



COUNCIL PRIORITIES REPORT  
**July 2022 - September 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

- The Council has been working with Cotswold Lakes Trust, Sustrans and Gloucestershire County Council 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 2 projects are underway and includes the feasibility study of a signalised crossing of the Spine Road, the foot/cycleway into Neigh Bridge Country Park, and a study of public transport options improving connections to Kemble station from Tetbury and Cirencester including links to Cotswold Water Park;
- Two Town and Parish forums were held at Moreton on 27 September and at Trinity Road on 6 October 2022. The presentations /discussions focused on the 'Debate not Hate' initiative, Active Cotswold programme, raising awareness of the work of Cotswold Friends in combating loneliness and isolation, and a Q & A session;
- The Council's Local Investment Plan, which sets out how the Council proposes to use the £1m UK Shared Prosperity Fund for the period, has been submitted to the Government and is awaiting approval. Year one projects have been decided, following a call for Expressions of Interest and include 'Clean and Green' projects and the feasibility study for the Old Station building in Cirencester. Further funding of £764,292 was indicatively allocated to the Council from the Rural England Prosperity Fund for financial years 2023-24 and 2024-25. This is a capital-only fund to support rural businesses to diversify with new products and services and to provide new community infrastructure;
- Following the successful trial of an offline payment solution, the remaining car parks in Phase 1 and 2 of the cashless parking project will have their machines upgraded. The car parks in Phase 3 will have the option to pay by cash removed in addition to the offline payment software upgrade;
- Cabinet agreed additional funding for the improvement works at Rissington Road car park, Bourton on the Water, in September 2022 so that work can start in November 2022. The car park requires a new drainage system, resurfacing and layout redesign which will improve the customer experience and comply with industry standards;
- In September 2022, Cabinet agreed to pursue a more sustainable solution for the roof repairs at Trinity Road. The proposed replacement composite panels in the pitched roof should result in an 87% reduction in heat loss energy across each atrium of the roof. The Agile and Atrium Roof Repair projects will be synchronised to minimise the impact on staff and efficiency;
- The Council's first Community Municipal Investment (CMI), named 'Cotswold Climate Investment' (CCI), which targeted a £500,000 fundraise closed on 16 August 2022, fully funded by over 450 investors. The Cotswold Climate Investment will support a range of projects, including installing publicly

available off-street electric vehicle charging points (EVCPs) around the District to encourage electric vehicle take-up, and improving the energy and carbon performance of the Council's Cirencester offices;

- Crowdfund Cotswold won the Local Government Chronicle (LGC) 'Community Involvement' award in July 2022. Crowdfund Cotswold continues to attract wide interest across the District. The six projects that applied to the Council's 'Spring Round' completed their campaigns, with a total value of over £123,000, towards which the Council has contributed £38,750. The deadline for the Autumn round was 14 September 2022 and includes the largest project seen to date, a new skate park for Fairford;
- The Community Wellbeing team in partnership with 'World Jungle' delivered the Holiday Activity and Food programme (HAF) in the summer holidays. The provision lasted for four weeks in August 2022 and provided a wide range of activities and food boxes mainly for children on free school meals. Over 800 participants took part in 1200 sessions which included 79 children with special needs;
- In partnership with Citizens Advice, the Council has distributed £130,000 from the Household Support Fund to support people in need with costs associated with energy, food and wider essentials. The funding period was April 2022 to September 2022 and we are expecting to secure funding at a similar level for the period of October 2022 to March 2023;
- The £380,000 replacement of fitness equipment across the Council's leisure has been delivered by SLM Everyone Active (SLM). Cirencester Leisure Centre's gym refurbishment commenced on 18 September 2022, and the facilities reopened to customers on 3 October 2022. This was followed by Bourton-on-the-Water Leisure Centre's gym refurbishment which commenced on 3 October 2022, re-opening to customers on 15 October 2022;
- The procurement process for the appointment of Leisure and Culture Management Contractors (2 lots) has commenced. The tender notice went out on 2 September 2022 including the first stage Standard Selection Questionnaire (SSQ). The evaluation process will take place in the first two weeks of October and the successful bids will receive an invitation to submit initial tender in mid October with a return date of 3 January 2023;
- The Council and Bromford Housing have entered into a Collaboration Agreement to deliver the Down Ampney housing development. A planned programme of consultation commenced on 10 October 2022 and will continue through this year, and will help to shape the initial scheme designs for a net carbon zero housing development. The draft Collaboration Agreement was approved by Cabinet at its meeting in November 2022.

