



COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL PRIORITIES REPORT
October 2020 - December 2020

Cotswold District Council Corporate Plan 2020-24

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



Our Principles

- rebuilding trust and confidence in the council by promoting a culture of openness and transparency
- providing value for money for our residents and businesses by using our resources wisely and investing in the district's fabric and future
- listening to the needs of our community and acting on what we hear

Deliver services to the highest standard



The Context

The Council aims to create services that are inclusive and flexible which meet the diverse and changing needs of its residents and communities. To achieve this, it will be important to listen to residents to understand what is important to them, identify the areas in which they need support, and adapt. In the context of reducing budgets over the last ten years and the phasing out of incentivised income streams such as New Homes Bonus, which has been further exacerbated by the impact of Covid-19, the Council will need to take a strategic approach, and make the best use of the available resources.

The Council will work with a range of public and private sector partners to help deliver its aims and objectives and to provide services seamlessly. The emphasis will be on efficiency and effectiveness whilst remaining true to the Council's commitments on climate change and a green economy.

Actions we are taking

One of the Council's aims is to establish financial resilience which will enable investment in our priorities. In September 2020, the Cabinet and Council approved a revised budget which reflects the impact of Covid-19; and adopted the Recovery Investment Strategy 2020-24 which sets out the framework within which the Council can invest in the infrastructure of the Cotswold District which will deliver on the Council priorities whilst also closing the emerging budget gap set out in the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The Council consulted on its budget and investment in council priorities between 4 November to 11 December 2020; leaflets were delivered to 18,000 homes across the District, and Town and Parish councils were invited to attend a webinar. The outcome of the consultation will be considered by Cabinet in January 2021. The Medium Term Financial Strategy will be considered by Council in February 2021.

The Council recognises that communication and engagement are key to working with our partners to deliver services; and work has started to establish excellent working relationships with town and parish councils. The Council is compiling a list of all parish councillors in the District, with the intention of sending a communique in early 2021 which will provide an update on the Corporate plan and the arrival of the new Chief Executive. Currently, it is proposed that this communique will also link to a survey to gather information on their thoughts, and preferences on future engagement, through

newsletters and surgeries/fora. Alongside this work, desk based research into good practice on protocols for engagement between principal authorities and local councils has commenced. There is a parallel work stream reviewing the Council's wider approach to engagement.

The Council has commenced some of the actions to deliver a simpler, and more efficient and effective way of delivering parking within the District. Construction works on the new Whiteway car park were completed prior to Christmas; and a temporary licence was agreed with the Rugby Club to enable non-permit holders to park at the car park during the run-up to Christmas. From January, it will offer parking for permit holders only during the week which will release over 150 all day parking spaces in the centre of Cirencester; and at weekends, it will be used by the rugby club. As each permit holder has a guaranteed space, there will be carbon savings as the need to search for parking is eliminated. The Whiteway car park also has four electric vehicle bays with fast charging points.

The Council is taking steps to move to cashless parking. It launched a new PayByPhone app on 1 October which is free to use, and includes a number of features such as reminders that the parking period is due to expire, and a 24/7 support service. The next step is to remove cash payments at all council owned car parks over the next 12 months. Moving to cashless parking has multiple benefits; not only will it support our carbon reduction commitment but it will reduce the costs associated with cash collecting and vandalism of pay and display machines. In January 2021, Cabinet approved the proposal to remove the option to pay by cash in all car parks, and to implement a phased approach to the removal of cash payments. The phased approach will enable the Council and its service provider, PayByPhone, to promote the change and assist users over an extended period.

As part of the Council's aim to provide a trusted, inclusive and transparent planning service, the professional planning team is being restructured so that it can be both more resilient and more responsive to the changing needs of the service. It will help to provide greater clarity on the responsibilities of individual officers so that Members and customers have a clear understanding of who to contact for their varying needs. The service is in the process of recruiting to various roles, and is on schedule to complete the restructure by March 2021.

The pre-application service is currently being re-designed across the three partner Councils and the revised pre-application charging scheme for this Council will be considered as part of that re-design, and if appropriate, launched alongside the implementation of the revised pre-application service.

