



COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL PRIORITIES REPORT
January 2022 - March 2022

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

- As part of the Flood Warden programme, the Council is working in partnership with Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC) and Town and Parish councils to recruit local volunteer wardens to help improve local flood preparation and responses. Meetings have taken place with Towns and Parishes including Bibury, Bledington, Bourton on the Water, Cirencester, Lechlade, Moreton-in-Marsh, Naunton, Somerford Keynes and Upper Slaughter. At the end of March 2022, six volunteers had signed up from four Parishes and a first Flood Warden meeting took place on 9th June 2022 and was very well attended by new Flood Warden volunteers;
- The parking enforcement function has been brought back in-house on conclusion of the contract with APCOA on 31 March 2022 to allow for a closer alignment of its function/activities to the Council's priorities, including the Climate Change Emergency and supporting the Clean and Green programme;
- The Council agreed the revised office layout at Trinity Road in support of Agile working, and to seek tenants to occupy space that will be created in the West wing of the building;
- Following the success of the Town and Parish forums last Autumn, two more events took place during March 2022. The Moreton forum was particularly well attended with 29 participants, and 14 at Cirencester. Feedback from participants was gathered via a survey which indicated that 92% of those surveyed were satisfied.
- The construction of the Applied Digital Skills Centre at Cirencester College is nearing completion and a launch event is being held in May 2022. 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 has been awarded £162,500 by the Government to assist with installing Changing Places toilets in locations across the District. The venues in our bid were Cirencester Abbey Grounds, Birdland at Bourton-on-the-Water, the Cotswold Country Park and Beach at South Cerney and Cotswold Farm Park at Guiting Power. It is anticipated delivery will take place in the 2022-23 financial year.
- In April 2022, the Council launched Gloucestershire's first Community Municipal Investment (CMI), targeting an initial £500k, and now named 'Cotswold Climate Investment'. 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; and is facilitated by the FCA-regulated investment firm Abundance Investment, and supported by the Green Finance Institute;
- Cabinet approved funding for the first phase of Electric Vehicle Charging Point installations with 20 charging connections (10 EVCPs) across locations in Bourton on the Water, Cirencester and Moreton in Marsh during phase one. The provider Electric Blue Charging is supporting the Council in applying for Government funding to partially fund the capital cost of this project;

- The Council was awarded £63,000 from the PropTech fund to procure new consultation software which was used to deliver the Local Plan consultation between 4 February and 20 March 2022. The consultation generated 2,901 responses from 748 individual respondents, more than has previously been achieved. The consultation generated useful remarks that will help to shape the emerging Local Plan, and some ideas about how to make the next consultation even better;
- The £1.2m Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme has reached practical completion; energy efficiency and carbon reduction technologies have been installed at Cirencester and Bourton on the Water leisure centres, and the Museum Resources Centre at Northleach, as well as some lighting improvements at Moreton Area Centre;
- Crowdfund Cotswold was put forward for a number of national awards, operated by the Local Government Chronicle and the Management Journal, and has been shortlisted for the 'Community Involvement' award for the LGC. The outcome is expected in July 2022;
- The Council secured £130k from DWP (via the County Council) last November 2022 to protect vulnerable households in most need of support this winter as the economy recovers. The funding has been used for supermarket vouchers and to support vulnerable households with energy and water bills, rent arrears and essential items to keep warm and well; and was delivered by Citizens Advice Stroud & Cotswold Districts Ltd on behalf of the Council. In addition, the Council has provided 1300 supermarket vouchers to pensioners on benefits as well as 28 starter packs containing a microwave, bedding, small table top fridge and additional kitchen equipment for families and individuals that are moving from temporary to permanent tenancy.

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 February, Cabinet and Council approved the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). The MTFS identifies an overall funding gap of almost £8.9m by March 2026 if left unaddressed. The Recovery Investment Strategy has been updated and was considered by Cabinet in March 2022; the Strategy sets out how capital investment will be used as the tool to address the funding gap and deliver the Council's priorities whilst also recognising that capital investment also needs to support the underlying revenue budget by making an appropriate return. The guidance within the Strategy seeks an average return of 7.4% to cover the cost of capital (principal and interest repayments) and a return consistent with the MTFS funding gap. The associated delivery plan is principally based upon projects on the key corporate priorities of Climate Change and Economic Development and an increasing emphasis on Green Infrastructure which is both consistent with the Council's Climate Emergency announcement but also recognises the deliverability of these schemes with partners. The Council will take individual decisions on the projects that come forward with the overall Strategy in mind.