## 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) 2022-26. The MTFS identified an overall funding gap of almost £8.9m by March 2026 if left unaddressed. The Recovery Investment Strategy was approved by the Council in July 2022. The Strategy sets out how capital investment would 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. However, the recent increase in government and Council debt costs as a result of the mini budget of 23 September 2022 have caused concern around borrowing levels and the viability of the schemes. In November 2022, Cabinet agreed to recommend to Council that the Recovery Investment Strategy be rescinded. There may still be opportunities that arise from time-to-time for example through transformation that will be considered on a business case basis taking into account any refresh of the budget and MTFS proposals and the affordability of any borrowing at the time.

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. Both Cabinets at the partner Councils have also agreed to retaining the service. 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 and redesign of the service to ensure that the service is as economical, efficient and effective as it can be which will be undertaken by external consultants.

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. Two Town and Parish forums were held on 27 September 2022 at Moreton Area Centre and on 6 October 2022 at Trinity Road. The agenda included the 'Debate not Hate' initiative, an overview of the Active Cotswold programme and recent deliverables; and the work of Cotswold friends to combat loneliness and isolation and support independent living, and how Town and Parish councils can help raise awareness and recruit volunteers.

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. The team carried out Litter and environmental pollution talks at a number of schools, as well as liaising with Town and Parish councils about litter picking and ensuring they have the equipment they need. During Q2, there were 14 requests for litter picks from communities with litter picks taking place in Tetbury, Chipping Campden, Swell, Bourton, Northleach and Cirencester. The litter picks facilitated by the Clean and Green team involved 92 members of the community and 65 children.

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 in June 2022. Much of the focus since then has remained on the 'Active and Sustainable Travel' improvements necessary to deliver the vision. The Council has been working with Cotswold Lakes Trust, Sustrans and Gloucestershire County Council 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 was delivered by March 2022 and reported in the Q1 update.

Phase Two of the project is underway. Key projects include:

- working with Gloucestershire County Council and Sustrans to assess the feasibility of a signalised crossing of the Spine Road. This is necessary to support increased use of the National Cycle Network route 45 (the Old Railway Path) and generally improve safety and access for pedestrians and cyclists between Cirencester/South Cerney and Cotswold Water Park/Cricklade/Swindon as there are currently no formal crossings of the Spine Road.

Funding for the crossing has been secured but there are engineering and viability challenges that must be overcome before it can be progressed. A pedestrian survey was undertaken on 23 July 2022 and traffic counts and site visits are taking place in October 2022;

- the foot/cycleway into Neigh Bridge Country Park is expected to be completed this winter. This is an off-road route for pedestrians and cyclists and provides a viable alternative to problematic car travel/parking;
- a travel plan for Cotswold Water Park which will identify and prioritise sustainable transport infrastructure improvements in the area. Consultations, surveys and data collection took place over the summer and the travel plan is now being completed. Improvements and measures could form a focus for future work/funding bids as well as forming material considerations for the updated Local Plan and Infrastructure Delivery Plan;
- a study of public transport options improving connections to Kemble station from Tetbury and Cirencester (including links to Cotswold Water Park is due for completion in October 2022. This will then support an economic assessment of the potential for new services including those funded through development (e.g. The Steadings);
- additional cycle parking installation (building on phase 1 work).

Cabinet approved the proposal to remove the option to pay by cash in all its car parks in its meeting on 4 January 2021 in 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 were completed but due to poor mobile phone signal strength in some car parks such as Rissington Road and Bourton on the Water; and the volume of card transactions, Phase 3 was paused. A trial of an alternative card payment system in Rissington Road and Old Station car parks commenced in late June 2022. The payment machines in these car parks underwent a software upgrade to support card payments being made offline, with the aim of speeding up the payment process and reducing the number of times the payment systems became disabled. The outcome of the trial was positive, indicating an increase in user accessibility and a decrease in failed transactions and lost charging days per machine. Therefore, the remaining car parks in Phase 1 and 2 (Abbey Grounds, Beeches, Leisure centre and Mangersbury Road) will be converted to off-line payment as soon as possible. Following on, Phase 3 will re-commence with the removal of the option to pay by cash and the off-line payment software upgrade at Brewery, Forum, Waterloo, Sheep Street, West Street, Church Street and Old Market Way. Once approval has been received, an order will be put in with our supplier (Metric) for the upgrades and changes to machines. Lead times are approximately 6 to 8 weeks from date of order. The Council will ensure that additional external comms are put in place as well as any necessary signage within car parks that are being changed to cashless.

