



COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL PRIORITIES REPORT
January 2021 - March 2021

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 during the Autumn 2020, and the outcome of the consultation was considered by Cabinet in January 2021. Following the outcome of the Local Government Finance Settlement, the MTFS and 2021/22 budget was revised taking into account any further adjustments identified since consideration of the draft budget in September. The revised MTFS and 2021/22 budget was approved by both Cabinet and Council in February 2021.

The Council is taking steps to move to cashless parking at all council owned car parks over the next 12 months. Moving to cashless parking has multiple benefits; it will support our carbon reduction commitment and reduce the costs associated with cash collection and vandalism of pay and display machines. Officers drive approximately 20,000 miles each year across the District to collect from the machines in addition to daily travelling to the secure depot to count and bank. In January 2021, Cabinet approved the proposal to remove the option to pay by cash in all car parks using a phased approach. This approach will enable the Council and its service provider, PayByPhone, to promote the change and assist users over an extended period. The first phase has been completed with the removal of the option to pay with cash at Rissington Road, Bourton on the Water; Maugersbury Road, Stow on the Wold;

and Beeches car park, Cirencester from 2 March 2021. The changeover went smoothly with additional repeater signs for the pay by phone option located in all the car parks as well as warning signs and increased communications with the media and stakeholders relating to each car park. A roll out plan is in place to cover the next three phases of the project, which is expected to be fully implemented by 31 January 2022.

Whilst all of the Council's public toilets are of a good standard there are some improvements that could be made to ensure they remain modern and clean. A review of our public toilets was commissioned by the Council's new contractor Danfo Ltd, and a condition survey was carried out by an independent body, the British Toilet Association; recommendations for improvements have been proposed. Alongside the review, officers have gathered a range of information on each site including any major refurbishment work, income, expenditure and footfall. A report, which brings the two strands of work together, has been prepared for the Cabinet Member responsible for public conveniences and Senior Officers for consideration of the next steps.

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.

In March 2021, the Cabinet approved the creation of the Civic Pride Programme for a two year period, with the creation of two new civic pride posts, and secondment of the current Enviro-Crime Officer to lead the programme. The key strategic outcome of this proposal was to achieve a reduction in enviro-crime within the District, delivering the benefit of a high quality environment where economic growth is supported and where the Council positively engages with the community to not only solve immediate issues, but to prevent further recurrences. Although much of the work will be about having a supporting presence, there will be £100k of seed funding to support programme activities across the District. The Council will also work in partnership with town and parish councils, the Voluntary and Community Sector, neighbourhood groups, businesses and schools and colleges to lobby wider support from other organisations such as County, Environment Agency, and Historic England, to identify additional resources and grant funding opportunities.



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 2020, 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 budget meets the UK target of net zero emissions by 2050, and complies with the Paris Agreement. The report is the most comprehensive advice the CCC has ever produced, and recognises that the emissions reduction has huge challenges but also economic, nature, health and wellbeing benefits. 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 2020s must be the decisive decade of progress and action'. On 2 April 2021 the government formally adopted the CCC's recommended 6th carbon budget, committing to a legally binding target of a 78% reduction in emissions by 2035 (albeit not endorsing all the CCC's recommendations, such as reduced meat consumption).

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 rate of 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); by 2040 all new trucks are low-carbon). 2) The rate of expansion of low-carbon energy (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 March 2021, the Council appointed its first Sustainable Transport Strategy Lead officer, responsible for developing and delivering a new sustainable transport strategy in the context of the Council's partial review of the Local Plan. Part of the Lead officer's work will involve supporting local community groups, and parish and town councils in taking local action to support low carbon travel, as well as considering the integration of sustainable travel into the Council's objectives on supporting the visitor economy and economic development.

The Council's electric vehicle charging point delivery plan was adopted by Cabinet in January 2021. In April, the Council completed the procurement of an electric vehicle charge point provider, and the contract will now enable the Council to roll out EVCPs in a number of locations in the District, including public car parks and Council offices.

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, the government announced the premature end of the 'able to pay' sector Green Homes Grant scheme in March 2021. Funds still exist to support lower income households, specifically those not connected to the gas grid, and the Council is preparing to take part in a new scheme, GHG Local Authority Led Phase 2, to be coordinated through the South West Energy Hub.