As part of the Council's aim to promote and implement civic pride initiatives, a new street nameplate specification has been adopted, and a programme of replacing worn and damaged street name plates has commenced.



Respond to the climate crisis

The Context

The Climate Emergency Strategy 2020-30 was unanimously adopted by the Council in September 2020. Since then, there have been important changes to the national regulatory and policy framework for the climate emergency, which further reinforce the urgency of action to tackle the climate emergency.

In November 2020, the government set out a ten point 'green industrial revolution' plan, linked to a £12 billion investment supporting 250,000 jobs. Whilst the focus of the plan is industrial heartlands, there is relevance for Cotswold District. In summary, the plan's points are: 40GW of offshore wind by 2030; 5GW of low carbon hydrogen production capacity (and develop the first town heated entirely by hydrogen) by 2030; nuclear energy; national infrastructure for electric vehicles; public transport, cycling and walking; technology for zero-emission planes and ships; energy efficiency improvements to buildings and 600,000 heat pumps every year by 2028; carbon capture and storage (remove 10Mt CO₂ by 2030); protect and restore the natural environment and plant 30k Ha of trees per year; and mobilising green finance.

In December, the government's independent committee on climate change (CCC) published its 6th carbon budget, i.e. the legal limit (under the Climate Change Act 2008) for UK net emissions of greenhouse gases over the years 2033-37. This emissions reduction will meet the UK target of net zero emissions by 2050, and comply with the Paris Agreement. The report is the most comprehensive advice the CCC has ever produced, and makes sobering reading. It recognises that the emissions reduction has huge challenges but also economic, nature, health and wellbeing advantages. Low carbon investment must scale up to £50 billion/year to deliver Net Zero, and the CCC estimates the cost of the transition at < 1% of GDP over 30 years. The report states 'The implication of this path is clear: the utmost focus is required from government over the next ten years. If policy is not scaled up across every sector; if business is not encouraged to invest; if the people of the UK are not engaged in this challenge - the UK will not deliver Net Zero by 2050. **The 2020s must be the decisive decade of progress and action**'.

The CCC's 6th carbon budget pathway provides a useful point of reference for the Council's own action over this decade, relating to: 1) the take-up of low carbon solutions (e.g. by early 2030s all new cars and vans and all boiler replacements are low-carbon – largely electric, and by 2040 all new trucks are low-carbon). 2) the expansion of low-carbon energy supplies (eg UK electricity production is zero carbon by 2035, offshore wind becomes the backbone of the whole UK energy system, and electricity demand grows by a half over the next 15 years, and doubling or even trebling by 2050). 3) The reduction in demand for carbon-intensive activities (e.g. less resource waste, less reliance on high-carbon goods, a national building insulation programme, 20% reduction in meat and dairy consumption by 2030, fewer car miles and flights). 4) greenhouse gas removals through agriculture and land use (e.g. farming is transformed while maintaining the same level of food production, with woodland cover rising from 13% of UK land today to 15% by 2035 and 18% by 2050, and more energy crops grown).

Actions we are taking

A major source of greenhouse gas emissions from the District is transport (burning diesel and petrol), which accounts for almost 50% of the District's overall emissions. In December, the Council began recruitment of a sustainable transport officer, who will be responsible for developing and delivering a new Sustainable Transport Strategy. The strategy will aim to promote active travel (cycling and walking), enable modal shift (particularly reducing reliance on car use for short journeys), increase the speed of electrification of vehicles, and work closely with the County Council and other district councils, and communities, to enable these changes to take place, and identify new solutions and opportunities. A crucial part of this work will be engaging with residents to encourage behaviour change.

The Council's electric vehicle charging point delivery plan was adopted by Cabinet in January 2021. The plan commits the Council to a number of actions relating to the installation of charge points in Council owned car parks, town and parish council land and other locations; encouraging homeowners to install EVCPs and requiring developers to include EVCPs in new build; working with the County Council on on-street charging installations, and encouraging businesses and taxi fleets to install EVCPs. Four electric vehicle bays with fast charging points have been installed at the Whiteway car park; the car park opened in January as a 'park and stride' car park servicing commuters. The vehicle purchasing policy for Ubico has been updated to make explicit the requirement to prioritise the selection of low-carbon vehicles wherever possible, and the new CDC hybrid (petrol electric) fitters' van has received its new livery. The hybrid drivetrain, whilst not zero carbon, enables the van to use zero-emission electric power in built-up areas, contributing to reduced air pollution.

