



COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL PRIORITIES REPORT
April 2022 - June 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. As of the end of June 2022, there were 11 registered Flood Wardens representing the following eight parishes/towns; Bibury, Bourton on the Water, Cirencester, Evenlode, Lechlade, Moreton in Marsh, Northleach and Somerford Keynes;
- A commissioning review of the Council's legal services has been completed. Cabinet approved the recommendation to retain the existing service underpinned by a formal collaboration agreement and fairer sharing of costs between the partner Councils;
- The Council has been working with Cotswold Lakes Trust to make improvements around the Cotswold Water Park to disperse visitors more evenly across the Water Park and make it easier for people to walk and cycle around the area. New wayfinding and welcome boards, and cycle parking have been installed as well as new sections of cycle path;
- A Town and Parish forum was held at Moreton in early July 2022 and attracted 18 participants. The presentations /discussions focused on development management, neighbourhood planning, levelling up and the regeneration bill. A small number of participants completed the satisfaction survey which indicated satisfaction was high, and that they found the information helpful;
- Funding from the Council's UK Shared Prosperity Fund allocation was agreed by Cabinet in July 2022 to enable design and feasibility work to be completed for the Old Station building. The Council is exploring options for bringing the building back into use and preserving it for future generations. A full business case will be brought forward for formal decision in the Autumn;
- Work has started on site at Sunground, Avening, a rural exception site which will be 100% low carbon affordable housing. The scheme is being delivered by Bromford on behalf of Gloucestershire Rural Housing Association;
- The Applied Digital Skills Centre at Cirencester College was officially launched at an event 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 assisted the Royal Agricultural University to secure £100,000 from the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee Strategic Economic Development Fund to assist with the cost of project management for bring forward their Triangle/University Gate site;

- Since the launch of Gloucestershire's first Community Municipal Investment (CMI) named 'Cotswold Climate Investment', targeting an initial fundraising of £500,000, the scheme reached around two thirds of its target at the end of June 2022. It has since met its target by the end of the raise period on the 16th August 2022;
- The outdated Electric Vehicle Charging Points at Old Market Way car park, Moreton-in-Marsh and The Beeches car park, Cirencester were replaced with new state-of-the-art 50kW rapid charge units. Later in the year, four charging units, able to charge eight vehicles simultaneously, are planned for the Council's Rissington Road car park at Bourton-on-the-Water as part of the wider redevelopment of the site, with a further four publicly-available chargers being installed at the Council offices in Trinity Road;
- Crowdfund Cotswold was put forward for a number of national awards, and won the Local Government Chronicle 'Community Involvement' award in July 2022. Round three of Crowdfund Cotswold closed on 23 March 2022, with staggered decision dates through the quarter, as projects cleared verification. The Council has pledged against five projects, to the tune of £22,400 from the Council's Community Fund and £11,600 from the Resilience Fund;
- In May 2022, the Council approved the use of £360,000 from the capital programme to replace fitness equipment across the Council's leisure which will be delivered by SLM Everyone Active (SLM). The new fitness equipment will be more energy efficient, reducing the power demand from the leisure centre's equipment, and helping to tackle the climate crisis. The new equipment is expected to encourage a more diverse range of people to use the facilities;
- The Council considered the outcomes of the Leisure and Culture Management Option Appraisal and approved the commencement of a procurement process for the appointment of Leisure and Culture Management Contractors, for the operation of the Council's Leisure and Culture facilities when the contract expires on 31 July 2023;
- The Council has secured just under £150,000 from the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) through the 'Strengthening Local Communities' programme. The funding aims to tackle health inequalities, improve health and wellbeing using an asset based community development approach;
- The Community Wellbeing team in partnership with 'World Jungle' have been awarded the contract by the County Council to deliver the Holiday Activity and Food programme (HAF) over the next three years.

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 2022, 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 and recommended to Council for approval at its meeting in July 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.

In July 2022, the Cabinet received a report on the outcome of a commissioning review of the Council's legal service to ensure that the Council has access to resilient, cost effective legal services in the medium to long term. Cabinet approved the recommendation that the existing shared team across Cotswold, West Oxfordshire and Forest of Dean continue to operate the service rather than be transferred to One Legal. The report also noted that the current Legal Service arrangements needed to be formalised with financial contributions incorporated within the legal documents to ensure a fairer sharing of the cost. The next phase is a review of the service to ensure that the service is as economical, efficient and effective as it can be.

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. A Town and Parish forum was held at Moreton in early July 2022 and attracted 18 participants. The presentations /discussions focused on development management, neighbourhood planning, levelling up and the regeneration bill. A small number of participants completed the satisfaction survey which indicated satisfaction was high, and that they found the information helpful. A second forum to be held at Trinity Road was cancelled due to illness and is now likely to take place in September 2022.

