

 <p>COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	CABINET - 7 JUNE 2021
Report Number	AGENDA ITEM 9
Subject	GREEN ECONOMIC GROWTH STRATEGY – SIX MONTHLY UPDATE REPORT
Wards affected	ALL
Accountable member	Cllr Tony Dale, Cabinet Member for the Economy and Council Transformation Email: tony.dale@cotswold.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Paul James, Economic Development Lead Tel: 01285 623558 Email: paul.james@cotswold.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To note the progress in the delivery of the Council’s Green Economic Growth Strategy.
Annexes	None
Recommendation/s	<i>That progress against the actions identified in the Green Economic Growth Strategy, as set out in this report, is noted.</i>
Corporate priorities	Enable a vibrant economy
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	

I. BACKGROUND

The Council's Corporate Strategy identifies the need to "enable a vibrant economy" as a key priority. To this end, Cabinet approved a draft Green Economic Growth Strategy for consultation in October 2020 and, following amendments made as a result of the consultation, it was adopted by Cabinet in December 2020. The Strategy covers a four-year period from adoption and the report by the Cabinet Member for Economy and Skills in December 2020 undertook to provide six monthly updates to Cabinet. This report is the first such update. It is also worth reminding Cabinet that in the same report they approved the establishment of the Cotswold Economic Advisory Group to oversee implementation of the actions contained within the strategy. The Group first met in February 2021 and is meeting on a bi-monthly basis.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1 The Strategy set out a number of different themes and progress against each of them is reported below. Efforts have understandably been focused in recent months on the safe reopening of town centres, but progress on other matters has still been maintained. It is anticipated in the months ahead that the work on town centres will continue but as part of a broader effort to help the economy to recover from the pandemic.

Growing Key Sectors

- 2.2 Discussions have been held with the Royal Agricultural University and their developer partner HBD (formerly Henry Boot Developments) to encourage them to come forward with a suitably ambitious scheme for their Triangle/University Gate site, which could include an agritech or related element building on the success of the Farm491 incubator. A marketing exercise has been taking place and a further meeting will be held with them shortly to discuss progress.
- 2.3 Various discussions have also been taking place in terms of the cyber and digital sector. These discussions are at an early stage but have the potential to bring exciting developments in this sector to the District. Members will also be aware that the Applied Digital Skills Centre at Cirencester College, which was awarded £4.48 million of funding through GFirst LEP last summer, is now on-site and will be completed next year.

Growing a Green Economy

- 2.4 Various private sector-driven initiatives are underway in the District that, if successful, will help build a green economy and contribute directly to emissions reduction. The Council has, in principle, an opportunity to invest directly in some of these. Several large-scale grid-connected solar farms are either being built or seeking planning permission, and linked to these, it is likely that hydrogen generation from solar energy will take place in the District.

Zero Avia, the ambitious and innovative company developing hydrogen-powered aviation has relocated to Cotswold Airport. Home energy retrofit is a huge challenge in emissions reduction and, in principle, a huge economic opportunity – the Council may be able to play a role in accelerating this activity locally. The Council's forthcoming investment in EV charge points, initially in Council-owned car parks, will promote more EV usage and it might be possible, in time, to link EV charge points to Council-invested solar power in the district.

- 2.5 Cabinet will also be aware that the Council is in the process of adopting a Green Business Pledge, which will involve businesses committing to reducing their carbon emissions. A report on this appears elsewhere on the Cabinet agenda.

Town Centres

- 2.6 As mentioned earlier in the report, town centres have been a key focus of activity and effort over recent months as the Council has assisted with the safe reopening of high streets following several lockdowns and will now continue to assist town centres to recover from the pandemic and evolve to take account of changes to shopping habits which have been accelerated by events over the last 12 months or so.

- 2.7 Last month Cabinet received a report on the use of the Reopening High Streets Safely Fund and the Welcome Back Fund. To remind Members, each of these two funds allocated £81,114 to Cotswold to be spent by the end of March 2022. The initial tranche was spent on a number of initiatives including:

- Temporary public realm changes, signage etc.
- Business packs with signs, stickers etc. showing safety messages
- A footfall counting system for Cirencester, Stow-on-the-Wold and Tetbury
- Promotional campaigns with public safety messages
- Cirencester town centre ambassadors deployed in the run-up to Christmas
- Webinars for the hospitality sector
- Business advisers for town centre businesses
- Support for businesses to improve their digital presence, working with tech company Maybe*

- 2.8 It is proposed to spend the second tranche on creating a Virtual High Street and delivering physical improvements to town centres. An intern position has been advertised and it is hoped to appoint someone for a period of 10 weeks over the summer to assist with these projects.

A Sustainable Visitor Economy

- 2.9 Work to improve the online & bookable presence of businesses within the visitor economy has been ongoing as part of Uncover the Cotswolds project. 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.

- 2.10 A focus on gathering content to improve the online content for towns saw digital town guides produced, consumer town itineraries and content for towns such as Cirencester improved. Two surveys were launched to gather a range of information including how businesses use Cotswolds Tourism and a digital health survey to understand the training requirements of businesses to reach new audiences. New training modules for businesses are now available online and free SEO reports have assisted businesses to improve online presence - see <https://www.cotswolds.com/partnership/training>.