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. In February 2021, the full grant was awarded to the Council by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS). Intensive work is now underway to procure the installation of these measures within a very challenging deadline of September 2021. The low-carbon heating installation could save the Council up to approximately 1.4 million kWh of gas and electricity annually, deliver energy bill savings of up to £43,000/year, and carbon savings of 242tCO₂e/year and 8,370tCO₂e over the lifetime of the measures. The projected carbon savings would be equivalent to approximately 10% of the Council's annual total.

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 make progress in discussion with solar farm developers in the District, to explore investment opportunities.

The Council has an important leadership role, and its networks and relationships can be used to assist and influence key stakeholders both internally and externally. In March 2021, the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Forward Planning led a full day Carbon Literacy workshop for Councillors from the four Publica councils, with further sessions to reach more Councillors in due course.

In February 2021, the Council launched Crowdfund Cotswold to link local support and fundraising with Council grants. A key focus of the initiative is locally-driven projects that address the climate emergency, as well as other wellbeing and community development objectives.

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). There is a shortage of good quality rented accommodation that is genuinely affordable. Affordable housing helps to meet the District's housing needs and can include low cost home ownership or rented accommodation which typically has a discount of around 20% on the market rent, however this may still not be truly affordable for some residents. Social rented homes have a rent that is lower than affordable rent and therefore provides homes for those on lower incomes or in receipt of full Housing Benefit.

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

The Council's Affordable Housing Delivery Strategy and action plan was adopted by Cabinet on 8 February 2021 and sets out the delivery strategy for the Council to accelerate provision of social rented and affordable homes for local people. The current focus is to facilitate the affordable housing identified within the Local Plan and through rural exception sites and community-led housing opportunities, and to work with Housing Associations to maximise affordable housing delivery. The Council plans to go further and bring forward additional affordable homes through enabling and direct intervention which may include provision of land and other funding. In addition, any development the Council acquires or builds must be carbon zero in support of the Council's Climate Change emergency commitment. Although this will increase the cost of affordable housing, it will reduce ongoing revenue costs for tenants. Based on the outcomes from the Member workshop in October, discussions with local Registered Providers, and a review of delivery options, Officers recommended that the Council establishes a formal partnership with one lead Registered Provider.

The February Cabinet report also sets out the options for delivery of the Kemble site. Cabinet agreed that delivery should be in partnership with a Registered Provider. Legal advice has been commissioned and obtained on the most suitable partnership model; and a specification has been produced and checked by Trowers Hamlin and passed to procurement to commence expressions of interest in a Contractual Joint Venture (JV) for delivery of Kemble and Down Ampney sites. Expressions of interest will run through April and be twin tracked with the preparation of a draft contractual JV.

In March, following recommendation from Cabinet, the Council allocated commuted sums grants to two projects to deliver low carbon affordable housing. A sum of £478,500 was allocated to provide 100% social rent on a scheme of 15 units at Davies Rd, Moreton in Marsh; previously an open market scheme with 40% affordable housing only. A further allocation of £102,000 will be used to enhance the environmental sustainability of the homes, including insulation levels above the requirements of current Building Regulations, air-source heating and provision for future installation of solar panels. An application has been made to Homes England, by Cottsway Housing Association, for match funding to deliver this affordable housing scheme and is currently being assessed.

The second allocation of commuted sums was to Gloucestershire Rural Housing Association (GRHA) for a scheme of 14 homes at Sunground, Avening. The sum of £332,000 (approx) will deliver this rural exception site, formerly a market cross subsidy development of six affordable rent and five private market homes, as a 100% low carbon affordable housing development. The scheme will receive Homes England funding through Bromford which is developing the scheme on behalf of GRHA. The scheme will provide nine social rented and five shared ownership homes for local people, incorporating rainwater harvesting, air-source heating, solar panels and bio-diversity measures. The development is due to commence on site shortly.

In Q4, thirteen affordable homes were completed for families, couples and single people comprising three social rented homes in Moreton in Marsh, six shared ownership homes in South Cerney and four affordable rented homes in Blockley, which brings the total for 2020/21 to 114, exceeding the target of 100 homes for the year. The demolition of Leaholme Court, Cirencester has commenced, making way for the construction of new one and two bed affordable flats for rent and shared ownership. The final phase of three social rented houses at Bath Rd, Tetbury has also commenced.

As with many sectors, the construction industry has been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic which has delayed work on site as well as the start of new schemes. The majority of schemes due to complete in 2021/22 were expected to start on site in 2020, but are now only beginning to come forward so are most likely to complete in 2022/23. Although the sites currently in the construction stage are expected to deliver their planned units, it is likely that there will be a shortfall in delivery in 2021/22 against the annual target of 100 homes. Under normal conditions, sites can be accelerated to make up lost time. This requires increasing the amount of labour and trades on site which is currently not possible with on-going social distancing requirements. No affordable units have been lost; they will simply complete later than originally planned.