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. During Q1, there were 21 requests for litter picks from our communities. The litter picks facilitated by the Clean and Green team involved 176 members of the community and 178 children. In addition, the Spine Road, Cirencester ring road and Andoversford dual carriageway were cleaned in June 2022 which included a mechanical sweep and litter pick. Cirencester ring road had an additional clean in April 2022.

The Cotswold Community and Flood Resilience Project was launched in November 2021 to support Cotswold communities to become more resilient to and prepared for flooding and other emergencies. Gloucestershire Rural Community Council is managing this scheme on behalf of and with support from the Council. During April 2022, two workshops on Community Emergency Planning were held online and all towns and parishes across the county were invited to send representatives. A total of 17 representatives from 11 towns and parishes attended. The workshops were organised and run by members of the Community Resilience group of the Local Resilience Forum.

In early June 2022, the first Flood Warden meeting was held at the Westwoods Centre in Northleach. At this point six volunteers had formally signed up and an additional nine representatives indicated their interest at the event. Following the meeting, volunteer Flood Wardens signed up from a number of parishes. As of the end of June there were 11 registered Flood Wardens representing the following eight parishes/towns; Bibury, Bourton on the Water, Cirencester, Evenlode, Lechlade, Moreton in Marsh, Northleach and Somerford Keynes. A further four communities have expressed an interest. The programme continues to be promoted and awareness is being raised around Community Emergency Planning and resilience. Three parishes have requested guidance on either updating or creating a Community Emergency Plan.

The Council has developed a Strategy on a Page for the Cotswold Water Park with the key ambition for it to reach its full potential as a 'lovely place to walk and cycle where people can get from place to place enjoyably, safely and easily', while also having regard for its importance as a natural habitat with a number of nationally designated Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Areas of Conservation.

The Strategy has four strategic elements with proposed activities which are expected to be delivered by the end of December 2022. The focus is on activities where interventions will make the most difference to communities, and will be supported by allocations from the Covid Outbreak Management Funds (COMF). These projects are 'ready to go', and any gaps and longer term issues will be identified.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report on progress at its meeting on 22 June 2022. Much of the focus over the last six months has been on the 'Active and Sustainable Travel' element. The Council has been working



with Cotswold Lakes Trust to make improvements around Cotswold Water Park that will make it easier for people to walk and cycle around the area as well as helping to disperse visitors more evenly across the Water Park.

Phase One of the project delivered a number of projects including:

- New wayfinding and welcome boards were installed at five of the key destinations to guide visitors to new and interesting places that can be reached on foot or bicycle.
- New cycle parking was installed at six car park and country park locations so visitors and local residents have somewhere secure to leave their bikes when visiting the Water Park, reducing the need to drive and helping to tackle the climate emergency.
- A new section of cycle path linking NCN45 (Railway Path) with Cerney Wick bridge.
- A large section of the railway path between Cerney Wick bridge up to Spine Road and across to the other side was resurfaced and underwent vegetation clearance to make it more accessible for those using bicycles, wheelchairs and mobility scooters.

Phase Two of the project includes working with Gloucestershire County Council to assess the feasibility of a pegasus crossing on the Spine Road which already has funding if a crossing is viable. The crossing would be signalled and used by pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders.

Over the last 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 was paused. A router was 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 to speed up card processing commenced in late June 2022 and if successful, Phase 3 will re-commence.

The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on travel, work and leisure habits and the current financial position of the Council. In January 2022, Cabinet agreed to align charging periods for all car parks owned by the Council to 8am to 6pm on Mondays to Saturdays and remove the 'free after 3pm' concession from six car parks. These changes were implemented on 4 April 2022. 'Free after 3pm' was introduced several years ago when Cirencester car parks were under pressure from high demand due to the Market Place refurbishment scheme and improvements to the Forum car park; and to draw shoppers into town at a less busy time of the day to spread the demand. This is no longer the case, and its removal was supported during the budget consultation as preferable to introducing charges for evening/overnight parking and Sunday parking. The additional revenue generated will support the capital financing costs of further investment in the Council's car park estate.

The overarching aim of the improvement work in the Planning service is to provide a trusted, inclusive and transparent planning service. A relaunch of the pre-application service has been prepared and is awaiting sign off by the Cabinet Member. The new service will be accompanied by new forms and schedule of charges on the website. In addition, the service has started work on improving both how it communicates with applicants and the timeliness of the communication at key stages of the process.



