



Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	CABINET – 6 DECEMBER 2021
Report Number	AGENDA ITEM 11
Subject	GREEN ECONOMIC GROWTH STRATEGY - SIX MONTHLY UPDATE
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Councillor Tony Dale, Cabinet Member for Economy and Council Transformation Email: tony.dale@cotswold.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Paul James, Economic Development Lead Email: paul.james@cotswold.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To update Cabinet Members on the progress in delivering the Council's Green Economic Growth Strategy
Annexes	None.
Recommendation(s)	<i>That progress in delivering the Green Economic Growth Strategy is noted.</i>
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supporting businesses to grow in a green, sustainable manner, and to provide high value jobs• Responding to the challenges presented by the climate crisis
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Cotswold Economic Advisory Group



1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Council's Corporate Strategy identifies the need to "enable a vibrant economy" as a key priority. To this end, Cabinet approved a draft Green Economic Growth Strategy for consultation in October 2020 and, following amendments made as a result of the consultation, it was adopted by Cabinet in December 2020. The Strategy covers a four year period from adoption and the report by the Cabinet Member undertook to provide six monthly updates to Cabinet. This report is the second such update. It is also worth reminding Cabinet that they approved the establishment of the Cotswold Economic Advisory Group to oversee implementation of the actions contained within the strategy. The Group has met on five occasions so far and provided a valuable source of guidance and challenge.

2. PROGRESS UPDATES

- 2.1 The Strategy set out a number of different themes and progress against each of them is set out below. Whereas during lockdown, efforts were largely focused on preparing town centres for reopening and assisting them to evolve in the face of evolving shopping habits, in more recent months with restrictions being lifted it has been possible to widen the scope of activities, including undertaking a number of visits to key businesses. Nonetheless, work to assist town centres remains an important part of the economic development function and this is set out in further detail later in this report.

Growing key sectors

- 2.2 The strategy identified, in common with Gloucestershire's Draft Local Industrial Strategy, agritech, cyber/digital and green technologies as key growth sectors for the District. In terms of agritech, we have been working closely with the Royal Agricultural University (RAU). We believe there is a great opportunity to use the RAU's University Gate site to grow agritech and related businesses. This would be consistent with the site's allocation in the Local Plan. We are in regular contact with the RAU and their developer partner HBD and will be organising a workshop of relevant stakeholders in the New Year to explore possibilities.
- 2.3 Farm491, the UK's leading AgriTech incubator, owned by and based at the Royal Agricultural University, has continued to grow its membership of agritech and agrifood startups both locally and nationally. With 75 members currently, their focus over the past 6 months has very much been on getting these companies investor-ready, launching an investor-ready pitch



deck programme and investor panel. They have also recently launched the Greenhouse Programme, which is funded by the ERDF to support Gloucestershire-based companies. Support for companies has taken a hybrid form, with both online and face-to-face sessions.

- 2.4** As far as cyber and digital are concerned, there are a number of small digital businesses within the District, particularly around Cirencester. For example, LatchAid, based in Kemble, has developed a breastfeeding support app. It has received funding from Innovate UK and is looking to raise further equity funding. Wherever possible we have connected businesses with the Applied Digital Skills Centre at Cirencester College. We are also holding discussions with the Fire Service College about whether it can evolve into a wider national resilience role.
- 2.5** Green technologies is an area very much in focus at the moment. The Council is working with Cotswold Airport on a project to add solar panels to a number of their buildings to generate electricity. Members will also be aware of ZeroAvia, who have moved to Cotswold Airport from Cranfield and are developing a hydrogen powertrain for aircraft. Cirencester College is planning to launch green engineering and construction T-levels from September 2022 and will be visiting ZeroAvia as part of the preparation for this.

Green Business Pledge

- 2.6** Cabinet will recall a report brought to you in June of this year which set out the case for a Green Business Pledge for Gloucestershire, based on a “Climate Commitment” developed by Eoin McQuone of Sustainable Business Design. Events have overtaken this, with the Government now promoting the “SME Climate Hub” for small businesses and “Business Ambition for 1.5 degrees” for larger companies as part of the “Race to Zero”. In light of this, the Climate Commitment website (www.climatecommitment.co.uk) now acts as a gateway for these national/international initiatives, but enables us to capture details of local businesses who sign up, enabling us to share best practice.

Town Centres

- 2.7** The Coronavirus pandemic has accelerated trends within consumer habits, including the shift to more online shopping and it is necessary for town centres and individuals businesses to evolve in order to respond to these trends. The Council has been working actively to support our town centres in making this transition.
- 2.8** A previous report to Cabinet set out how the Government’s ‘Reopening High Streets Safely’ Fund (RHSS) had been used for a range of initiatives including providing business packs of posters and stickers with safety messages and running promotional campaigns to encourage consumers to return to town centres in a safe manner once lockdown was lifted. The ‘Welcome Back Fund’ (WBF) is an extension of the RHSS and granted an additional



£81,114 to the Council to use to support town centres, albeit with greater freedom on how it could

be used. £50,000 of the funding has been earmarked for 'beautification' projects in town centres, in partnership with Town Councils. These projects are at various stages of being delivered. £30,000 was provisionally set aside for a Virtual High Street to help businesses to enhance their online presence. A specification for this is being finalised at the moment in order to go to procurement for a solution. The Council is being very cautious in its approach, recognising that there are many technology-based products available in this space, but we need to be sure that they are appropriate for the Cotswold District.