A significant part of both the Council's own emissions footprint, and that of the whole District, is heating buildings (homes and workplaces). In relation to domestic properties in the District, Council-supported advice (via Severn Wye Energy Agency) to home-owning residents on the national Green Homes Grant (GHG) initiative continues, but take-up of the GHG nationally has been low, not least due to insufficient numbers of qualified installers. Installations of insulation and heat pumps to park homes in Cotswold District, funded through the GHG Local Authority Delivery scheme is also progressing.

In December 2020, a review was undertaken of four key Council buildings (Trinity Road, Cirencester Leisure Centre, Bourton on the Water Leisure Centre and Moreton in Marsh Area Centre). It identified up to £1.2m of investment opportunity in carbon reduction in three of the buildings (excluding Trinity Road), from a range of measures from LED lighting replacements to air and water-source heat pumps for pool and space heating, ventilation heat recovery, and solar PV panels. An application was made in January 2021 to the BEIS Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) to cover the full capex of these installations which, if implemented, would reduce operating costs and significantly reduce carbon emissions from the Council's estate and operations. The PSDS is currently over-subscribed, but it is likely that the treasury will inject further funds in April. If it is not possible to access PSDS capital, many of these individual measures will be taken forward with direct Council investment, or using suitable low-cost finance such as a Salix loan.

The Council's Recovery Investment Strategy 2020-2024 identifies green energy and carbon reduction as one priority investment area. In line with that objective, the Council continues to progress discussions with solar farm developers operating in the District, to explore both investment opportunities (that is, investment to generate long term income) and the opportunity to buy electricity directly from solar farms for use in Council buildings, which would contribute to reducing carbon emissions from Council operations.

The Council's Climate Emergency Strategy identified the importance of taking a leadership role and working with local communities to bring about low carbon actions across the District. In December 2020, the Council joined over 40 other pioneer councils in making a Net Zero Local Leadership Pledge, committing the participant authorities to get their communities to Net Zero as soon as possible (and by 2045 at the latest). Engaging with other councils who are working to the same commitments also provides the opportunity to learn from each of them.

In October 2020, the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Forward Planning, supported by officers, delivered a Parish and Town Councillor Climate Emergency Action Planning Day, a virtual day-long conference which provided councillors with a grounding in the science and policy of the climate emergency, and focused on practical actions that councillors and communities can take at a local level to reduce emissions and encourage climate- and nature-friendly behaviours.

Provide socially 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 earnings 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

In parallel but separate from the Local Plan process, a draft Housing Delivery Strategy is being prepared. The draft Strategy will seek to set out and consider options for delivery, either directly or in partnership with others. A member workshop took place in October 2020, which identified some key actions and decisions to enable a clear delivery plan of potential schemes. In addition, meetings have taken place with key Housing Associations to discuss delivery options. Potential sites have been shortlisted for development and further discussions have taken place with Members on site specific outcomes, with a particular focus on how we measure and deliver carbon zero housing; these elements will be incorporated into the Cabinet report which is expected in February. The report will also include options to advance the Kemble development and there will be a separate report on options on the Cotswold Club.

Forty-two affordable homes, a mixture of flats and houses for local families and individuals, were delivered across the District. A key priority for the Council is the delivery of more social rented housing which is the most affordable of the affordable housing tenures available to local people. Five homes, a mixture of two, three and four bedroom houses, were completed for social rent in Tetbury and Moreton-in Marsh. A further 4 one bedroom bungalows were completed on a small site in Chipping Campden. The Council worked with Chipping Campden Town Council, Gloucestershire Rural Community Council and Bromford Housing Association to identify an under-utilised garage site within an established residential area. The Council enabled the construction of the new homes through an affordable housing grant to the housing association, ensuring they were delivered for social rent to meet the

Council's priority.

