



COUNCIL PRIORITIES REPORT
July 2021 - September 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

Executive Summary Highlights

- Town and Parish Councils were invited to attend forums in October, one at Trinity Road, and the other at Moreton Area Centre with a focus on improving relationships, working together and supporting each other as well as other topics such as planning and the budget. Twenty-eight participants attended the Cirencester event, and 21 at MAC. Looking ahead, a schedule of engagement events has been drafted which includes both forums for discussing topics such as 'Clean and Green', and community projects as well as the provision of training on items such as planning. The next forum is scheduled for January/ February 2022;
- In July 2021, Cabinet approved the creation of a flood warden programme, the scope to be agreed by key officers, the lead Cabinet Member and key Members and supported by Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC) who will deliver the programme. The towns and parishes that were severely affected in winter 2020/21 will be approached first with a view to recruiting volunteer flood wardens in these areas;
- The Council's electric vehicle charging point delivery partner is under contract and close to reporting recommendations for the first locations in Council car parks, along with recommendations for pricing for charge point users;
- In July 2021, Cabinet agreed to pledge to issue a Local Climate Bond using the Community Municipal Investment (CMI) model; and was one of the first five UK councils to become part of the Green Finance Institute and Abundance Investment's Local Climate Bond campaign. The CMI model is a way for local communities to invest in climate change projects to support the Council to meet its climate change targets. Progress is being made with Abundance on the legal elements of the bond as we move towards an issuance next year.
- Gloucestershire's district authorities have been awarded grant funding for a collaborative project to build capability in delivering support to able-to-pay owner-occupiers, supporting them to invest in energy efficiency and decarbonisation works in their own homes. The Council is leading the workstream on market analysis and business planning;
- The £1.2m Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme contractor has now presented an Investment Grade Proposal providing near-certainty over cost commitment, and the Council is close to entering into contract for the installations. Work will begin on Cirencester and Bourton on the Water leisure centres before Christmas;
- Bromford was selected as the preferred Registered Provider for the Joint Contractual Venture (JV) for the delivery of social housing, starting with the Kemble site. Currently, the legal agreements are being negotiated for the JV;
- A planning application was submitted for the Stockwells development, Moreton-in-Marsh to be delivered by Bromford Housing Association, which will be the first social rented, Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) net zero homes within the District;

- The Council's new approach to community grants, Crowdfund Cotswold has proven to be one of the most successful schemes in the country, facilitated by Spacehive. The first funding round ended in June 2021, and 15 out of 16 projects that launched on the platform achieved their targets. In total £271,043 was pledged by 1110 backers. The Council invested £72,054 into the projects, in addition to Gloucestershire County Council grant funding of £22,456, totalling £94,510;
- The Community Wellbeing team worked in partnership with the local voluntary and community sector to deliver the 'Holiday Activity and Food programme' (HAF) during the summer school holidays aimed at children in receipt of free school meals. The purpose was to make sure children were entertained, active, educated, safe, and fed between Monday 2 August and Friday 27 August 2021. The team is planning the HAF provision for the Christmas Holidays in partnership with the County Council, and will be incorporating learning from the Easter and Summer schemes;
- Cotswolds Tourism has continued to work with businesses to encourage better online presence and online bookings. One hundred and twelve Cotswolds Tourism businesses and experiences are now bookable online via Tourism Exchange Great Britain; and their online digital training videos have been watched over 300 times;
- 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. Cabinet has approved indicative allocations of £50,000 for physical works to town centres and £30,000 to create a 'virtual high street' to assist town centres to be more digitally resilient. A range of town centre projects submitted by Town and Parish Councils have already been approved;
- The construction of the Applied Digital Skills Centre at Cirencester College is moving on at pace and is anticipated to be completed early in the New Year. 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.

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

In September 2020, the Council adopted the Recovery Investment Strategy 2020-24 which sets out the framework within which the Council can invest in the infrastructure of the District including the acquisition of commercial property. The framework supports the delivery of Council Priorities whilst also closing the emerging budget gap. The Asset Management Plan sets out how council owned assets including service and commercial properties will be managed, and includes an Acquisition and Disposal Strategy. The current AMP is being reviewed and updated and will support the implementation of the investment strategy. In addition, an Investment Brief was prepared in August which sets out the criteria including investment return, profile, sectors and location when considering opportunities and work has commenced on identifying investment opportunities that fit with the requirements of the Recovery and Investment Strategy, and aligns with Council Priorities. A property by property approach will be taken.