In December 2021, Cabinet considered the high level options on the future use of the Trinity Road offices, Cirencester, accelerated by home-working during the Covid-19 pandemic and the adoption of the Agile Working strategy. Homeworking highlighted the financial and carbon benefits which could be achieved if the majority of staff spend a proportion of time working remotely whilst meeting the business needs of the Council. Spare capacity within the building would be let to commercial tenants to generate income, and by taking an opportunity to invest in carbon reduction measures such as installing solar PV, lighting and smaller measures in the office buildings would result in carbon emissions of approximately 59CO₂t per year (20%). A more detailed report was considered by Cabinet in March 2022 which builds on the previous report and incorporates some revisions following wider consultation with staff. Revised plans have been produced and refreshed costs and savings obtained based on the new office footprint. The Council agreed the proposed changes to the office layout and to seek tenants to occupy space that will be created in the West wing of the building. The report indicates gross annual revenue savings of £202,000, and the

net revenue savings of £166,000. This provides a gross return on investment of 15.0% and a net return on investment is 12.3%. The payback period for the investment would be 8.1 years.

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. Following the success of the two Town and Parish forums in Autumn 2021, a schedule of engagement events was drafted. The forums planned for January 2022 which were to be held again in Cirencester and Moreton Area Centre were delayed until March due to the Omicron variant and the Campden and Vale District Ward Election. The Moreton forum was particularly well attended with 29 participants, and 14 at Cirencester. Feedback from participants was gathered via a survey which indicated that 93% of those who responded were satisfied and 88% found the events helpful. Participants particularly enjoyed the clarity and openness of the Local Plan presentation, and the opportunity to obtain information and discuss issues. The next event will be the Town and Parish Clerks event in April 2022, and will be focused on good comms, and how the Council can help them communicate with their residents as well as networking with each other. The next forum for Councillors is scheduled for May.

The key strategic aim of the 'Clean and Green' initiative is to reduce enviro-crime within the District, and deliver 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. The Clean and Green team acts 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. The team has been out and about working with other community workers including the Police, engaging with schools, liaising with Town and Parish councils about litter picking and ensuring they have the equipment they need, and organising additional cleaning of the ring road. As part of the Great British Spring Clean, the Council with the Clean and Green team held a litter pick for staff, Councillors and residents. This year's campaign ran from 25 March to 10 April and the Council called on residents to join forces and pledge to pick a bag of litter from their local areas in order to clean up our environment and protect our wildlife.

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. The Flood Warden programme was launched in November 2021 to be delivered in partnership with Gloucestershire Rural Community Council (GRCC); and working with Town and Parish councils to recruit local volunteer wardens to help to improve local flood preparation and responses. During Q4, GRCC continued to promote the scheme to Towns and Parishes throughout the District. Meetings or calls have been held with interested parties from Parishes who attended the launch events in November 2021 and those who have since expressed an interest. These communities include Bibury, Bledington, Bourton on the Water, Cirencester, Lechlade, Moreton in Marsh, Naunton, Somerford Keynes and Upper Slaughter. At the end of March 2022, six volunteers had signed up from four Parishes and a first Flood Warden meeting took place on 9th June 2022 and was very well attended by new Flood Warden volunteers. Looking ahead, GRCC has meetings booked in Northleach and Lower Slaughter and will also be making further contact with those Parishes which would benefit from such a scheme but which have not yet engaged.

In addition, two Community Emergency Planning workshops were co-delivered in April 2022 to promote the new Community Emergency Plan template created as part of the work of the Local Resilience Forum.

Over the 18 months, the Council has taken 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. Moving to cashless parking has multiple benefits; it will support the Council's 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 but due to poor mobile phone signal strength in some car parks such as Rissington Road, Bourton on the Water, Phase 3 has been paused. A router has been installed in the toilet block to boost the mobile phone signal strength, and performance is being monitored. In addition, a trial of an alternative card payment system has commenced and if successful, Phase 3 will re-commence.

In December 2021, the Cabinet approved the transfer of parking enforcement back to the Council once the contract with the Council's current provider, APCOA ends in March 2022. The transfer of the function will allow for a closer alignment of its activities to the Council's priorities, including supporting the Clean and Green programme, as well as facilitating improvements in the car park service through closer alignment of the in-house enforcement service and the car park management team. APCOA staff successfully transferred to Publica on 1 April 2022.

This Council, along with over 30 other councils have received funding to use digital technology to make the planning system more open and accessible. The PropTech Engagement Fund was launched in August 2021, and this Council successfully bid for £63k to procure new consultation software to initially deliver the Local Plan consultation. The contract was awarded to CommonPlace in November 2021, with all elements in place and tested in preparation for go live of the LP consultation in February. The aim of the new engagement software is to facilitate meaningful digital engagement across a wide range of people, communities, businesses and third sector organisations, and providing a greater insight into their needs and expectations. The new CommonPlace platform has an integrated reporting facility and automated response handling providing a range of analyses to ensure wide coverage and to enable the Council to target certain or low response groups.



Respond to the climate crisis

The Context

The CoP26 climate conference in Glasgow in November 2021 rapidly faded from the headlines, and the government has since failed to pledge an end to coal, oil and gas extraction in the UK.