Thirteen key worker homes were completed at Chipping Campden School as part of a development of 34 new dwellings. The 13 homes provide rented affordable accommodation for members of staff at Chipping Campden School. The remaining 20 affordable homes completed this quarter were a mixture of affordable rent and shared ownership homes for local people in Blockley, Moreton-in-Marsh and South Cerney.

For the year so far, the Council has delivered a total of 101 units against the annual target of 100 units. We expect to exceed the target further in Q4 with over 30 units still in the revised programme for 2020/21. This forecast, whilst updated following the March 2020 lockdown, does not take into account the impact of the lockdown in November 2020 and the third lockdown that commenced in January 2021 which will impact on construction starts and completions. Officers are expecting that up to 75% of the units forecast for Q4 could slip into Q1-Q2 2021/22.

There has been a significant decrease in commencements against the forecast for this financial year due to Covid-19 restrictions and its impact on construction sites. As properties take approximately 8-12 months to build out, the reduction in units commencing this financial year will impact the number of completions in the next financial year. The Council is, however, supporting housing associations to bid for Homes England grant funding to acquire unsold private market units which developers may be willing to release for shared ownership, subject to viability. This would support delivery of the Council's affordable housing target in the next financial year, and provide additional low cost home ownership properties in the District.

One of the Council's aims is to reduce reliance on bed and breakfast and hotels for emergency homeless accommodation. A property has been secured in Tetbury and will provide nine self-contained units for homeless people. Not only will it reduce the reliance on Bed and Breakfast accommodation, it will also provide better quality accommodation in a more stable environment for homeless local people. The property upgrade works have been completed, and the lease has now been signed; and clients are being accommodated.

In June 2020, Cabinet approved funding to implement a 'Housing First' model to help reduce rough sleeping within Cotswold District. 'Housing First' is an approach aimed at people with multiple needs who have faced persistent challenges in sustaining accommodation; they are supported by intensive case management and a personalised approach to live in their own, permanent home. This approach has been well documented in the USA and Sweden for many years. The UK is gradually adopting the approach which is strongly recommended by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

The funding will be used to identify and place six individuals with the most complex needs into a permanent tenancy, supported by Housing Benefit and/or Universal Credit. The Housing First project is still in its early stages. So far, service level agreements have been agreed with Bromford and Aspire (support provider), and a dedicated staff member was appointed by Bromford in December 2020 to provide one to one support for the clients. The next stage will be to identify clients and properties.

In July 2020, the MHCLG launched the Next Steps Accommodation Programme to support local authorities to provide a range of solutions to tackle both short term/interim accommodation needs and longer-term move-on options, and the support linked to this accommodation. The Gloucestershire authorities were successful in securing funding to support a wide range of housing projects across the county including the Tetbury hostel accommodation.

Make our local plan green to the core



The Context

In July 2020, 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 resolved 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 undertaken by 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.

During Autumn 2020, Cabinet took a decision to pause the formal and regulatory plan making process until there is clarity on the White Paper and transitional arrangements from the old system to the new, and consequent change to the National Planning Policy Framework. The Council's Local Development Scheme has not been updated due to this uncertainty; specific details are available in the November Cabinet paper and also as part of the Council's response to the government consultations, as well as the Council's local plan webpages.

This is a short term watching brief. The Council is waiting for greater clarity from the government before the Local Plan is updated; officers will keep councillors apprised of the situation. We continue to plan for the future but with a focus on short term wins, projects include delivering a masterplan for

Cirencester Town Centre and undertaking a Sustainable Transport Strategy and a Growth Zone study. These studies will help to ensure the Council is well placed to respond to the changing nature of the English planning system.

The Council has updated its Statement of Community Involvement which will support forthcoming consultations. Terms of Reference have also been agreed for the Local Plan and Cirencester Town Centre Masterplan boards, where the purpose of each board is to monitor the programme of work and to provide regular feedback to Cabinet.

In mid-December, the government announced that it will revise its proposed method for calculating housing figures. The government still intends to deliver 300,000 homes a year in England by the mid-2020s but it will prioritise brownfield sites and urban areas. The government has not indicated when the revised method will be published.