The Council is taking steps to move to cashless parking including contactless, card, by phone or using an app at all council owned car parks using a phased approach which will enable the Council and its service provider, PayByPhone, to promote the change and assist users over an extended period. 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. The first two phases have been completed and include car parks at Rissington Road, Bourton on the Water; Mangersbury Road, Stow on the Wold; and Beeches car park, Cirencester from March 2021; and from the Abbey Grounds, Old Station and the Leisure Centre from June 2021. Due to increase in car park usage over the summer in particular at Rissington Road Car Park in Bourton-on-the-Water, there have been some complaints regarding the ability to pay for car parking by payment card at the payment machines, and some customers have experienced problems with downloading the pay by phone application to mobile phones as a result of poor mobile phone signal strength in the car park. Officers have placed an order for a router to

boost the mobile phone signal strength. In addition, some payment machines have been upgraded to use “roaming sims” which will provide a more consistent connectivity. Officers are also working with Metric, the manufacturer of the payment machines, to resolve intermittent problems with the machines in some car parks. Phase 3 of the project has been delayed until technical issues have been resolved by the suppliers and the in-house broadband has been upgraded.

The Council recognises that communication is key to establishing excellent working relationships and working alongside our partners to deliver services, as well as engaging our communities and supporting them to take responsibility for the environment around them. Town and Parish councils were invited to attend one of the two Town and Parish forums taking place at Trinity Road, Cirencester and Moreton Area Centre (MAC) in October. Twenty-eight participants attended the Cirencester event, and 21 at MAC. The focus of the events was on improving relationships and sharing good practices, and how the Council can support Town and Parish Councils more generally; although other topics that arose on the night included planning and the budget. Participants were asked to complete a survey at the end; the results of which will be reported in the next quarter. Looking ahead, a schedule of engagement events has been drafted which includes both forums for discussing topics such as ‘Clean and Green’, and community projects as well as the provision of training on items such as planning. The next forum is scheduled for January/ February 2022.

In March 2021, the Cabinet approved the creation of the Civic Pride Programme for a two year period, which has now been rebranded ‘Clean and Green’. The key strategic outcome of this proposal is 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. Two new Clean and Green officers have been appointed and are expected to start in early November, supporting the Lead Enviro-crime Officer. The team will act as the link between the Council, Councillors and communities developing and delivering initiatives, campaigns and educational programmes as well as supporting and working with partners and organisations. In addition, a village warden for Bourton on the Water has been recruited and will start in October. The aim of the role is to ensure visitors, businesses and residents respect the local area; and to improve the local environment and promote community cohesion.

Some areas of the District are susceptible to flooding, causing distress and anxiety to those affected. During winter of 2020/21 several locations in Cirencester, South Cerney and Bledington and properties in Siddington, Mickleton, Moreton in Marsh, Daglingworth, Coberley and Adlestrop were severely affected by flooding. One of the Council’s aims is to support both residents and businesses by providing advice and guidance, and promoting and delivering flood mitigation measures where it is able to. In July 2021, Cabinet approved the creation of a flood warden programme as a way that the Council can provide a supportive role, whilst capitalising on the wealth of local knowledge and experience that can be harnessed through volunteer programmes. The programme would be delivered by Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC) who would work with the Council to agree the scope and priority areas for engagement, with those areas severely affected in winter 2020/21 to be approached first with a view to recruiting volunteer flood wardens in these areas. Key deliverables would include facilitating discussions with Town and Parish councils in relation to seeking volunteers; promoting, recruiting and inducting Flood Wardens; ensuring registration and induction forms are completed; and undertaking focussed work with the identified Parishes/Towns on developing their resilience and preparedness.



Respond to the climate crisis

The Context

The national regulatory and policy context for the Council's action on the climate crisis is largely unchanged from that reported in the previous quarter, although political announcements ahead of the 26th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP26) in November in Glasgow have further reinforced government commitment to the net zero carbon objective. An example is the early October announcement by the prime minister that the UK electricity system would be decarbonised by 2035.

The key high level climate change document published since the previous quarter's report is AR6 – the first part of the UNFCCC Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC's) 6th Assessment Report, titled 'Climate Change 2021 – The physical science basis', released at the start of August (the high level summary for policymakers can be found here: https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/report/IPCC_AR6_WGI_SPM.pdf). Scientists are notoriously cautious in their language, but in AR6 they state "It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land" – a vital step forward from the "very likely" expression used in the previous version of this report, AR5, in 2013. Other headline statements include "Unless there are immediate, rapid and large-scale reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, limiting warming to close to 1.5°C or even 2°C will be beyond reach", and "Strong and sustained reductions in emissions of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases would limit climate change. While benefits for air quality would come quickly, it could take 20-30 years to see global temperatures stabilize."

