoring ensures actions stay on track and resources remain focused where they are most needed.

Looking ahead, the Council will continue to balance housing delivery with environmental stewardship. Draft development management policies aim to make the updated Local Plan "Green to the Core," embedding biodiversity enhancements, green infrastructure, and carbon-neutral design principles. Evidence from the 2025 Renewable Energy Study and other climate resilience work is helping ensure new development supports thriving communities without compromising the Cotswolds' nationally significant landscape.

Supporting Communities



The Context

Cotswold District benefits from strong health outcomes, low crime, and natural beauty. However, challenges remain, particularly for an ageing population in rural areas facing loneliness and limited access to services. Broader issues such as unemployment, low income, poor housing, and lifestyle choices also impact wellbeing. Addressing these requires a collaborative, whole-systems approach using asset-based community development.

Actions We Are Taking

Cotswold District Council continues to strengthen its role as a leader in health and wellbeing, promoting active lifestyles and inclusive community initiatives. The Leisure Strategy, shaped around local priorities, guides investment in facilities and non-facility programmes, overseen by the Active Cotswolds Programme Board across three themes: Healthier District, Connected Community, and Active Environment. The leisure contract continues to exceed performance targets, including gym memberships, participation levels, and Learn to Swim enrolments, supported by partnerships such as The Churn Project and The Long Table. Cultural engagement has also increased through activity at the Corinium Museum, which delivered major events and received several awards, alongside exhibitions such as the Woolly Mammoth and Project Orpheus.

The Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme has been renewed for three years, with delivery through providers including World Jungle. Summer HAF 2025 received positive feedback, and planning for future sessions is underway. World Jungle also continues to support youth-focused events including the Cotswold Youth Mobile Festival.

To complement HAF, the Council secured £50,000 for 14 Strengthening Local Communities events. Ten events have already engaged more than 600 residents, with further sessions planned in Northleach, Avening, Mickleton and Kemble.

Strong partnership working remains central, with collaboration from the NHS, Citizens Advice, Severn Wye, Foodbanks, and Carers Hub on cost-of-living pressures, health inequalities, and social isolation. Officers also contribute through the Integrated Locality Partnership and GCC's One Plan Cotswolds group to support children and vulnerable households.

The Cotswold Food Network continues to advance food sustainability through resources such as the Food Procurement Guide, Allotments Mini Guide, and Cookery Classes Guide. Outreach tools, including the Low-Income Family Tracker and the updated Worrying About Money? leaflet, are helping support low-income households. Work is also underway to scope a Venison Supply Project to support food charities.

Youth engagement remains a priority, with support for Northleach Teen Space, digital skills programmes, summer activities, and the Unsung Heroes Young Heroes category, which will return in November.

Crowdfund Cotswold continues to promote community-led initiatives, supporting over £1 million in local projects. Recent bids include community sheds, skateparks, and murals, such as The Churn Project's Community Shed.

Engagement with town and parish councils has stepped up as part of preparation for Local Government Reorganisation and the Local Plan Review. Two forums in Q3 brought together more than 150 clerks, and senior officers attended 13 public meetings on the Local Plan. Town and parish councils received toolkits, newsletters, and a dedicated LGR update.

Finally, the Council continues to work with the Community Safety Partnership to improve road safety and reduce antisocial behaviour. A community speedwatch film will be released shortly and the district supported Operation Shield, a summer town-centre safety initiative.

Supporting the Economy



The Context

The Cotswold economy is diverse, with businesses of all sizes across multiple sectors. While tourism remains a major employer, the district's economic potential goes far beyond visitor activity. Our focus is on creating a resilient, balanced economy by supporting innovation, enhancing digital capability, and promoting green growth. Through targeted investment and partnership working, we aim to nurture high-value, low-impact sectors such as agritech, cyber, medical technology and environmental innovation—providing better opportunities for local people and businesses.

Actions we are taking

The Green Economic Growth Strategy 2025–29 guides economic development activity and is overseen by the Cotswold Economic Advisory Group, which includes key partners such as St James's Place, Cirencester College, and the Royal Agricultural University (RAU). The refreshed strategy focuses on creating high-value, low-impact jobs, supporting sustainable growth, and promoting skills development, including apprenticeships and T-Levels.

Through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), the Council has delivered projects such as business support via the Growth Hub, heritage restorations, and the rebranding of the Cotswold Water Park area as the Cotswold Lakes. Outreach from the Growth Hub has expanded to towns like Moreton-in-Marsh, and the most recent round of UKSPF and REPF funding has supported initiatives including mentoring for young people, creative co-working spaces, and town centre improvements. Nine projects received over £120,000 from the UKSPF in 2025/26, including £25,000 for Cirencester Chamber of Commerce to support early careers. Additional funding from the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) has supported rural business grants, village hall upgrades, and active travel schemes. Projects funded from 2022–25 are complete, with 2025–26 funding full allocated and projects either completed or underway, including energy efficiency measures, solar panels, and community facility improvements.

Town centres remain a priority. Cirencester's vacancy rate has fallen to 4.8% with refurbished units and new social enterprises such as The Old Department Store occupying former retail spaces. Smaller towns maintain low vacancy rates, though conversions to residential use and loss of critical mass remain concerns. A UKSPF-funded consultant is investigating higher vacancy areas like Lechlade, Moreton-in-Marsh and Tetbury to develop action plans.

The Council is working with partners to grow sectors such as agritech, cyber, and medical tech. Key projects include:

- RAU Innovation Village – £140M scheme, planning application submitted.
- ZeroAvia at Cotswold Airport – advancing hydrogen-electric aviation.
- Fire Service College – expanding as a Centre for National Resilience.
- A417 Missing Link – £460M infrastructure project improving connectivity.

The Growth Hub, funded through UKSPF, continues to provide expert business support and has launched a second round of the Cotswold Catalyst incubator programme for high-potential start-ups. This six-month initiative offers tailored workshops, co-working space, and access to thought leaders, helping businesses scale and thrive. Cirencester Growth Hub remains the best-performing hub in Gloucestershire.

Cultural development is supported through the Creative Cotswolds Action Plan, approved in July 2025, which aims to strengthen the district's cultural sector. Delivery will now be driven forward by the newly appointed Leisure and Culture Support Officer, who started on 20 January 2026, enabling this work to be effectively facilitated and coordinated across programmes.