Respond to the climate crisis

The Context

The key national context in Q2 was the publication by the Climate Change Committee of the 2022 progress report to Parliament. The BEIS Net Zero Strategy published in October last year targeted a decline in UK greenhouse gas emissions from 2021 onwards, but the CCC progress report shows annual emissions rose by 4% in 2021. The key takeaways from the progress report include:

- There are still policy gaps in the net zero strategy
- Progress lags policy ambition – insufficient focus on delivery
- Need active management of delivery risks
- Tackling the cost of living crisis needs to link to net zero
- Warm words but no progress on the cross-cutting enablers of the net zero transition
- UK needs to act on CoP26 commitments

In addition to the policy context, in Q2 we have seen a hardening of the energy markets. Early in the energy crisis there was a shared view that markets would soften as the Russian invasion of Ukraine resolved itself and Russian gas continued to flow into Europe. Analysts now say that the current unprecedentedly high energy costs are likely to continue for the short-medium term. This has grave consequences for expenditure budgets for the Council, and for all residents. It is now predicted that, from the autumn, 'typical' annual household energy bills will be well over £3k, pushing many households into fuel poverty. There is an urgent need to help residents protect themselves from this crisis.

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

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. During May and June 2022, there was a 'big office clearout', and some early office moves were also

completed. Additional consideration is being given to energy and carbon reducing actions as part of this refurbishment, for example examining the feasibility of solar PV on the roof of the Trinity Road office, which will usefully reduce the cost of imported electricity; as well as energy efficiency improvements, for example setting minimum performance specifications for low energy lighting. A contractor will be appointed for the more extensive office moves, refurbishments, alterations to specific offices and the marking out of new tenant areas. The procurement process commenced in June, and the contract is expected to be awarded in September 2022.

A survey into travel and working patterns of Publica staff is being carried out by summer interns. This will feed through to a sustainable travel plan for the Trinity Road office, which should help staff to reduce the direct costs and carbon impacts of commuting.

Indirect Control

Waste and recycling collection represents one of the most fundamental municipal services that local government offers, presenting councils with huge challenges and potential opportunities in terms of emerging agendas around the environment, climate emergency, and digital services. The Environmental Services Innovation Programme (ESIP) is a partnership between Cotswold District Council, Forest of Dean District Council, West Oxfordshire District Council, Publica and Ubico to deliver shared innovation projects. The ESIP programme focuses on six main priority areas, one of which is to reduce the carbon produced by environmental services. The Council is already seeing benefits from the driver liaison post implemented in 2021-22 which delivered £14,959 fuel saving from heavy braking and acceleration equating to 36.6 tonnes of CO₂. The Council is also reviewing the current waste and recycling service over the next year. Frith Consulting has been commissioned to perform a benchmarking and options appraisal on the current service so that we can understand how it compares against nearest neighbours and authorities with a similar geographic and demographic. The final report is anticipated in late summer and once received, the available options will be considered.

The Council has completed procurement, through a Cheltenham-led contract, of renewable-sourced electricity for the next two year period, although the exposure to current high wholesale prices in this contract means that there is an urgent need to reduce direct energy consumption at Council sites particularly in the run-up to winter.

Discussions continue with the developers of ground-mounted, grid-connected, utility-scale solar farms, as well as premises-linked 'behind the meter' building-connected solar and storage installations in the District. These offer the potential both for Council direct investment as part of 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. A consultant has been identified that will support the Council in assessing viability and risk for these potential investments, and also advise on a commercial strategy and support any negotiation and transaction for solar farms.

Place Shaping

The 'Issues and Options' (Regulation 18) round of public consultation on making the Council's Local Plan 'green to the core' has been evaluated and reported to councillors. Responses demonstrate support for the underlying objective, and work is now underway to develop draft policies that put the overall objectives into effect. Close attention is being paid to other councils that are attempting similar updates or amendments to local plans, and how these

proposals are surviving examination in public. Of particular note are the Salt Cross Garden Village Area Action Plan, and the Supplementary Planning Document at West Oxfordshire and the Cornwall Climate Emergency Development Plan Document.

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 providing 20 charging connections (10 EVCPs). During the quarter, the outdated EVCPs at Old Market Way car park, Moreton-in-Marsh and The Beeches car park, Cirencester were replaced with new state-of-the-art 50kW rapid charge units. The second phase of the EVCP roll out is set to take place later in the year. The EV charging industry (infrastructure and services) is changing rapidly, with steep growth, grid connection constraints, rising equipment costs, new entrants and high M&A (mergers and acquisitions) activity. The Council's chosen contractor is strained by growth, and the latest quotations for new installations are higher than initial estimates, meaning the team is re-evaluating the viability of the initial selected sites. Plans are under development to seek more central government funding, notably the On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme (ORCS) and Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (LEVI) fund 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.