The evolution of zero carbon technology and business models continues to move fast. Examples are a £3bn investment into UK hydrogen production from wind and solar sources announced in October; an international industrial coalition plan to fully decarbonise steel, shipping and aviation, and global cement producers' pledge to achieve net zero carbon by 2030.

The key announcement in UK policy, expected very soon, is the government's long awaited Heat and Buildings Strategy. This will clarify the government's proposed approach to supporting households and non-domestic building owners to retrofit homes to reduce energy use and carbon emissions. It will impact the Council's approach to supporting retrofit for homeowners.

Actions we are taking

The Council's Climate Emergency Strategy of September 2020 identified the Council's different spheres of influence over carbon emissions in the District. These range from those that are relatively easier to tackle (actions under the direct control of the Council, such as decarbonising the Council's own buildings, fleet and operations), which have relatively limited impact on District-wide emissions, through to those that are hard to tackle, but which could

have greater impact on District-wide emissions (enabling District-wide action and engaging with all stakeholders, such as issuing so-called ‘climate bonds’ to invest in carbon reduction activity).

Direct Control

The key projects are the comprehensive decarbonisation of the District’s leisure centres, opportunities for reducing carbon emissions from the Ubico waste fleet, minimising carbon emissions as a result of changes to the use of Trinity Road offices, improving the energy performance of Council property currently let to commercial tenants, and providing ‘carbon literacy’ training to Council officers and Members.

The £1.2m Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme funding has enabled the procurement of a contractor to install the energy efficiency and carbon reduction technologies at Cirencester and Bourton on the Water leisure centres, Moreton in Marsh Area Centre and the Museum Resources Centres at Northleach. The contractor has now presented an Investment Grade Proposal providing near-certainty over cost commitment, and the Council is close to entering into contract for the installations. Work on the design and contracting stage has been completed for the two leisure centres, and work on site will start in Q4, with completion by the end of the first quarter of 2022-23. The leisure centres will in the future be heated with almost no gas consumption, with heating instead provided by electrically powered air source heat pumps resulting in both savings in carbon emissions and energy costs for the Council.

A selection of Publica staff have now received ‘carbon literacy’ training, with plans to roll the training out more widely across the partnership starting in November.

Indirect Control

The Council’s agile working policy has reduced carbon emissions from staff commuting (although, it is difficult to accurately measure the savings achieved), and the Council is in the process of procuring electricity sourced from renewable generation. In addition, discussions are continuing with the developers of ground-mounted, utility-scale solar farms in the District, offering the potential both for Council investment and supply of solar power to Council premises, through projects that will deliver substantial carbon savings for the District.

Place Shaping

The Council’s electric vehicle charging point delivery plan was adopted by Cabinet in January 2021, and an electric vehicle charge point installer procured in April. The roll-out is underway starting with Council-owned public car parks and Council offices; the contractor is expected to report back shortly on the first detailed locations. The project illustrates one of the key challenges faced by many carbon reduction projects, namely grid connection. As more processes in society become electrified (particularly transport and heat), as well as building new ‘distributed’ renewable electricity generation such as solar or wind farms, greater pressure will be put on the electricity distribution networks – both in terms of physical infrastructure and the ability of network operators to respond to increasing numbers of queries and requests for new connections, at domestic and commercial scale. At District-wide scale, the renewable energy resource and policy study will report before Christmas and feed into the Local Plan partial update process.

District-wide enabling

In July 2021, Cabinet agreed to pledge that it will issue a Local Climate Bond, using the Community Municipal Investment (CMI) model; and was one of the first five UK councils to become part of the Green Finance Institute and Abundance Investment's Local Climate Bond campaign. The CMI model is a way for local communities to invest in climate change projects to support the Council to meet its climate change targets. Initially, the Local Climate Bonds will be linked to Electric Vehicle Charging Point roll-out, with other investment opportunities being added in due course. Progress is being made with Abundance on the legal elements of the bond as we move towards an issuance next year.

A Gloucestershire-wide Local Authority partnership is taking forward a joint, 18-month project to build LA capacity to deliver support to able-to-pay owner-occupiers, supporting them to invest in energy efficiency and decarbonisation works in their own homes. The project has been awarded grant funding and is now underway with this Council leading the workstream on market analysis and business planning for a future one-stop-shop retrofit service for Cotswold residents.