2.11 A briefing note on the Green Economy and Sustainable Tourism has been drafted and will go to the Cotswolds Tourism DMO Advisory Board in the coming weeks. This is the initial step to creating a sustainable tourism strategy for the Cotswolds, including both short and long-term actions, in line with other key strategies and plans such as the Council's Climate Strategy, Green Economic Growth Strategy, and GFirst LEP's Gloucestershire Sustainable Energy Strategy.

2.12 The joint tourism team have been working with the Cotswolds National Landscape to identify short and long-term sustainable tourism actions that they can collaborate on. Actions include the development and marketing of rural skills experiences as part of the Marketing Recovery Fund project being undertaken by the tourism team at the moment, further development of the Caring for the Cotswolds scheme and its promotion to Cotswolds Tourism members, and various walking initiatives, such as extending the Cotswold National Landscape warden-led walks programme to include town walks and developing their offer to have greater appeal to visitors.

Infrastructure

2.13 The Economic Development Lead continues to liaise with and lobby both Fasternet and broadband providers such as Openreach and Gigaclear to address areas in the District where internet speeds are poor. Currently 97.17% of addresses in the District are able to access superfast broadband (download speeds of 30mbps and above). 45.04% of addresses have access to full fibre broadband. Gigaclear are currently working in Cirencester. At the moment they have 1500 live connections and when they have completed their build in 2022 there will be just over 3500. They are also currently working to finish their build in Westonbirt which should be completed by the end of the year. Openreach have committed to start work on upgrading the Cirencester exchange in 2022, with survey work beginning early next year and the build running through 2022/23.

2.14 Lobbying has also been undertaken with the four main mobile phone operators to address "not spots" in the District, informed by local intelligence provided by Members. BT/EE have shared with us their plans to upgrade masts and provide new ones, which will go some way to addressing current issues. The other main operators have committed to sharing their plans with us once they are fully developed.

2.15 The Council is in regular contact with Highways England regarding the planned upgrade to the A417 Missing Link in order to maximise the opportunities this will provide.

Skills and Training

2.16 One of the concerns about the skills and training offer in the County is that it has been fragmented and difficult to navigate both for businesses and those individuals seeking support. The Council worked with the County Council and GFirst LEP to bring forward the Gloucestershire Skills Portal (www.skillsportalglos.com) which brings together the various strands of support into a single site.

2.17 The Economic Development Lead also works very closely with Cirencester College in promoting opportunities for apprenticeships and work placements associated with T-Levels.

2.18 As mentioned earlier in the report, the Cotswolds Tourism DMO have made available a suite of digital training videos on the Cotswolds.com website.

Inward Investment

2.19 The Business Support page on the Council's website has been updated and a new page added with information for potential investors to the District. This is very much an interim update, with a more fundamental review of the business pages of the website being undertaken across the Publica partner councils.

2.20 The Economic Development Lead has been liaising closely with the agents for key sites in the District, including the Mitsubishi HQ at Watermoor and the employment land elements of the Steadings development.

2.21 In addition, Officers have been working closely with the Inward Investment Team at GFirst LEP in relation to inward investment opportunities, including the relocation of Zero Avia to Cotswold Airport. Zero Avia are developing a hydrogen aviation drivetrain. They are already building their team to around 50 employees and have potential to grow this much further over the next couple of years.

Business Support and Engagement

2.22 The Economic Development Lead has dealt with numerous enquiries from new and established businesses. Contact has been made with many of the key employers in the District, although visits to businesses have been restricted due to the Coronavirus pandemic. It is hoped to start a structured programme of business engagement over the coming months. The Council works closely with the Cirencester Growth Hub to ensure businesses are getting the support they need. It is an action in the Corporate Strategy to improve Growth Hub provision in the north of the District. Conversations have been held with various stakeholders on this and an Expression of Interest was submitted to Gfirst LEP, but a suitable funding source for this project has yet to be identified.

Innovation

2.23 The Cotswold District is home to a significant number of innovative businesses – far more than many people realise. Our ambition is to support existing businesses to grow and to attract more innovative high growth businesses. The Cabinet Member arranged a meeting with the Regional Manager of Innovate UK that has helped to raise the profile of the District.

Performance Measures

2.24 The Economic Development Lead has been working with the Business Information and Resources Team to develop an Economic Health dashboard for the District, bringing together data from a number of sources. The next six monthly update will include an example of the dashboard.

Conclusion

2.25 The above is a flavour of the actions, which have been taken over the last six months, but it is by no means an exhaustive list. By their very nature, some of the actions within the Green Economic Growth Strategy will take some time to deliver, but the activities undertaken within the first six months of the strategy form a firm foundation for their

delivery. The resource now in place to support Economic Development has certainly raised the profile of the Cotswold economy locally and regionally.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1. All activities have been undertaken within existing budgets. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

5. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 5.1. Risk assessments are undertaken where necessary on a project-by-project basis. There are no risks arising from this report.

6. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 6.1. The Green Economic Growth Strategy seeks to deliver inclusive economic growth across the District.

7. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. The Green Economic Growth Strategy seeks to deliver sustainable growth and includes a number of actions which will positively impact the battle against climate change, including growing the environmental technology sector within the District and encouraging businesses to build climate change considerations into their operations.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 8.1. The District Council could choose not to have an Economic Growth Strategy or could choose not to monitor it. Neither option is recommended as it would lead to missed opportunities and would not maximise the District's potential for sustainable economic growth.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 9.1. None.

(END)