The consultants appointed to undertake carbon baselining and forecasting work for the Cotswold District sustainable transport strategy have reported to councillors through a workshop which highlighted the slightly surprising finding that the bulk of private vehicle emissions in the District arise from longer journeys, and that short journeys are responsible for very little of the total. Consultants are now developing proposals for policies and actions for the Council to consider.

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.

In May 2022, Cabinet endorsed the Nature Recovery Plans for the Cotswold Water Park and the Cotswolds National Landscape (AONB). The implementation of the NRPs forms an important part of the Council's approach to addressing the Climate and Ecological Emergencies.

Nature Recovery Plans (NRPs) aim to secure resilient ecological networks to benefit wildlife and to also provide a range of "ecosystem services", such as clean air and water, food provision, water management and improvements to wellbeing and the economy. They guide activities within a given area, such as planning decisions and policy, funding applications, and land management to ensure that alongside other benefits, biodiversity is protected, enhanced and created in a way that drives nature recovery – "the right habitats in the right places".

The Cotswold Water Park NRP was prepared by the Council in partnership with a wide range of local organisations including local councils, national government organisations, local voluntary and environmental organisations; while the Cotswold National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan (CotsNRP) was prepared by the Cotswolds National Landscape, in consultation with this Council and other partners. The CotsNRP is focussed on actions which will

enhance the special species and habitats of the Cotswolds, setting out targets, priorities and potential locations for habitat restoration as well as describing what can be done by the wider community to contribute to nature recovery.

District-wide enabling

The Council's first Community Municipal Investment (CMI), named 'Cotswold Climate Investment' (CCI), is targeting a £500,000 fundraise, and stood at about two thirds of target by the end of the quarter. During the quarter investor sentiment has shifted, driven by a rising Bank of England base rate, and general uncertainty caused by economic stagnation, inflation and the cost of living crisis. Depending on how the remainder of the raise period goes, it may be necessary to extend the finish deadline for the fundraise.

A Gloucestershire-wide Local Authority partnership, led by Stroud District Council, now named Retrofit Centre, is taking forward an 18-month project to build LA capacity to deliver retrofit support to able-to-pay owner-occupiers who wish to invest in energy efficiency and decarbonisation works in their own homes. The project has been awarded initial grant funding, and has since attracted additional grant funding, and key fixed term appointments have been made to drive the project forward. The Council's role is to lead the workstream on market analysis and business planning for a future one-stop-shop retrofit service for Cotswold residents. The collaboration with the Ashden Trust is proving important.

In parallel with the Gloucestershire-wide project, this Council and Stroud District Council are receiving support from the not for profit technical support organisation owned by the LGA, Local Partnerships, to evaluate opportunities for joint working on the retrofit objective, and Local Partnerships is due to feedback its findings and recommendations to the two Councils in the next quarter.

After extensive evaluation of customer feedback and the offer from the Solar Together scheme for bulk-purchased residential rooftop PV, it was decided not to proceed with the offer, but to seek alternative ways to satisfy the 'solar streets' objective of the Climate Emergency Strategy. Discussions are now underway with alternative providers that should be able to help the Council expand the number of households with solar PV (and related technology) by reducing risk and complexity for householders. Such a scheme should help increase behaviour change in favour of lower carbon lifestyles, and the visibility of such a scheme provides opportunities for the Council to communicate its ambitions for District-wide emissions reduction, and engage with residents.

'Warm and Well' is managed by Severn Wye Energy Agency (SWEA) on behalf of the seven local authorities in South Gloucestershire and Gloucestershire, including Cotswold District Council. The service offers energy efficiency advice to householders and administers grant funding on behalf of the local authorities and other funders. During 2021-22, one hundred and fifty-eight households were supported resulting in 49 properties being improved making a life-time saving of 1,723 tonnes of CO2 equivalent to making 490 Cotswold homes carbon neutral for a year.

Engaging

This remains 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 are now working on the creation of a District-wide network of individuals and organisations interested in the climate challenge, and researching user needs in order to provide real value.