In July 2021 the Council agreed to invest in improvements to the Rissington Road car park, Bourton on the Water to improve the customer experience and to ensure compliance with industry standards. The car park requires a new drainage system, resurfacing and layout redesign. This will reduce ongoing maintenance works and provide a long term improved facility for users. Although a contractor was appointed in December 2021, there was insufficient time to complete the works before April 2022. The Council had instructed that works could not take place between April - September as closure would severely affect the tourist trade in this location and could result in inconsiderate parking on-street, affecting residents in the area. Unfortunately during the period from contract award to-date, there have been a number of national and global factors which have seen material and labour prices rise substantially. Cabinet agreed additional funding in September 2022 so that the works can start in November 2022.

Whilst the provision of toilets is not a statutory function, the Council provides 15 public conveniences across the District which support shoppers and tourism, and prevents negative environmental health impacts from lack of accessibility. A significant refurbishment project was carried out in 2007-8 to ten of the sites. Although all 15 public toilet sites are fit for purpose, the five remaining sites are in need of some investment to bring them up to date. A strategy for the Council's public conveniences is being developed – they should be accessible and clean and 'charged for' to reduce the burden on the public purse while maintaining and improving the customer experience with emphasis on 'no-touch' automation where possible. The small maintenance budget (for the fabric of the buildings) is insufficient to cover structural maintenance and income in 2021/22 represented 30% of all costs. Once the Strategy has been signed off by the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, it will be brought forward to the Cabinet.

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 for Development Management and Licensing. 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. A series of customer 'touch points' has been introduced to help applicants know where they are in the planning process. The three 'touch points' are at 7 days from receipt, the application is acknowledged; during the next 7 days, the case officer makes contact and introduces themselves providing high level comments on the application; and at five weeks, the case officer gives detailed feedback and agrees whether an extension of time is required. The next stage is a trial of different ways to communicate with all stakeholders which will be taken forward by a small team comprising officers of varying levels of expertise and looking at the impact of the ways we communicate on throughput.

Work is also progressing on improving the customer journey in planning enforcement. There will be an end to end redesign of the enforcement service. The design phase including a review of information and tools on the website, and new forms to register enforcement issues and 'harm' checklist have been completed and are in beta testing. The first phase is to implement the improvements to the 'front end', followed by reducing the backlog of enforcement cases through prioritisation, and finally a re-design of the 'back office' processes. This project is expected to deliver a reduction in repeat customer contact/chasing, as well as a reduction in the number of non-breach cases from improved online reporting facilities and back office triage.

## Respond to the climate crisis



### The Context

National policy context in Q2 is best characterised by stasis. The conservative party leadership election and the summer parliamentary recess has meant little change or clarity in respect of climate goals or policies. The Climate Change Committee's criticisms in its 2022 progress report to parliament in June stand, and there was no evidence of progress to address these criticisms.

Globally, the reported evidence of climate destabilisation continues to harden. Whilst the granularity and confidence in climate modelling continues to improve, in general it can be seen that the speed and extent of the effects of climate destabilisation for example glacier loss, arctic sea ice loss, drought, extreme temperatures, extreme rainfall events, consistently exceed what was predicted by earlier climate modelling. Such real world observations should be motivating governments and corporations to much more urgent action, but there remains very little indication of this, particularly in the context of the central challenge of eliminating fossil fuels. Notably the UK government justification for granting nearly 900 new North Sea oil and gas exploration licences rests on the idea that home-produced fossil fuels will somehow be lower emission than the equivalent foreign production, and therefore such new licences are in fact consistent with a 2050 net zero carbon commitment.