Support health and well-being



The Context

The Health and Wellbeing of our residents is generally good and above the England and County average in most measures. We are one of the safest districts with very low crime levels and are surrounded by beautiful countryside. However, we do face some challenges. Cotswold District has an ageing 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.

We also need to take into account the wider determinants of health - social, economic and environmental factors such as unemployment, low income, poor housing, and healthy lifestyles which have an impact on people's health and wellbeing. This means that we need to work with a wide range of partners, to pool resources and to apply a whole systems and asset-based approach to address challenges together.

Actions we are taking

We want Cotswold District to be the best in the country for health and wellbeing, and promoting healthy lifestyles and providing opportunities for people of all ages to be active is key. The Council is developing a Leisure Strategy for the District based on Sport England 'Strategic Outcomes Planning Guidance'; this framework will ensure that a clear approach determined by local priorities and outcomes is developed which will provide effective and sustainable physical activity and sport opportunities for local communities via investment in our stock of leisure facilities and other non-facility interventions. There are four key stages; Outcomes, Insight, Interventions and Commitment; and in parallel, an Indoor Built Facilities Strategy will be developed.

So far, the Outcome (Stage 1) and Insight (Stage 2) stages have largely been completed but will constantly be reviewed and revised as part of the wider process of developing the Strategy. The key strands of work that informed these stages included a review of local strategies and plans, a facilities audit of current provision, an online resident survey as well as stakeholder consultation. In Q3, focus groups were run in Tetbury and Fairford to gather further information on specific groups; the results have been analysed and incorporated into the relevant stages.

The draft Stage 3 (Intervention) report which establishes recommendations for facility requirements and also service interventions, based on the needs of residents and stakeholders, has been completed and reviewed by Officers. In addition, an Indoor Built Facilities Strategy has been completed and signed off. Over the next quarter, all the information and insight gathered during the four stages and in developing the Indoor Built Facilities Strategy will be reviewed together, and a report prepared for Cabinet.

Promoting healthy lifestyles, fun and self-care for all ages, and providing the facilities and opportunities to support communities to stay active is important, but we also need to encourage resilient, well-connected and active communities that take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing goals. Some of the actions the Council is taking are to review and revise the community grant scheme to focus on our priorities, host regular community forums, and invest in asset-based/place-based community development.

In October 2020, Cabinet agreed to commission Spacehive, a not-for-profit provider of a civic crowdfunding platform, to develop a web based mini-site to deliver the Council's community grants. Applicants will need to submit a project proposal, and evidence that they meet the scheme priorities and that they are attracting local support, in order to be awarded a grant pledge by the Council. During the quarter, work has progressed on developing the mini-site, and developing the scheme criteria. The scheme will launch in late February, and the first deadline for applications will be April.

The Community Wellbeing team regularly engages with all local community groups and Town and Parish Councils (TCs/PCs) on Covid-19 related matters; and hosts bi-weekly meetings with the wider Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) with representation from key TCs/PCs, local charities /organisations (The Churn, Cotswold Friends, GRCC, Cotswold Counselling, Young Gloucestershire etc.) and some of the local support groups. Engagement with our partners helps us to be more aware of the concerns and challenges in our communities so that the Council is better able to support them as well as the local organisations themselves. After having hosted two focus groups last summer with 11 community representatives from different sectors including TCs/PCs, the Council is reviewing its wider approach to engagement. A parallel work stream to help establish excellent working relationships with TCs/PCs has commenced which aims to understand the views and thoughts of parish councillors and how best to engage with them. Alongside this work, desk based research into good practice on protocols for engagement between principal authorities and local councils has commenced.