Provide socially rented homes

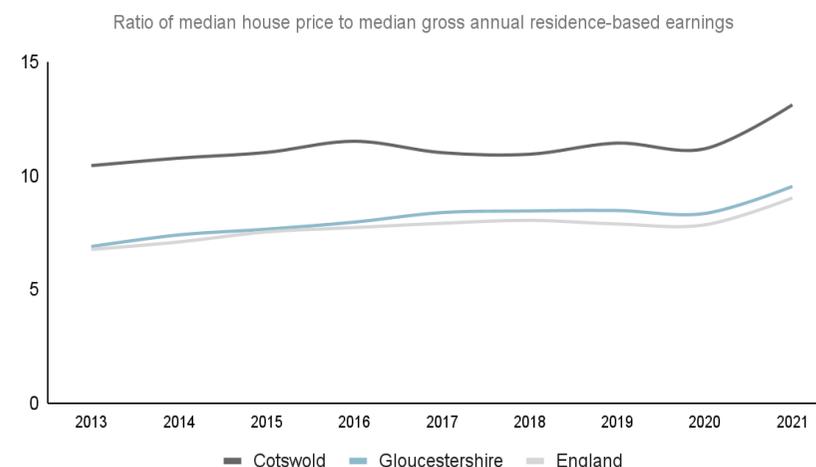


The Context

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 (RPs), 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 legal agreement is being progressed; however, the Kemble site has been paused, and an alternative scheme at Down Ampney is now being prepared for delivery first. The Council and Bromford are working in partnership to prepare a planning application for the Down Ampney site and have started a planned programme of consultation, which will continue through this year. Architects have been appointed and are preparing initial scheme designs for this net carbon zero housing development, which will be further shaped by consultation with local people. Legal advice has now been refined and the partnership and development will now be taken forward via a Collaboration agreement which is being finalised before the Council makes a formal decision on both the legal agreement and terms of the Down Ampney agreement in September 2022.

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. The Council has now accepted an offer on the property and is progressing with the sale.

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 was 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. Historic England has invited the Council to work with them on the project to use it as a case study for how the refurbishment of old buildings can be carried out in a way that looks to make the building as sustainable as possible in the future. They will be providing expertise during the project to help make the building sustainable, both in the refurbishment and ongoing maintenance and running. Funding from the Council's UK Shared Prosperity Fund allocation was agreed in July 2022 to enable design and feasibility work to be completed which will inform a full business case which will be brought forward for formal decision in the Autumn.

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. Developers are expected to start on site in August 2022.

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. The developer, Helix Construction has submitted a planning application for reserved matters to finalise the details of the units and the landscaping.

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 commenced in July 2022 which coincided with the National Federations's Rural Housing Week 2022 which highlights the challenges facing housing in rural communities.

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 Council secured a lease on a property in Tetbury in July 2020 which provided nine self-contained units for homeless people. This provision worked very well and saw a reduction in the reliance on Bed and Breakfast accommodation. The Council recently took the opportunity to purchase this property when it became available for sale ensuring longer term provision for homeless people. The purchase is now progressing.

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 2019 the Council declared a Climate Change Emergency, and a year later 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 places, 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 approximately 7508 individual respondents making 2,900 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. A summary of the consultation responses has been drafted and will be made available on the Council's website in July. An update on the Local Plan project was presented to the 4 July 2022 Cabinet meeting.

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 April 2022, 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 first phase of this work, which establishes future “do nothing” transport carbon forecasts for Cotswold District and quantifies the difference between that forecast and the trajectory we need to meet to achieve our aim of net zero carbon emissions by 2045, has now been completed and shared with Members at a workshop on 4th July 2022. The second phase, exploring options to close that gap, is now underway. The outcomes from that phase will be used to inform the update to the Local Plan and in the preparation of other planning policies, such as the Cirencester Town Centre Masterplan. A Public Transport Study examining potential locations for a transport interchange in Cirencester and possible improvements to the public transport connections between Cirencester, Tetbury and the rail station at Kemble was commissioned in April 2022 to further support this work.

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. Progress on the projects are being monitored by the Active Cotswolds Programme Board.

In May 2022, Council approved £360,000 from the Capital Programme to replace fitness equipment across the Council's leisure service to be delivered by SLM Everyone Active. The new fitness equipment will be more energy efficient, reducing the power demand from the leisure centre's equipment, and helping to tackle the climate crisis. The new design of gym spaces will also reflect the rising trend in 'functional' fitness training, focusing on more functional fitness space and less on cardio machines. Furthermore, the new equipment is expected to encourage a more diverse range of people to use the facilities. This is especially important at Cirencester Leisure Centre where there has been growth in health and fitness competition from Puregym. The café at Cirencester will also be upgraded, improving the whole leisure experience for our residents and customers.

The leisure management options appraisal which includes the Corinium Museum has been completed to determine the most suitable delivery model, contract scope and contract terms for the Council's leisure facilities when the current contract expires on 31 July 2023. Max Associates was selected to undertake the work and the process was supported by a Cross Party Member Working Group. A report on the outcomes of the options appraisal was discussed at Overview and Scrutiny in April, followed by Cabinet and Council in May 2022. The Council approved the commencement of a procurement process for the appointment of Leisure and Culture Management Contractors (separate lots) at its meeting which will be managed by Max Associates

supported by the Council and its Legal team. Work has commenced on the overarching legal contract, and the procurement details were reviewed at the procurement and commissioning board in July 2022 to determine the procurement route and the contract terms.