One of the Council's aims is to reduce reliance on bed and breakfast and hotels for emergency homeless accommodation. Ridgeway House in Tetbury has been secured and upgraded to 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. During Q4, residents started to move in, and as at the end of March 2021, all the units are occupied.

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. 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. Six clients who would benefit from the Housing First approach have been identified with a further three clients identified on a reserve list in case any of the initial six clients find alternative accommodation or decide to withdraw. Our partner support agency, Aspire, are working with all nine clients to identify their needs and where they would benefit most in terms of the location of any accommodation. Bromford has agreed to provide six properties as part of the project and have so far identified three properties that would be suitable.

The Housing Team is actively participating in a number of countywide funding bids including the Rough Sleeper Initiative round 4 (RSI4) and the Rough Sleeper Accommodation Programme round 2 (RSAP) fund. The Council is investigating potential options for submitting a specific bid to RSAP to increase the availability of supported accommodation in the District. The closing date is early Sept 2021, which will provide sufficient time to examine the options and feasibility, and prepare a report to Cabinet. In addition, the Council has also been allocated £60,000 of Emergency Accommodation Funding to help with costs associated with providing clients with emergency accommodation during the pandemic and cold weather, and to assist them in accessing appropriate 'move on' 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 that Local Plans play. In the next few months the Environment Bill and the Agricultural Bill is expected to 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 are likely to need updating. The process of updating the Local Plan will consider the options available to the Council and local communities. Along with international and national pledges made by the 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 partial 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 Government's Planning for the Future White Paper and transitional arrangements from the old system to the new, and consequent change to the National Planning Policy Framework. 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. Cabinet also confirmed the funding to take forward the Cirencester Town Centre Masterplan.

Subject to Cabinet support, the Local Plan partial update will recommence as the Government has provided clarity (in February 2021) on the District's future housing needs, which has returned housing need to previously anticipated levels; e.g. approximately 490 homes per year down from the proposed 1,200 homes per year. The resumption of the project will be supported by an updated project plan called the Local Development Scheme that sets out key stages in the local plan making process. For example, an informal public consultation is programmed for the end of 2021.

The Local Plan Programme Board, which has membership of all political parties, met for the first time in March to discuss and define the Corporate Strategy's priority to make the Local Plan 'green to the core' as well as considering project milestones. During the early months of 2021 the Council has prepared a Sustainability Appraisal scoping document, which is currently being reviewed by Natural England, the Environment Agency and Historic England as part of the statutory process. The Sustainability Appraisal scoping document sets out the context, objectives and approach of the assessment; and identify relevant environmental, economic and social issues and objectives. Subject to Cabinet support consultants will be appointed to deliver an integrated Sustainable Appraisal and Habitats Regulation Assessment to support the partial update of the Council's Local Plan.

Work continues on the Cirencester Town Centre Masterplan project which was officially rebooted in January and work has already begun on revising the Town Centre Strategy contained in the Council's Local Plan. The Council will be carrying out feasibility studies with Cirencester Town Council during 2021 to assist with the eventual master plan options and also to support Cirencester Town Council's emerging Neighbourhood Plan. Consultants are expected to be appointed in May to carry out an assessment of possible changes to the retail and other uses in the town centre and to provide scenarios that will assist with anticipating future parking demand. The Council's Cirencester Town Centre Health Check is programmed to be updated during the late spring and early summer months of 2021 and will be a joint project with Cirencester Town Council.

In March, the Council appointed its first Sustainable Transport Strategy Lead officer, responsible for developing and delivering a new Sustainable Transport Strategy to support the partial update of the Local Plan and the transition to a carbon zero future. The Lead officer's work will involve supporting local community groups, parish and town councils in taking local action to support low carbon travel, as well as considering the integration of sustainable travel into the Council's objectives on supporting the visitor economy and economic development. The sustainable transport strategy will also assist the preparation of a new Cirencester Town Centre Masterplan.

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 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. Over the last year, the Council has been developing a Leisure Strategy for the District based on Sport England 'Strategic Outcomes Planning Guidance'; this framework ensures that a clear approach determined by local priorities and outcomes is developed to 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.