In 2017, the Council received external funding from Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group and Gloucestershire County Council to deliver an Asset-Based/Place-Based Community Development programme in Bourton-on-the-Water which has now ended. However, the initial 2-year project has been extended a further year until summer 2021 to support and enable local communities across the District in their ambitions to improve health and wellbeing in their local area. Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) identifies and builds on the assets that are found in the community and mobilises individuals, associations, and institutions to come together to realise and develop their strengths. Many solutions to the problems we are facing today lie in our communities. The ABCD approach focusses on 'What's strong, not What's wrong' and is therefore different to a Deficit-Based approach that is used in most public services. ABCD is an approach that colleagues across the county are applying in various joint projects. The impact of this type of work however, is difficult to measure and we are working on developing skills in measuring success in partnership with colleagues around the county. Some of the evaluation methods that are being explored are 'System Mapping' and 'Ripple Effect Mapping' (REM), which is a method for conducting impact evaluation that engages programme and community stakeholders to retrospectively and visually map their 'performance story' resulting from a programme or intervention.

The Council's investment in and support for youth engagement work is one of the actions being taken to ensure that residents and communities have equal access to quality services. In August 2020, the Council commissioned Young Gloucestershire to engage young people across the District which has already provided useful insight into young people's needs. The next step is to summarise all the findings and recommendations and to share them with local

stakeholders including TCs/PCs, and discuss with them how best to implement some of the recommendations. As mental health is one of the central issues affecting young people, there are plans to look at opportunities to support more young people locally with their mental health in conjunction with Young Gloucestershire and Cotswold Counselling in early 2021.

Unemployment rates in young people aged 18-24 have doubled over the last months according to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). The Council has therefore facilitated meetings with colleagues from the DWP and a wide range of local partners including Cirencester Town Council, Cirencester College, Cotswold Counselling, The Wildlife Trust, Youth Providers and many more to discuss the development of Youth Hubs in the District. The Youth Hub idea is part of a number of measures designed to get young people back to work. During Q3, a proposal for the Youth Hub initiative in partnership with the DWP and many local organisations was developed; and a report was presented to Cabinet in January 2021 to seek support including financial support for the proposal in which the Council will be the Lead Accountable Body for the funding bid. Following Cabinet approval, the funding bid will be submitted to the DWP at the end of January with a decision expected by the end of March 2021.

Tackling domestic abuse is a priority for the Council. There are fewer reports of domestic abuse in rural areas compared to urban areas as victims do not have the same access to services due to rural isolation; and it often remains undetected for longer. The Council has created a sub group to the Community Safety Partnership which aims to tackle domestic abuse in the district. The first meeting was held in November 2020, and the group currently has 16 members with more members expected to join.

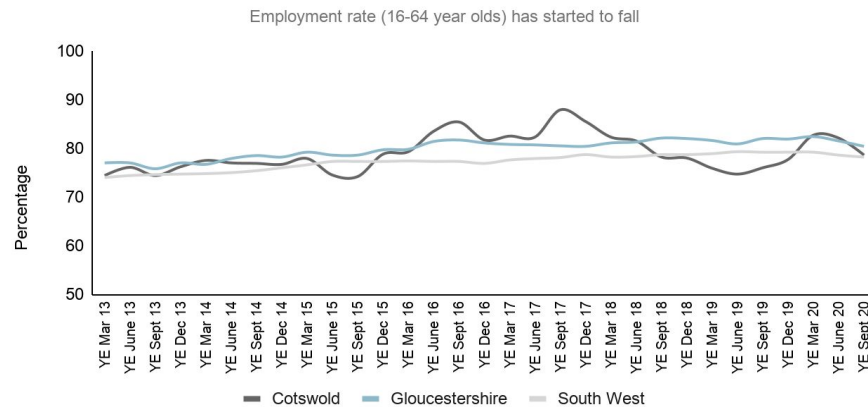
The Council is working with a number of partners to create tools for raising awareness of domestic abuse. In partnership with GDASS (Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Support Services) we have continued to develop Domestic Abuse Champion Training; two training sessions were delivered virtually by GDASS and future courses are currently being planned. In addition, the Council ran the '16 days of Action' campaign to raise awareness of domestic abuse in the District. Although work is continuing on a dedicated Domestic Abuse Teacher Training Pack which is being developed in partnership with Cirencester 6th Form College and aims to support teachers who are dealing with students who have been exposed to domestic abuse, work on the Hidden Harm training videos has been paused due to the Pandemic.