Another project in the Leisure Strategy is the development of a Playing Pitch Strategy which will include an assessment of the District's current and future needs for playing pitches for football, rugby, hockey, tennis and polo. Consultants, KKP is undertaking the project, and completed the winter sport assessment during the first part of the quarter. The assessment was informed by consultation (1-2-1, telephone and online) with Town and Parish Councils, educational establishments and sports clubs. The winter sport assessment was reviewed by sporting governing bodies with KKP and the Council at the end of June. The next steps are for KKP to draft the report and produce an action plan in partnership with the Council and governing bodies; and to commence the summer sport assessments.

Round three of Crowdfund Cotswold closed on 23rd March, with staggered decision dates through the quarter, as projects cleared verification. The Council has pledged against five projects, to the tune of £22,400 from the Council's Community Fund and £11,600 from the Resilience Fund:

- Two projects to replace tired play equipment in Meysey Hampton and Ampney Crucis
- Investment in equipment to help the Severn Areas Rescue Association set up a Cotswold Search and Rescue Team
- A grant to replace a temporary canopy at the Tetbury Goods Shed Art Centre
- A grant to develop a clubhouse at the recently established Moreton Croquet Club.

The Ampney Crucis playground project as well as the Cotswold Search and Rescue Team project have already hit their funding targets.

Visits to projects supported in earlier rounds have yielded photo and video content, to promote the scheme to the next cohort of project creators and to celebrate the work of community project creators. Crowdfund Cotswold won the Local Government Chronicle's 'Community Involvement' award in July 2022.

The Council is actively engaging with its communities. In June 2022, the Community Wellbeing team supported the 'NHS and Beyond Health Fair' in Cirencester, organised by the local Patient Participation Group. The team took the opportunity to inform and promote their activities as well as engaging with residents and networking with other organisations. This event was part of the 'Cirencester Health and Wellbeing Week' organised by the Town Council.

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 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. The Community Wellbeing team has supported the development of a community-led initiative in Bourton-on-the-Water that aims to enable older people to learn and feel comfortable with digital technology. It is in the early stages but plans include weekly classes for ten participants over the age of sixty.

The Council's Community Builder has connected residents together who are interested in reducing food waste in Northleach, and ideas about a food pantry/food waste/community fridge/kitchen are being discussed. Two small youth grants have been secured for Northleach Youth Trust, and young people are being asked about how they would like to see the funding spent.

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 Community Wellbeing team in partnership with 'World Jungle' applied to the County Council to deliver the Holiday Activity and Food programme (HAF) over the next three years and has won the contract. The scheme is aimed at children in receipt of free school meals and has already run successfully during school holidays in 2021. More recently, we delivered the HAF during the Easter Holidays in April 2022. Just under 930 children attended the 30 activities that were on offer and 1001 sessions were booked. Forty-six percent of those children were eligible for free school meals. Over 700 Co-op food Boxes as well as 400 frozen meals were delivered to families. Feedback from a survey told us that the children had a really enjoyable time, felt there was a large range of activities to choose from and enjoyed just being able to get outside or try new things. Parents were extremely pleased as lower income families were able to access activities for their children to try that they otherwise may not be able to afford. Feedback also highlighted areas for improvement such as activities for children of older and much younger age groups, widening our activities to include as many age groups as possible, providing more slots for the most popular activities as well as better advertising. This feedback will feed into future provision planning.

The Council was 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. Delivery for all four venues should take place in the 2022-23 financial year and officers are currently liaising with each of them to progress this project.

The Council secured just under £150,000 from the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) through the 'Strengthening Local Communities' programme to tackle health inequalities and improve health and wellbeing using an asset based community development approach. In collaboration with the Integrated Locality Partnership (ILP), it has been agreed that part of the funding will be used to improve food security/food sustainability in the Cotswold District. The Council has commissioned 'Feeding Change' to scope the picture of community food provision now, what is working well in the Cotswolds and what is the need and where the gaps are. Their report explores how to provide everyone with great food and someone to eat it with across the Cotswolds. The report contains several key recommendations, which will be implemented over the coming months using the CCG funding in part.