The major international development in the quarter was the lead-up to publication of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC's) final report in the sixth Assessment Report (AR6) cycle. This report, focused on what action the world has taken to date and the options for taking action now, makes sobering reading. It concludes that, whilst the Paris Agreement target of limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels is now effectively beyond reach, we nonetheless still have plenty of cost-effective options for immediate action to limit further damaging temperature rise. The report says, in effect, that we have now run out of time and are in a full-scale global emergency, yet the report had very little media coverage. Meanwhile, global emissions of greenhouse gases continue to rise.

The AR6 reports set out to establish the science i.e. whether global warming is happening, whether it is linked to fossil fuel burning, what the effects will be on food supply, droughts, floods, species loss etc, and the options for action. The reports are best summarised as: It's real; it's us; it's very bad; we can make it less bad; no more fossil fuels; no more delays.

The national regulatory, policy and markets context includes the unprecedentedly high energy costs affecting all residents, and the build-up to the launch of the government's energy security strategy. The strategy has been widely criticised for failing to focus on the most cost-effective and fastest to implement solutions, which would have done the most to protect poorer households from unmanageable increases in energy cost (that is, principally, a national emergency programme of home energy efficiency improvement, plus rapidly building more on-shore wind and solar).

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 relatively easier but with lower impact (e.g. direct and indirect control of the Council's own operations), through to relatively harder but with potentially much higher impact (e.g. enabling District-wide action and engaging with all stakeholders).

Direct Control

The £1.2m Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (BEIS) funding enabled the procurement of a contractor to install the energy efficiency and carbon reduction technologies at Cirencester and Bourton on the Water leisure centres, and the Museum Resources Centres at Northleach as well as lighting improvements at Moreton in Marsh Area Centre during 2021-22. Originally, there were plans to install air source heat pumps at Moreton but this was not viable and the funding was re-allocated to the Museum Resources Centre. This comprehensive decarbonisation project has now reached practical

completion, and monitoring is being put in place in order to measure reduced carbon emissions and the impact on running cost. Solar PV electricity generation plus energy efficiency improvements will offset the increased consumption of electricity for the air source heat pumps delivering space and pool heating.

In March 2022, Cabinet agreed the proposed changes to the layout of the Trinity Road offices which will increase the space efficiency of the office use, and reduce energy cost and emissions for the Council, and work to procure a contractor is underway.

More Publica staff will receive 'carbon literacy' training, following the completion of the pilot in the previous quarter.

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 options are being explored to take this further. The Council has completed procurement of renewable-sourced electricity for the next two year period. In addition, discussions continue with the developers of ground-mounted, utility-scale solar farms in the District, offering the potential both for Council direct investment in line with the Recovery and Investment Strategy and potentially the supply of solar power to Council premises, through projects that will deliver substantial carbon savings for the District.

Place Shaping

The first 'Issues and Options' (Regulation 18) round of public consultation on the Council's Local Plan 'green to the core' update has been completed, using the Council's newly-procured digital engagement platform Commonplace. Response has been good, with a greater level of public engagement than in previous similar exercises. Results are being evaluated, but in general there appears to be fairly strong support for the underlying objective of making the Local Plan much more positively supportive of making the District more resilient to forthcoming climate impacts, and reducing climate emissions.

There is a need to improve the existing local electric charging infrastructure capability, encourage the market shift towards an electric future and assist in the achievement of the Council's carbon-zero by 2030 target. The electric vehicle charging point business case was agreed by Cabinet in March 2022 for Council-owned car parks, and specific locations have been identified resulting in 20 charging connections (10 EVCPs) across locations in Bourton on the Water, Cirencester and Moreton in Marsh in phase one. Works are due on-site in the coming quarter, and plans are under development to seek more central government funding to further expand EV charge points, particularly aimed at residents who do not have off-street parking where they can locate a private domestic charge point.

Consultants have been appointed to undertake carbon baselining and forecasting work for the Cotswold District sustainable transport strategy, which will then enable us to identify and prioritise options to reduce dependency on high-carbon transport across the authority. Separate projects have also started to explore options to improve non-car access to Kemble station, evaluate potential sites for a new multi-modal interchange in Cirencester and improve walking and cycling infrastructure around Cirencester and along our dis-used railway lines. The Council is also moving into the second phase of the COMF-funded projects to increase active travel to and within Cotswold Water Park.

District-wide enabling

In April 2022, the Council launched Gloucestershire's first Community Municipal Investment (CMI) named 'Cotswold Climate Investment', targeting an initial fundraise of £500,000. 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; and is facilitated by the FCA-regulated investment firm Abundance Investment, and supported by the Green Finance Institute. Initially, the Community Investment will finance the roll-out of Electric Vehicle Charging Points in the District and the installation of energy efficiency measures, including solar PV, at the Council's Trinity Road offices in Cirencester.