The key strands of work in developing the Strategy included a review of local strategies and plans, a facilities audit of current provision, an online resident survey and focus groups held in Tetbury and Fairford, and stakeholder consultation. In parallel, an Indoor Built Facilities Strategy was also developed. The key themes that emerged were Healthier District, Connected Community and Active Environment. An analysis of all the information gathered was used to establish recommendations for key service and facility interventions, and a report was prepared for the March Cabinet.

The Cabinet approved the Leisure Strategy and authorised officers to work in partnership with other organisations on the feasibility of the projects identified within the strategy, and to undertake a leisure management options appraisal to determine the most suitable delivery model, contract scope and contract terms for the Council's leisure facilities, when the current contract expires.

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 include a review and revision of the community grant scheme to focus on our priorities, hosting regular community forums, and investing in asset-based/place-based community development.

In Autumn 2020, the Council commissioned Spacehive to deliver a Crowdfunding platform for Cotswold District. The Council's new approach to community grant funding, 'Crowdfund Cotswold' was launched on 22 February via an online event attended by over 100 people. During March, two project creator workshops were held, attracting around 70 registrations. The pipeline of project ideas looks extremely promising with a greater number of project ideas having been generated in comparison to other Spacehive programmes across the country, and a number of projects are already 'live' on the platform attracting funding. The first deadline for applications is 21 April 2021. In addition, a review of the Council's Community Welfare Grant budget has commenced. This budget is used to support Voluntary and Community Sector partners who provide vital services to local residents. The review is expected to conclude in June, with any change in arrangements to come into force in October 2021.

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. The Council has, however, received additional funding of £100k to continue to support focussed community development work, alongside the local Integrated Locality Partnership (ILP). The ILP brings together senior representatives of all major health and social care services, Public Health, Local Government, the Clinical Commissioning Groups, GPs as well as representatives from the voluntary sector. This work complements existing county-wide community-based initiatives whilst applying the principle of proportionate universalism (actions and services are proportionate to the needs and levels of disadvantage in a population) to help reduce the gap in health and wellbeing among local communities. This work will enable the Council to continue engaging with local communities and helping them to achieve their goals. The programme of work sits within the existing county-wide Strengthening Local Communities Steering group and will apply the following approaches:

- Identify local priorities in conjunction with ILPs and communities
- Develop projects that utilise the skills, knowledge and organisations found in the local area to address identified priorities
- Develop outcomes for each project once priorities have been identified and provide assurance that these outcomes are being met.

The Council is continuing to support local community groups and charities by hosting bi-weekly Community Network Meetings and working in partnership to develop sustainable community-led health and wellbeing initiatives. During Q4, the Council supported five local groups and charities to attract significant funding via the Gloucestershire Public Health - Coronavirus Prevention Grant 2021.

The Council is taking a range of actions to improve equal access to quality services across the District including actions to tackle food poverty and investing and supporting youth engagement work.

The Council's community and wellbeing team has started to work in partnership with the 'Long Table' (based in Stroud) to build on the success they have had engaging communities across Stroud District and beyond about healthy food, cooked with love. It is anticipated that by drawing on our shared experiences, skills and track record, a plan can be developed that can be grown into a successful project delivering outcomes around hyper-local community resilience and Covid-19 recovery in the Cotswold District. Social enterprise is at the heart of this vision, as is the certainty that food distributions systems are failing us in many different ways, and we can do much to improve the situation. The Council is funding a scoping project over twelve weeks that aims to develop a clearer picture of our local food system. The project will engage and involve various stakeholders and community members across the District with the aim to build a network or partnership that will look at how the system can be improved to become more healthful, affordable, democratically controlled and culturally significant.

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 (YG) to engage young people across the District which provided useful insight into young people's needs. Building on this work, the Council in partnership with Young Gloucestershire and other local youth providers, is continuing to support young people through a range of planned activities such as the Cotswold Youth Roadshow which is being planned for May 2021. Through YG youth engagement and conversations with partner agencies it has been established that there is a clear gap in accessible Mental Health support for young people in the Cotswolds due to the increased demand as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and lack of provision. The Council is currently supporting YG to secure funding for a project, Cotswolds Let's Chat, which will be delivered in partnership with Cotswolds Counselling and other mental health services in the area. Part of the funding has already been secured via Gloucestershire County Council so that the project can start for an initial six months period from May 2021.