The Net Zero Carbon Toolkit developed by Publica Councils has been well received across local government. The Handbook fills a gap in the market for well designed, visually appealing, direct, authoritative guidance based on the latest understanding of Net Zero Carbon policy and technology, and is aimed primarily at small scale builders, architects, contractors and allied trades, although it is also accessible for householders. Work begins shortly on the revised Cotswold Design Guide and heritage retrofit guidance. Linked to the home retrofit support is the development of the 'Solar Together Gloucestershire' scheme which, if adopted by Council, will give Cotswold District residents access to least-cost high quality rooftop solar PV.

Engaging

This is a very important part of the Council's overall climate crisis response, and there is much work to do to help build confidence and momentum among all District-wide stakeholders, from residents to businesses and public sector bodies. We envisage the creation of a District-wide network of individuals and organisations interested in the climate challenge, supported by the Council's (soon to be procured) digital engagement platform.

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. It has been reported that the stamp duty holiday which will start to be phased out at the end on 30 June 2021 has driven up house prices in particular in rural areas. At the end of December 2020, the median property price in Cotswold District was £385,000, 54% higher than the median property price in England and Wales, while the median monthly rent was £850 in 2020-21, over 16% higher than the national median (Private rental market summary statistics - April 2020 to March 2021, 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 2020, 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. Legal advice was commissioned and obtained on the most suitable partnership model i.e. a Contractual Joint Venture (JV). During April, there was an expressions of interest exercise which was twin tracked with the preparation of a draft contractual JV. The expressions of interest were evaluated and Bromford was selected as the preferred Registered Provider. The

Kemble site is being taken forward via the Joint Venture partnership with Bromford, and the legal agreements are being negotiated. Both the Council and Bromford are looking at potential timelines for delivery which may be constrained by the slow worms on site which will need to be relocated.

Officers undertook an options appraisal for future use of Sheep Street Cottages and the Cotswold Club. These options included the potential use for service delivery with regard to homelessness accommodation and other housing options. In addition, the Council commissioned Energy reports to understand the feasibility of achieving carbon zero. Both buildings were viewed by a housing provider for use as specialist accommodation, however, the findings indicated that it was not an affordable option. The Cotswold Club options appraisal is being updated and a report is being prepared for Cabinet in November.

In March 2021, an allocation of approximately £332,000 from commuted sums grants was approved for a scheme of 14 homes at Sunground, Avening, which will deliver this rural exception site as a 100% low carbon affordable housing development. The scheme has received Homes England funding through Bromford which is developing the scheme on behalf of Gloucestershire Rural Housing Association (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 has been delayed due to underground utility issues but is expected to proceed shortly. The grant agreement has been prepared for sign off.

In July 2021, Full Council approved the allocation of commuted sums grants for 28 social rent homes at Stockwells, Moreton-in-Marsh to be delivered by Bromford Housing Association. The Stockwells regeneration scheme represents an opportunity for the Council and Bromford to create the first social rented, Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) net zero homes within the District. With funding support from the Council, Air Source Heat Pumps will replace traditional gas boilers, reducing CO2 emissions from heating and hot water by around 80%. In addition, the introduction of a large solar PV system will reduce net carbon emissions of the development to zero. A planning application was submitted in Q2 for the redevelopment, and a decision is awaited.

One of the Council's aims is to reduce reliance on bed and breakfast and hotels for emergency homeless accommodation. 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 is being used to identify and place six individuals with the most complex needs into a permanent tenancy, supported by Housing Benefit and/or Universal Credit. Service level agreements have been agreed with Bromford and Aspire (support provider), and a dedicated staff member is providing one to one support for the four clients that have been successfully accommodated. The team is currently searching for the right properties for the two remaining places on the scheme due to the changing circumstances of the initial clients placed. The contract for the support element for this project will end in December 2021, therefore the Housing Team is exploring matched funding options with both Aspire and Bromford. The Council set aside a healthy amount for the project in 2020 so the current underspend for year one can be utilised for our 'matched' funds element to extend the project into a second year.

The Housing Team continues to actively participate in a number of countywide funding bids, including Rough Sleeper Initiative round 5 (RSI5) which is due to be launched around October 2021. A working group will be set up once details of the fund have been released, with further updates available next quarter.

The Council had identified one of its own properties as a potential opportunity to be converted into supported accommodation which was discounted due to the costs and difficulties in changing the use of the building; and a second property identified as suitable for supported housing has now been pledged to the Afghanistan Resettlement Programme. The Housing Team will continue to work with colleagues in Estates and wider countywide partners to formulate a plan to address the gap in supported accommodation in the District.