A Gloucestershire-wide Local Authority partnership is taking forward an 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. New collaboration agreed with bodies outside of the core partners (Ashden Trust, and the not for profit technical support organisation owned by the LGA, Local Partnerships) is enhancing the project.

Work begins shortly on the revised Cotswold Design Guide and heritage retrofit guidance, the latter supported by Historic England. Linked to the home retrofit support is the development of a 'Solar Together Cotswold' scheme which will give Cotswold District residents access to least-cost high quality rooftop solar PV. Whilst domestic solar is a relatively small part of the solution to the climate crisis, and will not be available for all homeowners, expanding the number of households with solar PV (and related technology) should help increase behaviour change in favour of lower carbon lifestyles, and the visibility of the scheme provides opportunities for the Council to communicate its ambitions for District-wide emissions reduction, and engage with residents.

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 newly procured digital engagement platform.



Provide socially rented homes

The Context

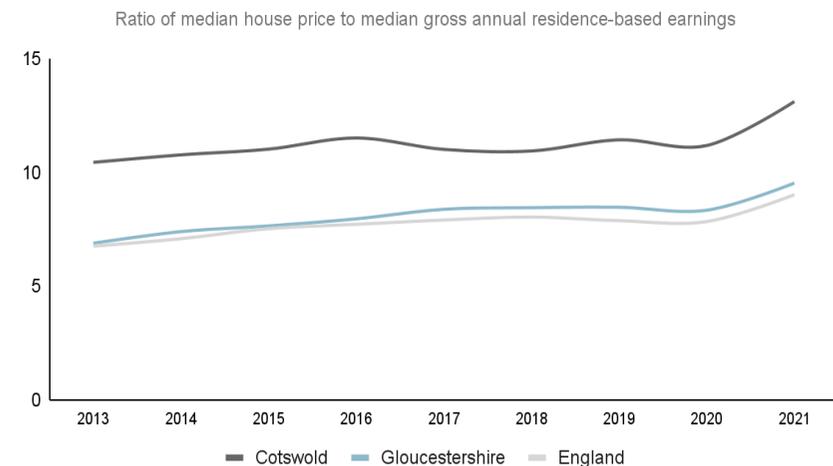
The high quality natural and built environment makes the District a desirable place to live. Cotswold District has a high number of properties owned outright (37.8%, vs 30.6% national average) reflecting the attractiveness of the District as a place to retire or to purchase a second home.

House prices and rents are relatively high. Residents can expect to pay on average 13 times their earnings on purchasing a home in the District. It has been reported that the 'stamp duty holiday' which ended at the end of September 2021 has driven up house prices in particular in rural areas. At the end of June 2021, the median property price in Cotswold District was £410,000, 46% higher than the median property price in England, 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. The high house prices and high rents will be exacerbated by the rise in cost of living which is expected to stay relatively high over the next two years.

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.

An expressions of interest exercise resulted in Bromford being selected as the preferred RP, with the Kemble site to be taken forward via a Contractual Joint Venture (JV). The draft JV is being progressed; however, the Kemble site has been paused, and alternative schemes will now be considered for delivery first. Bromford has started work to develop an alternative scheme with architects shortlisted in January 2022. An initial meeting with the selected Architect has taken place, and plans are being drawn up along with detailed comms with key stakeholders.

In December 2021, Cabinet received a report on the potential uses of the Cotswold Club, Cirencester including options to utilise it for homelessness accommodation, social housing and residential accommodation. As the property is a grade II listed building, it was financially unviable to pursue these options. Based on the high level cost appraisal, the financial risks associated with the conversion of a listed property and the opportunity to release capital for reinvestment in carbon zero affordable homes on other sites in the District, Cabinet approved the recommendation that the property be disposed of on the open market in its current condition, and that the capital receipts from the sale be earmarked for investment in carbon zero affordable housing developments on other sites in the District. Both national and local estate agents have been shortlisted, and the property is now on the open market.

Similarly, the Old station, Sheep street had also been assessed for service provision such as homelessness accommodation and other housing options but the conversion was also found to be unaffordable. A number of interested parties were shown around the Old Station building at the end of January 2022. A project manager has recently been appointed to collect information on possible options and prepare a project plan on the process for selecting potential tenants or partners to develop Old Station, and then to take the project forward.

In March 2021, 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. Cottsway Housing Association successfully submitted an application to Homes England for match funding; and the Housing Association has signed the build contract with the developer.

The second project has an allocation of approximately £332,000 from commuted sums grants for a scheme of 14 homes at Sunground, Avening, a rural exception site which will be 100% low carbon affordable housing. 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 biodiversity measures. The grant agreement has been signed off, and work on site is expected to commence shortly.