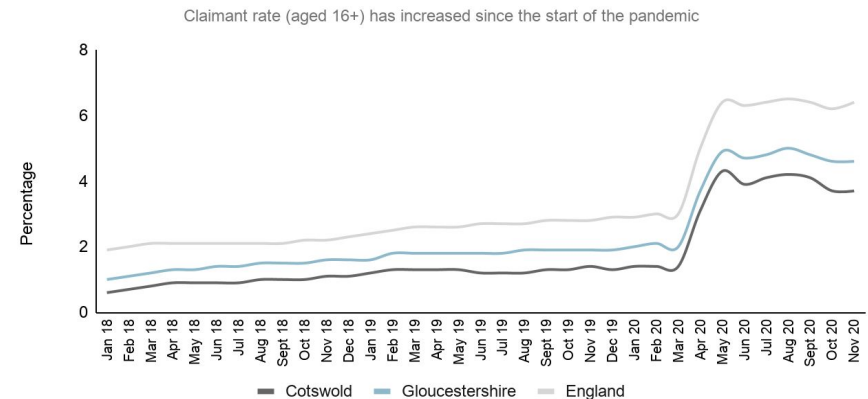
Enable a vibrant economy

The Context

The District supports an economically active population of around 47,700 and has strengths in Finance and Business Services, ICT including Science and Technology, Retail, and Accommodation and Food Services. A large proportion of businesses are small enterprises employing less than 10 people. Median wages for people working in the District are below the national average, and affordability of housing is a significant issue for the District, as a result businesses can face skill and labour shortages. Historically, unemployment has been relatively low but has risen sharply since the start of the pandemic but the full extent of job losses has been masked by the Job Retention Scheme (furlough) which is expected to continue until April 2021.



Source: ONS, Annual Population Survey



Source: ONS, Crown Copyright Reserved (Nomis)

The Cotswolds is well-known as a popular visitor destination and the visitor economy accounts for a significant proportion of the local economy - 7000 jobs or 18% of the total. We also have many companies at the cutting edge of innovation and the opportunity to grow key sectors like agritech, cyber and digital, medical equipment and environmental technologies.

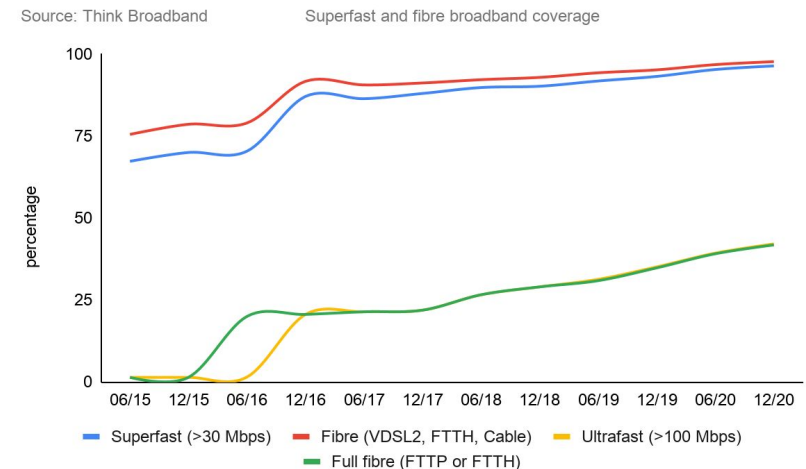
The lack of a reliable broadband connection especially in rural districts can add to social isolation as well as reduce opportunities to be economically active. Openreach has announced that Cirencester will be full fibre by 2025. However, there are still some areas where broadband is poor and even superfast connectivity is not sufficient for some businesses to operate in the way they wish to.

Much of our work to enable a vibrant economy will be done in partnership with key stakeholders ranging from the County Council, GFirst LEP, Chambers of Commerce and other business groups, Town and Parish Councils, institutions like the Royal Agricultural University and Cirencester College and individual businesses.