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 was 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.

In February 2021, the Government provided clarity 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. As a result, the Council has recommenced its programme of work to undertake a partial update of the Local Plan. The project will be supported by an updated project plan called the Local Development Scheme (LDS) that sets

out key stages in the local plan making process and a Local Plan Programme Board, that has membership of all political parties, will monitor the progress of the Local Plan partial update. For example, a statutory public consultation is programmed for December 2021.

The Council has begun the process of updating its evidence base and studies to support the partial update of the Council's Local Plan, including:

- the draft Cotswold District Green Infrastructure (GI) Strategy, which was open for public consultation during July and August. The GI Strategy forms part of the Local Plan evidence base and responds to the Council's Climate and Ecological emergencies and corporate priorities to improve health and wellbeing. A summary of comments received together with a final edit of the Strategy will be carried out during Autumn 2021;
- an updated Sustainability Appraisal - this is a statutory and iterative process in the production of the Local Plan; it helps to ensure policies promote sustainable patterns of development;
- a Habitats Regulation Assessment - like the Sustainability Appraisal this is a statutory and iterative process; it will examine the effect of proposed development on protected habitats;
- a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment - a key piece of evidence that helps to ensure proposed development is located away from areas that flood.
- a Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) which seeks to identify land that could be suitable for allocation in the updated Local Plan. This will be made publically available towards the end of the year, and local communities will be able to comment on the document through the Local Plan consultation scheduled in December 2021.

Work continues on the Cirencester Town Centre Masterplan project which was officially rebooted in January 2021 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 Masterplan options and also to support Cirencester Town Council's emerging Neighbourhood Plan. Consultants were appointed in May to carry out an assessment of possible changes to 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 currently being updated by Council and Cirencester Town Council officers and will be published in Autumn 2021. The Council will be commissioning the next stage of the Masterplan in Autumn 2021 which will bring the project to life and invite local communities to engage and shape the future of their town centre.

In March 2021, 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. A Leisure Strategy determined by local priorities and outcomes was developed with the aim of providing effective and sustainable physical activity and sport opportunities for local communities via investment in our stock of leisure facilities and other non-facility interventions. In March 2021, Cabinet authorised officers to work in partnership with other organisations on the feasibility of the projects in the Strategy. Specialist Leads for each of the three themes (Healthier District, Connected Community and Active Environment) have since been identified and are now in the process of developing action plans for each area. In addition, a Programme Board has been established and had its first meeting in September.

Concurrently, a leisure management options appraisal which also includes the Council's Corinium Museum is being undertaken to determine the most suitable delivery model, contract scope and contract terms for the Council's leisure facilities, when the current contract expires. The first Members working group was held in July to determine the key drivers for undertaking a Leisure Management Options appraisal, for example to increase participation, which has been used to form part of the consultant's brief to help narrow down the number of potential operating models for consideration. Max Associates has been selected to undertake the work with a kick off meeting scheduled for October 2021.

The Council's new approach to community grants, Crowdfund Cotswold, launched in Q4, with the first funding round ending in June 2021. Fifteen out of 16 projects that launched on the platform have met their targets. In total £271,043 has been pledged by 1110 backers. In addition, the Council invested £72,054 into the projects, with further grant funding from Gloucestershire County Council of £22,456, totalling £94,510. Crowdfund Cotswold has proven to be one of the most successful schemes in the country, facilitated by Spacehive. The deadline for project ideas for Round 2 was 15 September. Our delivery partner,

Spacehive, is currently verifying applications, so we don't yet know how many projects will go 'live' on Crowdfund Cotswold, but interest remains strong, and a wide range of projects have come forward.

In line with other Districts across the county, the Council received £100,000 grant funding from Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group to work with the local Integrated Locality Partnership and others, to build on our community focussed work to reduce health inequalities. The community wellbeing team will lead this work and collaboration with voluntary and community sector organisations and our communities will feature heavily. The scheme will work in partnership with 'We Can Move' and we will involve residents and relevant community groups in its development and implementation. The aim of the scheme is to enable and support Cotswold residents to access physical activity by making use of existing assets across the District, creating new activity opportunities and working alongside partner organisations and the wider community. There will be a robust pathway to physical activity that is person-centred, underpinned by behavioural change and motivational support with a focus on empowering people to be more independently and habitually physically active, whilst also creating more resilient, inclusive and connected communities. This three year project sits under the umbrella of the Council's leisure strategy and will involve the following work streams: community engagement/involvement (will commence in September 2021); asset-mapping and gap analysis to identify existing opportunities for referral into physical activity; develop a menu of referral opportunities within the community and leisure centres; support development of new community-based opportunities using and building on existing assets; development of instructor/exercise professionals network across the District; development of physical activity pathway initially targeting specific long term health conditions; exercise professionals skills and capacity audit (supported by Active Gloucestershire); and increased number of exercise professionals through upskilling in partnership with Active Gloucestershire.