The Cotswold Safer and Stronger Communities Partnership, of which the Council is part, has agreed its priorities for the next three years. The priorities align with those of the Police and Crime Commissioner as well as Safer Gloucestershire Board whilst focussing on the local area. They are: Safe and Social Roads, Tackling Domestic Abuse, Crimes of Local Concern, Tackling Anti-Social Behaviour, Community Engagement and Involvement, and Supporting Young People. The partnership is in the process of developing an Action Plan which will be agreed and adopted in June 2021.

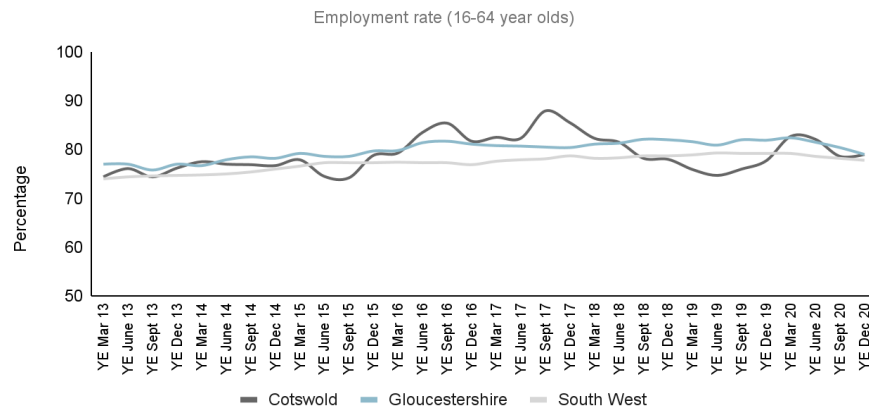
The Council is working with a number of partners to create tools for raising awareness of domestic abuse and has continued to press on with the Domestic Abuse Champions Network training courses in partnership with Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Services (GDASS). Having recently completed two courses (four blocks of training) for those working in the profession, there are now 17 Champions, with a further two courses booked for August 2021. Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue service has agreed to have two Firefighters from each of the Cotswold fire stations trained, increasing the total by another 14 Champions.



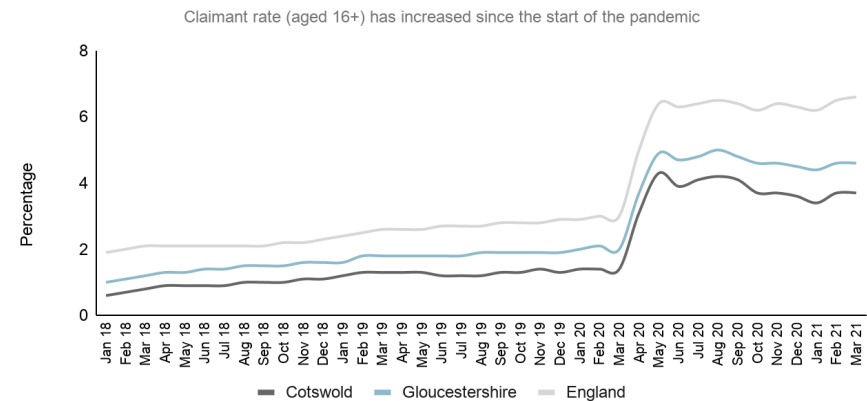
Enable a vibrant economy

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, which can result in skill and labour shortages. Historically, unemployment has been relatively low but has risen 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.

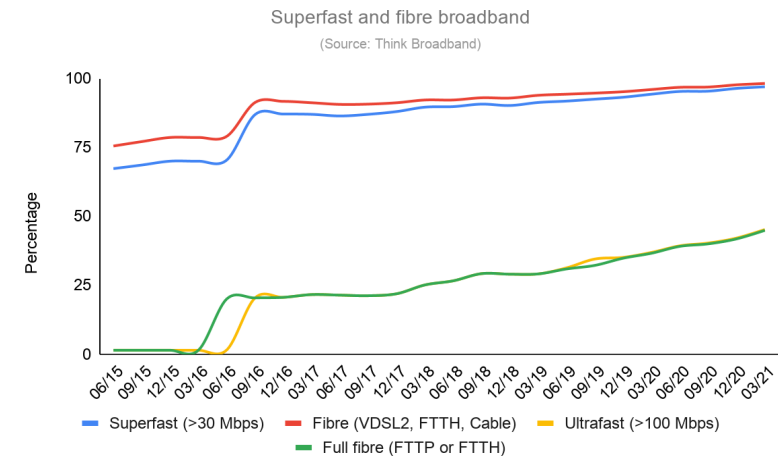
The lack of a reliable broadband connection especially in rural districts can add to social isolation as well as reduce opportunities to be economically active. Openreach has announced that Cirencester will be full fibre by 2025. However, there are still some areas where broadband is poor and even superfast 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 achieved 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 adopted at the Cabinet meeting in December 2020. The Strategy 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. 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 has been established with representation from Cirencester College, the Royal Agricultural University, Campden BRI, St James's Place, the Federation of Small Businesses and Corin Medical. The group held its first meeting in February 2021, met again in April and will meet bi-monthly going forward. At its April meeting, the group considered reports on the 'Welcome Back Fund' (described below) and the 'Cotswold Green Business Pledge' which is currently in progress and aims to encourage businesses to reduce their carbon footprint. There were also presentations from Cirencester College, Campden BRI and Cotswold Airport.