- 2.9** An Economic Recovery Intern was employed for 10 weeks over the summer to concentrate on town centre issues and her contract was extended until the end of October to work on Welcome Back Fund projects. Her work has included some detailed research on town centre composition within the District and a detailed look at vacant units, particularly in Cirencester. This work has contributed to the Town Centre Healthcheck as part of the Cirencester Town Centre Masterplan.

Visitor Economy

- 2.10** 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.
- 2.11** 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.

Infrastructure

- 2.12** By far the biggest infrastructure project within the District is the A417 Missing Link. The Development Consent Order was submitted on 31st May 2021. The draft timetable for the examination has now been set and was discussed at a preliminary hearing on 2nd November. Officers are continuing to liaise with National Highways (formerly Highways



England) to ensure the opportunities for local contractors, labour and suppliers are maximised.

- 2.13** An update on the rollout of high quality broadband across the District appears elsewhere on the agenda and Officers continue to press Fastershire, as well as providers such as Openreach and Gigaclear to complete work within the District as quickly as possible.
- 2.14** Mobile phone signal remains an issue in some parts of the District and officers are pressing the network operators to address not-spots, including Birdlip, Meysey Hampton and Poulton. By its nature this is not a quick process but it is important that we lobby to ensure these issues are addressed as quickly as possible, either through the Single Rural Network or by operators individually.

Skills and Training

- 2.15** As mentioned earlier, the Applied Digital Skills Centre at Cirencester College is now well-advanced and will open early in 2022. In preparation for this, Officers are connecting relevant businesses with the College whenever the opportunity arises.
- 2.16** The College has also been awarded £4 million from the Government's Post-16 Growth Fund for a new T-Level building which will be ready in Autumn 2022. T-Levels are likely to be an increasingly important part of the training mix going forward, as mentioned in the Chancellor's recent Budget.
- 2.17** In addition, the County Council has brought together their employment and skills offering in a new Employment and Skills Hub at <https://www.gloucestershire.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/grow-gloucestershire/employment-and-skills-hub/>.

Inward Investment

- 2.18** Officers have been working with GFirst LEP's Inward Investment Team to bring ZeroAvia to Cotswold Airport and to support them with their expansion. Their staff numbers have increased from 10 to over 40, with the potential to grow to 200-300 in the next couple of years. The Cabinet Member, Chief Executive and Economic Development Lead have all visited the company and the Leader is planning to visit shortly.
- 2.19** Officers have also been liaising with the new owners of the former Mitsubishi site at Watermoor, Cirencester. The sale completed at the beginning of October. The small hotel on the site, known as Riverside House, has been let to RAU students. The warehouse is currently let to Mitsubishi until the end of March but Members may be aware that the Mitsubishi aftersales business has been sold to the IM Group and the warehouse operation



will transfer to IM's existing facility in the Midlands. New occupiers are being sought. The office building is being offered as serviced offices.

Business Engagement

2.20 The lifting of Coronavirus restrictions has meant that it has been possible to pay visits to businesses within the District in a way that was not possible before. In recent weeks, visits have been paid to:

- The Fire Service College, Moreton-in-Marsh
- Auto-Sleepers, Willersey
- Cotswold Airport, Kemble
- ZeroAvia, Cotswold Airport
- Royal Agricultural University, Cirencester
- Sentinel Systems, Cirencester
- Vanessa Arbuthnott Fabrics, Cirencester
- Law & Company, Cirencester
- Campden BRI, Chipping Campden

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the businesses we visited reported challenges with recruitment across a range of posts and disruptions to supply chains, which were affecting their businesses. A number of follow-up actions were identified which have either been completed or are in the process of being implemented. Further visits will be planned in the months ahead.

Other

2.21 The Economic Development Lead has been involved in a range of other work which could be seen as contributing to the delivery of the Green Economic Growth Strategy, including:

- Supporting Cirencester College and the RAU's projects to reduce the spread of Covid. This has brought funding of over £50,000 into the District.
- Identifying investment opportunities for the Council consistent with the Recovery Investment Strategy and Government/CIPFA guidance.
- Submitting an Expression of Interest to the government for £162,500 of funding for Changing Places Toilets for the disabled. We expect to hear the outcome at some point in the Autumn.
- Working to bring a number of empty/derelict buildings back into use.
- Working with the Data Team to produce an Economic Health Dashboard for the District made up of key indicators. It is hoped this will be ready in time for the Cabinet meeting.



3. CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1 The last six months have been a busy time within this portfolio as the economy has opened up again. Good progress has been made in many areas against the Strategy's Action Plan, with further progress expected in the months ahead. Of particular note has been the work with ZeroAvia, which has seen their headcount rise from 10 to around 50 with potential for further growth. The launch of the Green Pledge through the Race to Zero is a key area of work and St James's Place, as the District's largest employer was the first local business to sign up. Town centre evolution remains a priority and the visit to Law & Company highlighted a business which has transformed itself through a stronger digital presence - something which other businesses can learn from. By building relationships with the new leadership at the Royal Agricultural University, we can take advantage of agritech opportunities in the future.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

6. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 6.1 There are no direct risks associated with this report. The risks of non-delivery of the actions contained within the Strategy are mitigated by regular monitoring and reporting.

7. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 7.1 The Green Economic Growth Strategy seeks to deliver inclusive economic growth.

8. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The Green Economic Growth Strategy seeks to grow the environmental technology sector in the District and encourage businesses to reduce their carbon emissions.

9. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 9.1 The Council could choose not to have a Green Economic Growth Strategy or could choose not to monitor progress against it. Neither option is recommended.



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10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 None

(END)