The Housing team is working closely with other services to ensure that there is a sufficient supply of both temporary and longer term accommodation available for our clients in housing need. The Council recently approved the proposed spending of our annual Homelessness Prevention Grant award for 2022-2023. As we move away from the reactive necessity of the pandemic, the focus for the Housing team in 2022-23 is returning to a strong Prevention from Homelessness approach and thereby reducing the need for short term, emergency Bed and Breakfast use.

The Housing Team has also worked closely with countywide partners to submit a bid to the Rough Sleeping Initiative 2022 – 2025 fund which included three specific Cotswold District focused projects – Housing First, Complex Needs Prevention, and Temporary Accommodation support. Previously the annual Prevention Grant has been used to recruit staff to assist with providing a proactive and preventative approach to homelessness, however if agreed, RSI 2022-2025 will enable the team to plan much further into the future.



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 government's National Planning Policy Framework has introduced new guidance that increases the importance of climate change adaptation and mitigation and the role that Local Plans play. This is in addition to the Clean Growth Strategy, Environment Act (2021) and UK Net Zero Strategy, which 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 Cotswold District 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 2020 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. A new Local Development Scheme (LDS), published on the Council's website, sets out key stages in the local plan making process. A Local Plan Programme Board, that has membership of all political parties, will monitor the progress of the Local Plan partial update.

In December 2021, the Council's Cabinet approved an early stage Local Plan public consultation to run between Friday 4th February and Sunday 20th March. Overall, the consultation has been a great success with 748 individual respondents making 2,901 responses, more than any previous Local Plan Regulation 18 (issues and options) consultation that the Council has undertaken. The consultation generated useful remarks that will help to shape the emerging Local Plan, and some ideas about how to make the next consultation even better.

The consultation was carried out on Commonplace, the Council's new consultation system, funded by a Government scheme to promote digital engagement. The consultation was based on 18 bite-size themes or topics, and generated responses from all sectors of the community but notably the Council was able to target the District's younger people with promotion on social media, in schools and through video productions, which was a shortcoming of previous consultations. The Council also ran two well attended drop in events in Cirencester and Moreton-in-Marsh where the Forward Planning Team was able to provide information and explore with interested parties the issues and options for the District.

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 is now underway;
- 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. An early stage appraisal supported the public consultation;
- an updated 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 scoping document supported the public consultation;
- an updated Strategic Flood Risk Assessment - a key piece of evidence that helps to ensure proposed development is located away from areas that flood.
- an updated 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 was published in October 2021 and local communities have commented on the document through the Local Plan consultation.

Work continues on the Cirencester Town Centre Masterplan project which was officially rebooted in January 2021. The project is split into two discrete parts, (1) feasibility assessments; and (2) a framework masterplan. The former examines key issues affecting the town centre such as, the changing nature of uses in the high street, parking demand and capacity and the future impact on transport modes of achieving zero carbon. The Council has already completed an assessment of possible changes to uses in the town centre and an updated Cirencester Town Centre Health Check; both documents will be available via the Council's website in spring 2022. Further feasibility assessments will be carried out in 2022. In December 2021, the Council commissioned a consultant to prepare a Framework Masterplan which will bring the whole project to life and invite local communities to engage and shape the future of their town centre. The work aligns and supports the Council's Local Plan partial update and Cirencester Town Council's Emerging Neighbourhood Plan.

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 assessment of possible changes to uses in the town centre and an updated Cirencester Town Centre Health Check; both documents will be available via the Council's website in spring 2022. Further feasibility assessments will be carried out in 2022. In December 2021, the Council commissioned a consultant to prepare a Framework Masterplan which will bring the whole project to life and invite local communities to engage and shape the future of their town centre. The work aligns and supports the Council's Local Plan partial update and Cirencester Town Council's Emerging Neighbourhood Plan.

In March 2021, the Council appointed its first carbon travel, as well as considering the integration of sustainable travel into the Council's objectives on supporting the visitor 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 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) were identified and developed action plans for each area.

The actions and projects have been prioritised to determine whether they are short, medium or long term projects with all the short and medium term projects either under development or being delivered. Many of the projects are cross cutting, contributing to the delivery of multiple Council Priorities, and include projects such as the development of a Sustainable Transport Strategy, Crowdfund Cotswold and the gym refurbishment. Progress on the projects are being monitored by the Active Cotswolds Programme Board. To support the promotion of the programme, a communications strategy has been developed for implementation from April 2022, once the designated Communications Officer is in post.

Another project in the Leisure Strategy is the leisure management options appraisal which is being undertaken to determine the most suitable delivery model, contract scope and contract terms for the Council's leisure facilities (includes the Council's Corinium Museum), when the current contract expires. Max Associates was selected to undertake the work and the process has been supported by a Cross Party Member Working Group. The final report detailing the recommended operating model for the leisure management contract and the Culture management contract has been received and is due to be discussed at Overview and Scrutiny at the end of April, followed by Cabinet and Council in May.