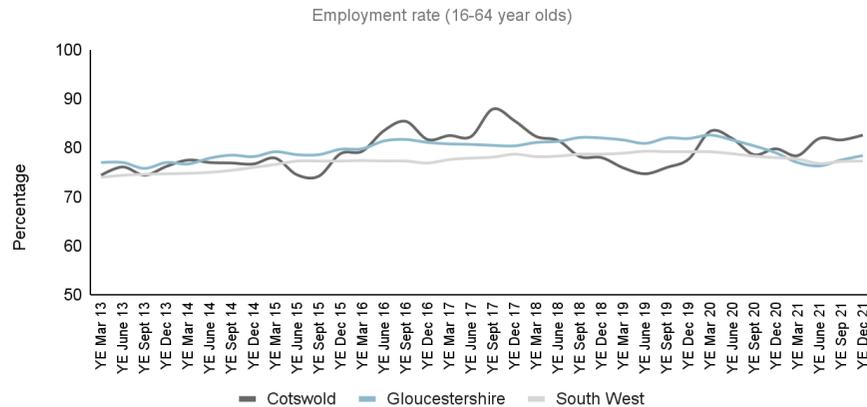
The Government announced a package of support to help households with rising energy bills which includes a £150 non-repayable rebate for households in council tax bands A to D, and discretionary funding to support households who are in need, but not eligible for the Council Tax Rebate. The discretionary funding aims to reach people on low income, people living in supported accommodation, people living in Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and people receiving certain benefits amongst other criteria. At the end of June 2022, almost 90% of those eligible for the mandatory scheme had received their payments. The Council paid out £2,889,600 to 22,496 households. To address how the Council can continue to support households during the cost of living crisis, some modelling on changes to the council tax support scheme is being undertaken in preparation for April 2023.

Enable a vibrant economy

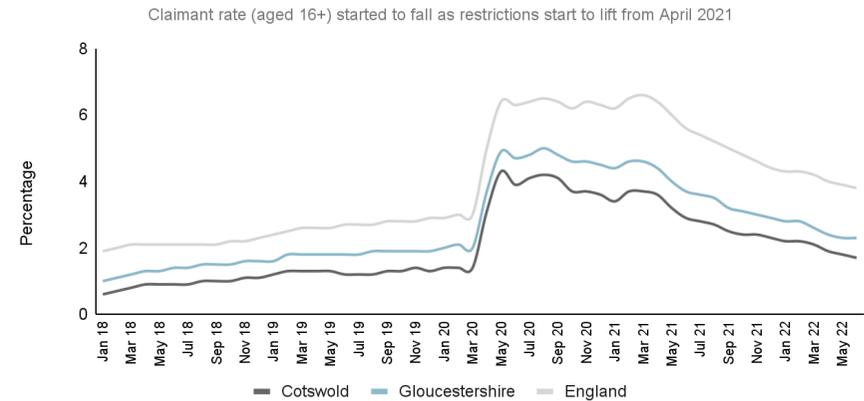


The Context

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 fewer 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 significantly in recent months to 1.8%. 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. The local visitor economy has taken a huge hit over the last two years and while it is recovering strongly the outlook remains far

from rosy. Demand remains relatively strong but there is mounting evidence that a large proportion of UK residents will be holidaying overseas this summer. This, combined with the cost of living crisis will have an effect on both visitor numbers and visitor spend.

Visitor attractions are reporting numbers have fallen since last year and accommodation providers are reporting lower levels of advance bookings, although with late bookings their overall occupancy rates are stable. All businesses are reporting large cost increases, particularly in wages and energy prices. For serviced accommodation and hospitality businesses, staff shortages are continuing to result in reduced services being offered and this is significantly affecting profitability.

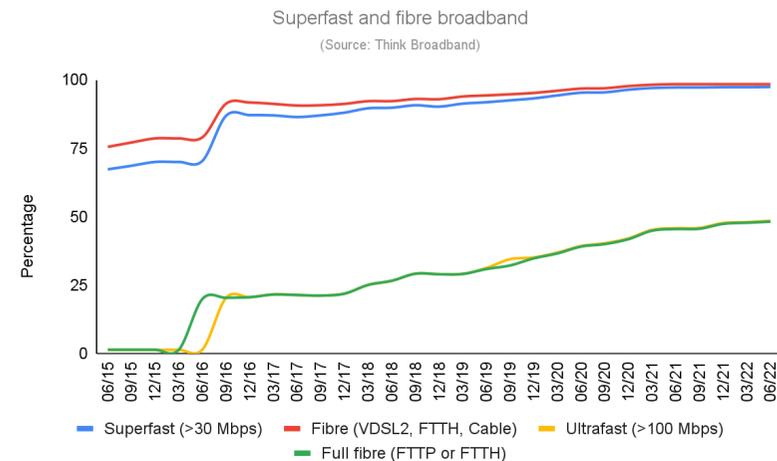
Overseas visitors are still relatively low in number and some markets have not returned yet (especially Asian markets). However the key North American market is showing signs of recovery.