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 has applied for and secured just under £73,000 from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to improve employment outcomes or prospects of future employment outcomes for long-term unemployed young people and groups facing the most complex and intractable barriers to work. The Council and Cirencester Town Council in partnership with the wider Cotswold Youth Network, voluntary and community sector, will offer an innovative and responsive service to young people between the ages of 16 -25 who are not currently involved in education, employment or training. 'Cotswold New Start', which is funded for 18 months initially, will provide a holistic service to support young people across the District offering a personalised support programme tailored to individual needs. Two youth workers were recruited over the summer and started their roles in September. A project Steering Group has been set up involving a range of external key stakeholders and partners; and meetings with relevant service providers, the DWP and Job Centres will take place in October. The aim is to take the first referrals from Cirencester and Cheltenham Job Centres by the end of October 2021.


The Community Wellbeing team has been commissioned by Gloucestershire County Council and has worked in partnership with the local voluntary and community sector to deliver the 'Holiday Activity and Food programme' (HAF) during the summer school holidays aimed at children in receipt of free school meals. The County Council secured match-funding which enabled us to have an open access offer for all young people locally to create a more inclusive offer without losing the focus on disadvantaged young people and children. The scheme was funded by the Department for Education, and the purpose of the programme was to make sure children are entertained, active, educated, safe, and fed between Monday 2 August and Friday 27 August 2021. The infographic

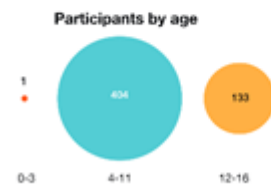
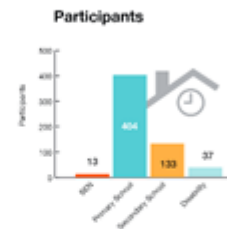
below shows how the programme has performed. The team is in the process of planning the HAF provision for the Christmas Holidays in partnership with the County Council which will incorporate learning from the Easter and Summer schemes.

Children & Families Commissioning Hub
HAF Project Cotswolds Summary [2/8/21-31/8/21]