The Council's new approach to community grants, Crowdfund Cotswold, launched in February 2021, with the first funding round ending in June 2021. Round Three of Crowdfund Cotswold launched in Q4, with a well-attended project creator workshop on 7 February ahead of the deadline of 23 March 2022. So far, four projects from this round have passed verification and are now actively fundraising, towards a combined total of over £90,000. Projects supported in early rounds are now in the main fully underway, and a series of project visits have been used to create materials to promote both the project successes and the scheme to encourage new projects to come forward. The scheme was put forward for a number of national awards, operated by the Local Government Chronicle (LGC) and the Management Journal (MJ), and has been shortlisted for the 'Community Involvement' award for the LGC. The outcome is expected in July 2022.

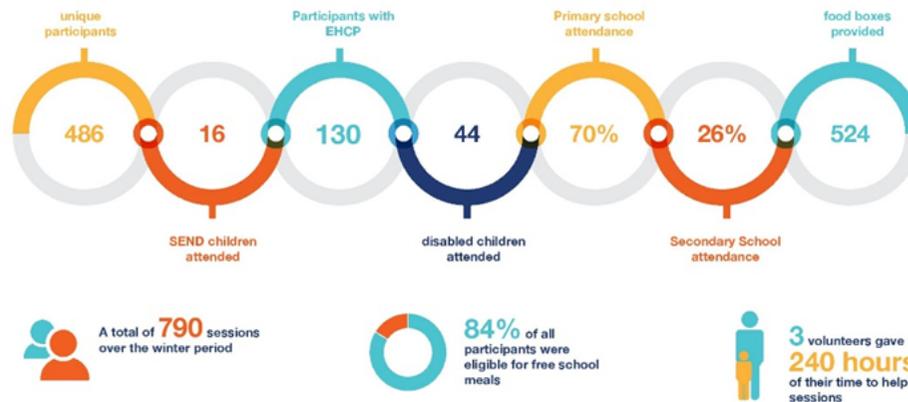
The Council is taking an asset-based community development approach aiming to support more resilient, well-connected and active communities. In September 2021 the Council employed its first Community Builder, and a second post will be recruited in Spring/Summer 2022. Community Building aims to empower local people to shape their local area in a way that is right for them using their skills, knowledge and passion as well as other existing assets. Over the last months the Community Builder has visited many groups such as Men in Sheds, Evergreens, Mother/Baby group, and the Snooker Club in Northleach, which is the area of focus at the moment; as well as attending various meetings such as Town Council meetings, Charter Fair and the Queens Platinum jubilee planning meetings, and speaking to local people about the local area. One of their main aims is to help the Youth Trust to develop initiatives with and for young people of Northleach. The Community Builder's work was covered in local papers, radio and through social posts which has generated a lot of interest and positive feedback.

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 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 'Cotswold New Start' launched in October 2021 and has employed two Youth Support Project Officers. The project has received 45 referrals so far and continues to build relationships with other service providers with the aim of offering tailored and effective support to local young people. The New Start project hosted a job fair at the C-Hub in Cirencester in February 2022 which attracted 25 young people, three employers as well as the National Careers Service. Officers are attending Cheltenham Job Centre bi-weekly to engage with eligible young people from the North Cotswolds directly who will then receive tailored support where they live. Since March 2022 a 'social club' for 'clients' is being offered every Tuesday in the C-Hub with the aim of building trusted relationships with young people and to connect young people to each other.

The Community Wellbeing team was commissioned by Gloucestershire County Council and worked in partnership with the local voluntary and community sector to deliver the 'Holiday Activity and Food programme' (HAF). The scheme is aimed at children in receipt of free school meals and has already run successfully during the last summer holiday and Christmas school holidays, with the most recent one in the Easter Holidays. 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 is funded by the Department for Education, and the purpose of the programme is to make sure children are entertained, active, educated, safe, and fed during the holidays. Structured youth activities and access to a range of free ticketed venues were also offered with transport options. The infographic below provides more detail about what was delivered for local families during the Christmas Holidays.

Going forward, the team is looking to increase capacity by working closely with the Cotswold Youth Network to invest in more community-led and place-based youth activities locally. The Holiday Activity and Food programme is being funded for three more years.