Actions we are taking

The draft green Economic Growth Strategy was approved for consultation in October 2020, and sets out the challenges and issues for the District, and how they will be addressed. It identifies the key areas that will deliver growth in the District, as well as a recovery plan for the local economy. The four week consultation demonstrated broad support for the Strategy and generated some constructive comments which have been addressed and incorporated into the revised Strategy. The Strategy was adopted at the Cabinet meeting in December 2020. Cabinet also approved the establishment of a Cotswold Economic Advisory Group which will advise, oversee and challenge the implementation of the Strategy; and provide a link to the main institutions and the wider business community in the District. The group is in the process of being established with representation already agreed with Cirencester College, the Royal Agricultural University, Campden BRI, St James's Place, the Federation of Small Businesses and Corin Medical. The group is expected to hold its first meeting in early /mid February.

The economy is continuing to struggle due to the tightening of restrictions to combat Covid-19 resulting in lower levels of activity. The retail and hospitality sectors have been particularly hard hit including those businesses that are particularly dependent on the visitor economy. One of the Council's aims is to help town centres recover from Covid-19; and much of the focus towards the end of the 2020 was on reopening town centres following the second lockdown. A social media, newspaper and digital campaign was run to encourage customers to return to town centres in a safe way, supported by the Government's Reopening High Streets Safely fund. The funding also enabled the Town Centre Ambassadors in Cirencester Town Centre to oversee social distancing in the run-up to Christmas and provide additional signage and markings. The Council is currently encouraging residents to continue to support local businesses who are either permitted to open as essential services or who trade online.



In terms of the wider visitor economy, the tourism team is continuing to promote good practice, signposting businesses to grants, holding virtual sector tourism meetings and promoting businesses where it is able to. In Q3, the team completed work on a late autumn marketing campaign to help boost businesses at the end of the summer season but with rising Covid cases the launch was postponed; the campaign will be run at a more appropriate time. In December, the Tourism team launched a survey to gather a range of information from businesses to provide insight into how they could be better supported; this included how they use Cotswolds Tourism services, the impact of Covid-19 on businesses and what sort of training they would benefit from. The team is planning to work with local LEPs, Visit England and other organisations during Q4, to source/organise suitable training.

Town centres were already having to evolve in order to adjust to changing shopping habits, which has been accelerated by Covid-19 and the lockdowns. Our local traders have had to become more digitally able in order to survive in a period when physical footfall has been significantly reduced. The Council is working with tech company Maybe to support businesses to improve their social media presence which is expected to improve sales, and help to offset the losses from a reduction in physical footfall. The project went live in September 2020, initially in Cirencester and Chipping Campden and has been rolled out to other towns in the District. In the months ahead we will be increasing our efforts to encourage more businesses to sign up.

Work is also being undertaken to improve the online presence of businesses within the visitor economy. The 'Uncover the Cotswolds' project, funded by the tourism team's successful bid to the Discover England Fund, is now in full swing. The project aims to promote year round 'experiences', help businesses become bookable online and to spread visitor numbers geographically and seasonally across the Cotswolds area. The team is working with individual businesses to help them become bookable via Visit England's Tourism Exchange Great Britain (TXGB) platform allowing visitors to look and immediately book these experiences and accommodation. This will help to raise awareness of the range of products available and consequently, help increase bookings.

The Tourism team has successfully submitted a bid to the Visit England Recovery Marketing Fund: a digital marketing campaign, which is responsive to changing Covid-19 restrictions, and promoting businesses that are fully bookable online. Due to the third lockdown, the team is waiting on Visit England to provide an update on conditions for the grant.

In addition to the Covid-19 related work that has taken place during the quarter, the Council is working with partners to bring sites forward which will support the Council's ambition to grow high value, highly skilled, low environmental impact businesses in key areas including agritech, digital/cyber, medical equipment and environmental technologies, and to enhance the opportunities available for local people, particularly young people. So for example, the Council is working with the Royal Agricultural University and their development partner Henry Boot Developments (HBD) to bring forward their Triangle site for agriculture or education-related activity. Another example is the Mitsubishi HQ site in Watermoor, Cirencester which is now up for sale; the Council is helping to secure a replacement occupier and assist Mitsubishi with the transition to an aftersales business following the decision of Mitsubishi Japan to exit the UK and Europe new car market.