540
Total participants
attended


862
Sessions
booked


332
Food boxes



Participants eligible
for Free School Meals


50%

Participants
with EHCP


16%

 Gloucestershire
COUNTY COUNCIL

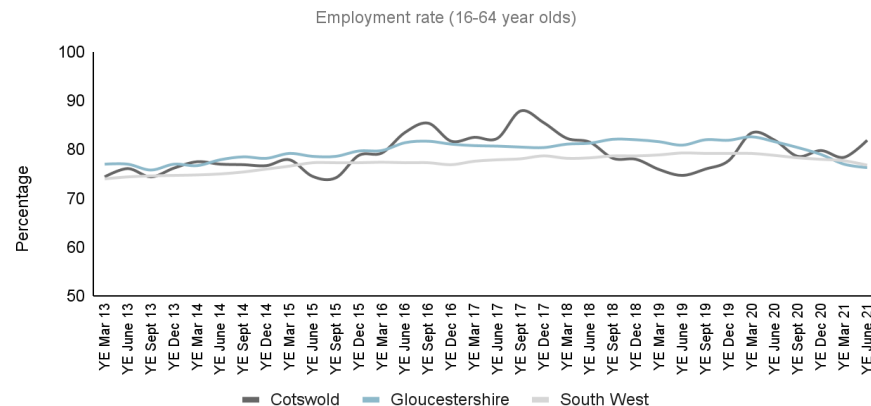
*EHCP – Education and Health Care Plan



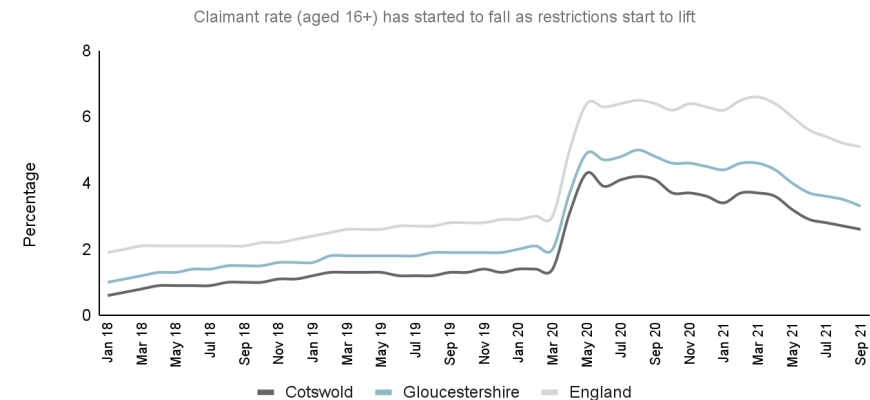
Enable a vibrant economy

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, although has fallen back in recent months. The true picture has been masked by the Job Retention Scheme (furlough) which was extended until the end of September 2021, but Cotswold District has seen one of the sharpest reductions in people on furlough indicating the economy has bounced back sharply since restrictions have been eased.



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. Many of these jobs were furloughed during the pandemic, but with restrictions now eased that number has fallen sharply. The number of job postings in the District in August 2021 was at its highest since January 2019, indicating both that the economy has bounced back sharply but

also highlights the issues being faced with recruitment in some key sectors like hospitality, agriculture and care. There are also 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.

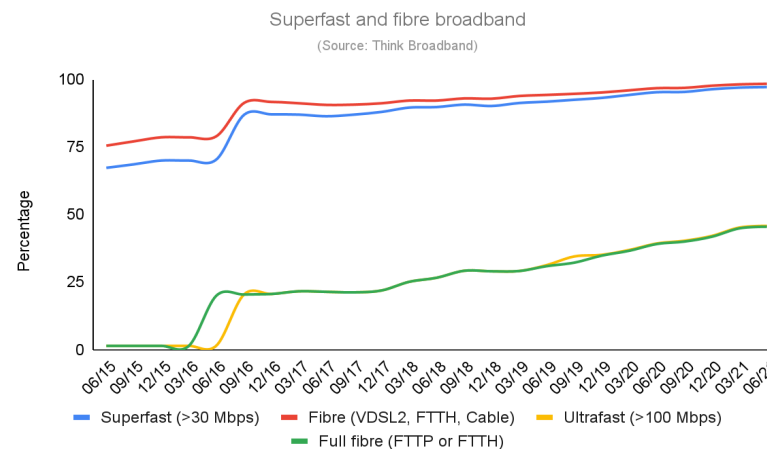
The lack of a reliable broadband connection especially in rural districts can add to social isolation as well as reduce opportunities to be economically active. Openreach is currently working in Cirencester and has recently announced plans to deliver full fibre to Tetbury, South Cerney, Lechlade, Northleach, Fairford and Bourton-on-the-Water by 2026 at the latest. A detailed timetable is awaited. Gigaclear is also onsite in Cirencester and Westonbirt. 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. The District Council is working with the Fastershire Project to address these areas.

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. The Cotswold Economic Advisory Group which was set up to 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 continues to meet regularly and provide valuable advice and assistance. The group has representation from key stakeholders including Cirencester College, the Royal Agricultural University, Campden BRI, St James's Place, the Federation of Small Businesses and Corin Medical. Most recently the Group received a presentation from Fastershire on the progress of broadband rollout and updates on the 'Welcome Back Fund' projects and the Green Business Pledge.

Much of the focus over the last year has been on preparing town centres to reopen following multiple lockdowns and 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 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. Cabinet has approved



indicative allocations of £50,000 for physical works to town centres and £30,000 to create a 'virtual high street' to assist town centres to be more digitally resilient. The Council has approved a range of town centre 'beautification' projects submitted by Town and Parish Councils. An Economic Recovery intern was recruited for an initial 10-week period and her contract has been extended until the end of October to assist with the delivery of 'Welcome Back Fund' projects. Part of the intern's work was to assess the health of town centres across the District and, in particular, to assist with the town centre health check as part of the Cirencester Town Centre Masterplan. Her work showed that Cirencester has a town centre vacancy rate of 11%, 3% below the national average of 14%. Of the 38 vacant units, 15 were either under offer or have strong interest shown in them. The smaller towns within the District have much lower vacancy rates and none of these are of concern at this time, although we need to be mindful of the pace of change on the high street.