Children & Families Commissioning Hub
Cotswold Winter Stream HAF/COMF Report 2021/2



Gloucestershire
COUNTY COUNCIL

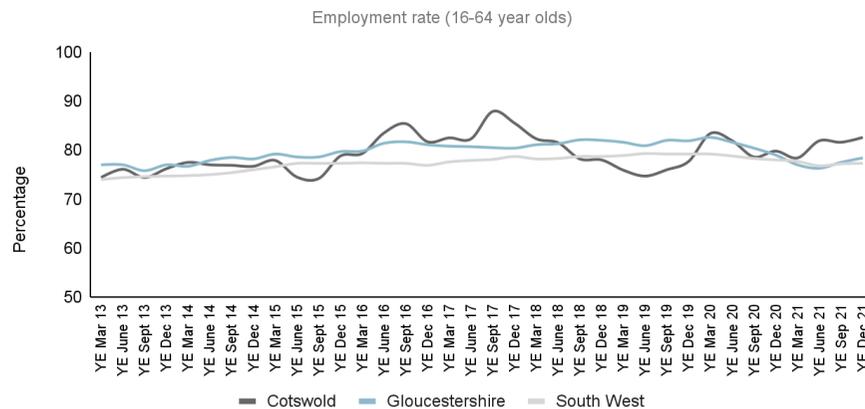
In November 2021, the Council secured £130,000 from the Household Support Fund to help local residents. The Household Support Fund is funding from the DWP for upper tier LA's to: 'Provide support to vulnerable households in most need of support this winter as the economy recovers.' The funding has been used to provide supermarket vouchers for vulnerable families as well as to provide support with energy and water bills, rent arrears and essential items to keep warm and well during the winter. This was delivered by Citizens Advice Stroud & Cotswold Districts Ltd on behalf of the Council. The Council has also provided 1300 supermarket vouchers to pensioners on benefits as well as 28 starter packs containing a microwave, bedding, small table top fridge and additional kitchen equipment for families and individuals that are moving from temporary to permanent tenancy. The Government has announced more funding for 2022/23 to support families and individuals with rising costs of living. The council will receive details from Gloucestershire County Council in due course.



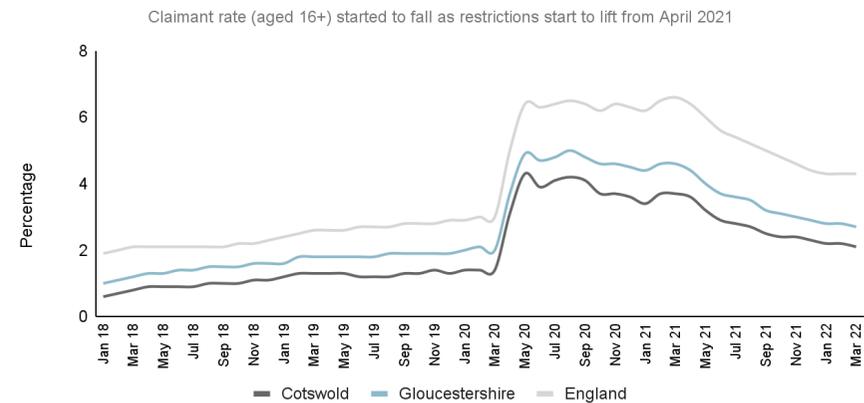
Enable a vibrant economy

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. It appears that the ending of the furlough scheme has not had a significant impact on overall employment/unemployment levels. The national and global economies face further uncertainty now as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and sharply rising prices, particularly for energy and fuel, which will impact disposable income and living standards.



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 the easing of restrictions that number fell sharply and the main issue now continues to be difficulties in recruiting, despite many businesses increasing wages for these types of roles which has led to businesses reducing their offer to customers. Furthermore, the VAT reduction for leisure and hospitality businesses will end on 31 March 2022.

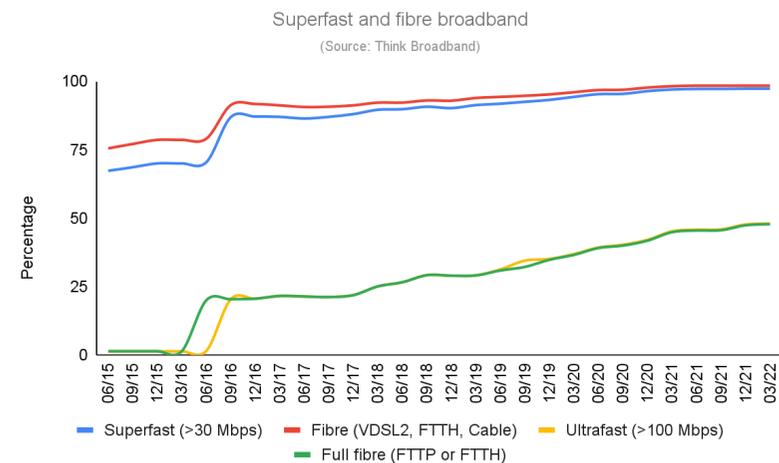
While interest from overseas tour operators has returned, it is unlikely that overseas visitors will be returning in great numbers this summer, especially for the high spending long haul markets, due to both the time lag in bookings and continued nervousness over the course of the pandemic and potential new variants. Pre-pandemic overseas visitors accounted for 12% of all staying trips which would need to be filled by domestic visitors. However there is some concern over whether the 'staycation' effect of the last two summers will be repeated or whether domestic visitors will holiday overseas.