The number of job postings remains high, reflecting difficulties in 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 Council is working with the Fastershire Project to address these areas. The coverage of both superfast (>30mbps) and ultrafast (>100mbps) continues to edge up according to figures on the ThinkBroadband website (see graph above).

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 2021-25 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 (RAU), Campden BRI, St James's Place, the Federation of Small Businesses and GFirst LEP. Most recently, the Group received a presentation on the RAU's plans, considered the latest six-monthly update report on the Green Economic Growth Strategy and advised on the priorities for the 'Supporting Local Business' and 'People and Skills' elements of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

The Council has now completed the 'Welcome Back Fund' and 'Reopening High Streets Safely' project, designed to assist town centres to recover after lockdown, for which the Council had been allocated just over £160,000 of funding. 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. The vast majority of these were delivered ahead of the 31st March 2022 deadline. As a District, we will have utilised somewhere very close to our full allocation under the 'Welcome Back Fund'. The final claim under this scheme is currently with the Government for approval. Other projects funded by the 'Welcome Back Fund' included a feasibility study into a Business Improvement District for Cirencester Town Centre, which is currently under consideration. The Digital Resilience Project helped a considerable number of businesses but improving the digital skills and presence of businesses within the District remains an ongoing challenge. Webinars produced under the Digital Resilience Project remain available on the Council's YouTube channel.

A survey undertaken in August 2021 showed Cirencester having a town centre vacancy rate of 11%, three percentage points below the national average. A further count undertaken in April 2022 showed this had dropped to just under 6%. 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.

Much of Cotswolds Tourism's work this quarter has been centred on sustainability, one of the six priorities set out in the Destination Management Plan. The findings of the Sustainable Tourism Survey are being worked through to identify the organisations and partners best able to assist businesses in the many different areas of sustainability, and a Sustainable Tourism Action Plan has been developed.

In partnership with the Cotswolds National Landscape, the Tourism team held a business webinar, attended by 20 businesses, to promote the Caring for the Cotswolds scheme. This scheme provides a way for businesses, residents and visitors to give something back via a visitor payback scheme to ensure the environment is taken care of.

Plans for a Local Connections project designed to develop and improve business to business connections between local accommodation providers and businesses providing services or products that would add value or interest to their visitor offer. The project will be going live in March 2023.

At the end of June 2022, the team held its first in-person networking event since the start of Covid. Twenty-two businesses attended the event in Stow on the Wold. These sessions provided opportunities for delegates to network, and to discuss issues and challenges and share ideas as well as an opportunity for the team to give a regional and national overview, for example, the outlook for overseas visitors to the UK, and tell them about the team's work and plans including upcoming marketing campaigns.

The aim of the Real Cotswolds campaign is to encourage interest in less visited towns and away from visitor hotspots by giving greater prominence to less visited towns on the Cotswold Tourism's website, encouraging media interest away from hotspots, controlling where possible the imagery used (e.g. only supplying out of season images of the most popular places). The campaign is proving successful. Web traffic to the promoted towns has increased 107%, and traffic to the hotspots has decreased by 35%.

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. The RAU has come up with a concept of an 'Innovation Village' which will help to address global challenges around sustainable farming and food security. The plans include teaching and research space, incubator and grow-on business units, a conference centre, hotel and hospitality space. The Council assisted the RAU to secure £100,000 from the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee Strategic Economic Development Fund to assist with the cost of project management over the next two years. It is anticipated that a planning application for the site will be submitted towards the end of this year or early next year.
- the new owners of the former Mitsubishi site in Cirencester, now renamed Watermoor Point. The office element is now 75% let and the warehouse is being repurposed for storage for businesses and individuals. The Cabinet Member for Economy and Transformation visited recently to see improvements to the site. The most recent meeting of the Cotswold Economic Advisory Group was hosted at Watermoor Point.
- 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 Applied Digital Skills Centre at Cirencester College was officially launched at an event held in May 2022. The new 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. The Economic Development Lead has met with staff from the College to assist them with identifying potential placements for students.

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 finished in May 2022, and a decision is now awaited. Kier Highways has been appointed main contractor pending the outcome of the inquiry. 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.

An Innovation Lab at Chipping Campden library will open from 1 August 2022 and is a friendly community space offering access to digital skill development for all ages and abilities, including 360° immersive film, 3D design, print, scanning and prototyping, coding and micro-computers, virtual and augmented reality and advanced digital design and animation. A lab technician will be on hand to support delivery of a range of events, workshops and one-to-one sessions for young people, job seekers, freelancers and creatives, and will also establish a network of volunteers and industry links to help with setting up Code Clubs and STEAM based workshops for local schools.