The economy continues to be impacted by 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 over the last year has been on preparing town centres to reopen following multiple lockdowns and Tier restrictions as well as supporting businesses to adapt to the changed environment e.g. to transact more digitally where possible. Social media, newspaper and digital campaigns have promoted safety messages and encouraged customers to continue to support local businesses whenever they can and return to town centres in a safe way when they reopen, supported by the Government's Reopening High Streets Safely fund. The funding has also enabled the Council to engage 'Business Advisers' who are contacting town centre businesses in towns across the District to ensure they have the support they need. The Council has also arranged a series of webinars aimed at the hospitality sector to assist them in reopening safely and successfully as the economy opens up at the end of the third national lockdown. The Council has been allocated a further £81,144 from the 'Welcome Back Fund', which is an extension of the



Reopening High Streets Safely Fund which runs until the end of March 2022. A report is being prepared for Cabinet in May to agree the broad framework for how this funding will be used to assist the medium-term recovery of the visitor economy from Covid-19.

The tourism team has been working to assist business recovery and future resilience: the council's offer of free membership of Cotswolds Tourism has seen membership grow from 336 at the end of March 2020 to 477 businesses. Virtual sector group meetings have been held to promote best practice, signpost to grants, provide an opportunity to network with similarly affected businesses and to suggest ways businesses could adapt and diversify in response to changing markets and opportunities.

In December 2020, 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 the type of training they would benefit from. The results of the survey provided a greater understanding of the digital training needs of tourism businesses in the area enabling a suite of short training modules to be developed during Q4. Training webinars have also been provided by Visit England.

Town centres were already having to evolve in order to adjust to changing shopping habits, which has been accelerated by Covid-19 and multiple 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 Maybe platform assists businesses to interact on social media in a place-based way which helps to raise their profile. Regular webinars have been held, including three aimed specifically at Cotswold businesses. The project went 'live' in September 2020, initially in Cirencester and Chipping Campden and has been rolled out to other towns in the District, including Tetbury, Northleach, Bourton-on-the-Water, Stow-on-the-Wold, Moreton-in-Marsh, Fairford, Lechlade and South Cerney. Over the last few months we have been increasing our efforts to encourage more businesses to sign up.

The Tourism team successfully submitted a bid to the Visit England Recovery Marketing Fund: a digital marketing campaign. The grant conditions are now in place and dependent on the roadmap, the digital marketing campaign focussing on businesses that are fully bookable will launch at the end of May provisionally. During Q4, the team developed the media content plan alongside businesses.

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 was put up for sale and is now under offer; the Council is in contact with the prospective buyer and assisting Mitsubishi with the transition to an aftersales business following the

decision of Mitsubishi Japan to exit the UK and Europe new car market. Another exciting development is the relocation of ZeroAvia from Cranfield to Cotswold Airport. ZeroAvia is a leading innovator in decarbonising aviation, and is developing a hydrogen-electric powered aircraft. The Council has been working with the Inward Investment Team at GFirst LEP to support ZeroAvia which will be increasing its staff numbers from 10 to 40 in the coming months with the potential to continue to grow significantly. Finally, Cirencester College was awarded £4.48 million of funding from GFirst LEP last summer to build the Applied Digital Skills Centre. The contract was awarded to E G Carter of Gloucester, who are now on-site. The new Applied Digital Skills Centre will give the District a great opportunity both to develop a workforce with the digital skills needed in the 21st century, and also to grow its digital and cyber sectors. The Council will work with Cirencester College to maximise the benefits of the Digital Skills Centre by linking it with local businesses to secure employment opportunities for young people.