The number of job postings in the District in February 2022 was higher than it has been in any of the three previous years, but has fallen back from the peak – partly because of a change in the way that the data is collected, but also potentially representing some easing in problems with recruitment. There are 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 Chipping Campden and has plans to undertake work in Northleach, Fairford, Tetbury, Bourton-on-the-Water, South Cerney and Stow-on-the-Wold over the next year or so. 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 Green Economic Growth Strategy 2020 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 GFirst LEP. Most recently, the Group had a presentation from a County Council Transport Planning Officer about transport issues within the District, particularly in relation to getting young people to and from work within the area. A number of conversations will take place between members of the Group and the County Council to explore ideas for improving the situation and a further report will come back to the Group in September 2022. The Group also looked at the draft Economic Health Dashboard for the District. The Group is likely to have an important role in putting together the Local Investment Plan required under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, which is the replacement for funds which previously came via the European Union. Guidance on the fund and allocations for each council is expected to be announced imminently.

Much of the focus over the last year or so has been on helping town centres to reopen and recover 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 was 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 approved indicative allocations of £50,000 for physical works to town centres and £30,000 to assist town centres to be more digitally resilient. The Council approved a range of town centre 'beautification' projects submitted by Town and Parish Councils. Of the 23 projects submitted, 19 were approved. The vast majority of these have now been delivered ahead of the 31st March 2022 deadline for the 'Welcome Back Fund'. We are fairly confident that, as a District, we will have utilised our full allocation under the 'Welcome Back Fund'. Other projects funded by the 'Welcome Back Fund' include a feasibility study into a Business Improvement District for Cirencester Town Centre and a Digital Resilience project for town centre businesses across the District to improve their digital presence.

An Economic Recovery intern was recruited for an initial 10-week period and her contract was 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%, three percentage points below the national average. Of the 38 vacant units, 15 were either under offer or have strong interest shown in them. It has been encouraging to see a number of new entrants opening in the town centre in recent months. 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. It is planned to revisit the Town Centre vacancy rates as of the end of March 2022 to check what movement there has been.

The Council has just been awarded £162,500 by the Government to assist with installing Changing Places toilets in locations across the District. The toilets are larger and accessible to people who cannot use standard accessible toilets, with equipment such as hoists, curtains, adult-sized changing benches, and space for carers. The venues in our bid were Cirencester Abbey Grounds, Birdland at Bourton-on-the-Water, the Cotswold Country Park and Beach at South Cerney and Cotswold Farm Park at Guiting Power. It is anticipated delivery will take place in the 2022-23 financial year.

The outlook for the visitor economy, a major sector of the local economy, is distinctly positive despite staff shortages, rising energy prices and the low number of overseas visitors. The lifting of the final pandemic restrictions and the easing of international travel restraints have created a mood of optimism. Over the last eleven months, a new monthly record for visits to the Cotswold.com website has been reached. Unique visitor numbers for 2021 (1.64m unique visitors) were 36% higher than pre-pandemic levels; and interest from international tour operators has started to return.

In December 2021, the sustainable tourism survey was launched (www.cotswolds.com/survey), and was completed by over 60 businesses. The survey was designed to gauge business interests and needs in a number of areas, to identify the main barriers to sustainability and to identify businesses that were keen to access support. The survey covered a broad spectrum of sustainable issues including the use of local suppliers, nature/biodiversity, business practices and management, as well as influencing visitor behaviour. For instance, almost all businesses (93%) would like to use more local suppliers and the main barrier identified (by 44% of businesses) was the time to research and identify potential suppliers. Work has begun on identifying how local businesses can be best supported whether through signposting to existing organisations and resources or by devising bespoke training ourselves or with partners.

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 to bring forward their Triangle/University Gate site. The Council's Chief Executive, the Cabinet Member for Economy, and the Economic Development Lead have held a number of meetings with the new Vice Chancellor, Chief Operating Officer and Director of External Relations at the RAU and have agreed a broad vision of how the site could be developed in a way that supports and complements the University's ambitions to evolve and grow. The University's planning consultants have made representations to the Local Plan Review consistent with these discussions.
- the new owners of the former Mitsubishi site in Cirencester, now renamed Watermoor Point. The purchaser is marketing the warehouse and office elements to let separately, with the latter being serviced offices. Officers and the Cabinet Member for the Economy are due to visit the site again in early April 2022 to see the refurbishment work which has taken place and hear about progress in securing occupiers.
- 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 well over 50 with the plans to continue to grow significantly. The Council and GFirst will continue to support ZeroAvia in its continued growth.

- 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 next step will be for a reserved matters planning application to be submitted for this phase.

The construction of the Applied Digital Skills Centre at Cirencester College is nearing completion and a launch event is being held in May 2022. 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 £4m of funding from the Government 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. The examination is now underway and will run until May 2022. 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.