The Council has also been working with GFirst LEP to deliver a digital grant scheme to assist businesses with a grant of up to £3,000 for a project to improve their digital capability, which has been funded by each District Council contributing £60,000 from the Government's Additional Restrictions Grant; the scheme is being administered by the LEP. At the time of writing, just over £50,000 of bids for Cotswold District had been approved in principle and due diligence is being undertaken.

The visitor economy accounts for a significant proportion of the local economy. Overall, the local visitor economy was extremely buoyant during the summer with record levels of demand. Visits to the tourism website (www.cotswolds.com) hit record levels with unique visitor numbers, 94% up on pre-pandemic figures in 2019. There were almost 250,000 unique visitors to the website in August alone.

Tourism businesses generally reported very high levels of interest from the public and uptake, especially those businesses with a significant amount of outdoor space. However, those businesses reliant on overseas visitors, and the business and events market or group visits, did not do so well. The tourism team has been supporting businesses in trying to adapt their offers for the domestic leisure market.

Almost all local visitor economy businesses have had staffing issues, which has been particularly acute in catering posts. For many, these shortages have had a knock-on effect on operating capacities and the services they are able to offer. While there is no short-term solution, the introduction of online bookings (and dedicated time slots) has enabled many businesses to better manage visitor flows and staffing levels. The Cotswolds Tourism team has been continuing to work with businesses to encourage a better online presence in general and online bookings in particular. One hundred and twelve Cotswolds Tourism businesses and experiences are now bookable online via Tourism Exchange Great Britain; and the team's online digital training videos have been watched over 300 times.

The 'Escape to the Cotswolds' digital marketing campaign, the result of a successful £73,000 bid to Visit England's Destination Management Organisation (DMO) Recovery Fund, allowed the Tourism team to market with major online national publications, such as the Times and Independent, as well as specialist niche markets and funded social media influencer visits resulting in boosted social media presence with over 150,000 followers.

A key focus of the Tourism team is to improve the dispersal of visitors across the Cotswolds, increasing visitors to less visited towns and to encourage less visits to places struggling at peak times to cope with visitor numbers. Work to better spread visitors across the area continues with an enhanced web

presence for towns earmarked for visitor growth (Cirencester, Tetbury and Northleach) and measures to help alleviate issues in villages with large visitor numbers such as two waymarked walks for Bourton on the Water to help circulate visitors away from the crowded village centre.

Another key work area is Sustainable tourism; the first of a number of projects is a partnership with Cotswolds National Landscape working with local businesses and their customers to encourage appreciation of place, better business practices and sign up to the 'Caring for the Cotswolds' grant scheme, a way in which businesses, residents and visitors can give something back to ensure the environment is taken care of.

In addition to the Covid-19 related work that has taken place during the quarter to support businesses, as well as promoting tourism, 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. The Council is working with:

- the Royal Agricultural University and their development partner Henry Boot Developments (HBD) to bring forward their Triangle/University Gate site.
- the prospective purchaser of the Mitsubishi site at Watermoor. The purchaser is proposing to continue with the existing uses, albeit with a new tenant or tenants.
- ZeroAvia which has relocated from Cranfield to Cotswold Airport. ZeroAvia is a leading innovator in decarbonising aviation, and is developing a hydrogen-electric powered aircraft. The Council is working with the Inward Investment Team at GFirst LEP to support ZeroAvia which has increased its staff numbers from 10 to 50 with the potential to continue to grow significantly.
- Bathurst Developments in relation to the first phase of employment land at The Steadings development. They have appointed a developer partner who is confident about the demand for the units.

The construction of the Applied Digital Skills Centre at Cirencester College moves on at pace and is anticipated to be completed early in the New Year. 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 continues to work closely with the College, particularly to identify partnerships with business which would be mutually beneficial. The College has also been awarded just over £2.5m of funding from the Government's T-Level Capital Fund for a new T-level building which will help to provide high level skills in the District. T Levels are based on the same standards as apprenticeships, designed by employers and approved by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education. It is equivalent to 3 A-levels and involves an industry placement.

On infrastructure, the Development Consent Order (effectively the planning application) for the A417 Missing Link was submitted to the Planning Inspectorate by Highways England in June 2021; a decision is likely to take some time to make. The project, which at around £450m, is the biggest infrastructure investment in the District and indeed the whole county for a generation, is designed to reduce congestion and improve road safety on this important link between Cirencester and Gloucester and, more widely, the M4 and M5 motorways. While new road building projects can be seen as environmentally damaging, much of our efforts have been focused on delivering opportunities for environmental improvements as well as economic benefits.