Consistent with the accelerating frequency and scale of global climate impacts, more attention is turning to adaptation. The Climate Change Committee reported in July 2022 that key national organisations (energy, water, transport and communications providers) need to do more to address the risk of cascading climate impacts on their operations.

In addition to the policy context, in Q2 we have seen a further hardening of, and much greater volatility in, the energy markets, reflecting unpredictability in the events of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This continues to have grave consequences for expenditure budgets for the Council, and for all residents.

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

#### 'Direct Control' actions

The proposed changes to office layout at Trinity Road will increase space efficiency, and reduce associated energy costs and carbon emissions. In addition, the feasibility of solar PV and electricity storage is being explored, with contractor selection for potential solar PV installation undertaken in collaboration with other Publica Group councils, in order to maximise economies of scale.

In September 2022, Cabinet agreed to pursue a more sustainable solution for the atrium roof repairs at Trinity Road. The better insulation in the proposed replacement roof panels would deliver an 87% reduction in heat loss compared to the existing glazed panels. Installation of the replacement roof will be undertaken in phases to minimise disruption to staff in those areas, and to facilitate occupancy by new commercial tenants as soon as possible.

The analysis of results from the survey into travel and working patterns of Publica staff, started by interns in the summer, will be completed by other staff in order to propose a sustainable travel plan for the Trinity Road office. This plan aims to help staff, and by extension the Council itself, to reduce both the cost and carbon emissions of commuting.

#### 'Indirect Control' actions

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 carbon emissions from environmental services. The Council is reviewing the current waste and recycling service over the next year. Frith Consulting has been commissioned to perform a benchmarking and options appraisal of the current service so that we can understand how it compares to nearest neighbours and authorities with a similar geographic and demographic profile. The final report has been received and is being reviewed.

Increases in the cost of borrowing, due to the Bank of England's intervention to raise interest rates, means that the potential for investment into ground-mounted, grid-connected, utility-scale solar farms, as well as 'behind the meter' building-connected solar and storage installations in the District, now require re-assessment. Nonetheless investment into solar PV on council-owned property is likely to remain positive.

#### 'Place Shaping' actions

Work is underway to develop draft policies for the Local Plan partial update which reflect feedback from the Regulation 18 public consultation. Consultancy support is being explored to assess the climate / carbon emissions impacts of potential policies, with close attention to other councils undertaking the same process.

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 charge point business case was agreed by Cabinet in March 2022 for Council-owned car parks providing 20 charging connections. Following the replacement of outdated EVCPs at Old Market Way car park, Moreton-in-Marsh and The Beeches car park, Cirencester, further installations are currently running behind schedule due principally to delays in responses from electricity distribution network operators (DNOs), as well as a backlog with the government's appointed grant scheme administrator.

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 finding that the bulk of private vehicle emissions in the District arise from longer journeys, and that

short in-District journeys are responsible for relatively little of the total. Consultants are now developing proposals for Local Plan 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 has also moved into the second phase of the COMF-funded projects to increase active travel to and within Cotswold Water Park.

#### 'District-wide enabling' actions

The Council's first Community Municipal Investment (CMI), named 'Cotswold Climate Investment' (CCI), which targeted a £500,000 fundraise closed on 16 August, fully funded by over 450 investors. The Cotswold Climate Investment will support a range of projects, including installing publicly available off-street electric vehicle charging points (EVCs) around the District to encourage electric vehicle take-up, and improving the energy and carbon performance of the Council's Cirencester offices. The scheme is being delivered in partnership with Abundance Investment, the UK's first and biggest regulated green investment platform.

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 householders who wish to invest in energy efficiency and decarbonisation works in their own homes. The project is now attracting additional potential grant funding that was not foreseen at the outset. Participating district councils in the county have now purchased a comprehensive data set of energy efficiency performance of all houses, which should enable much more effective targeting of future communications, and the identification of homes most in need of upgrading.

In parallel with the initiative to support householders who are able to pay for retrofit measures, government grant support for retrofit measures for lower income households continue to be channelled through Cotswold District Council's partners Severn Wye Energy Agency and Bromford Homes.

In parallel with the Gloucestershire-wide project, Cotswold and Stroud District Councils have benefited from 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. The Local Partnerships report recognises the central importance of supporting domestic retrofit in the two Districts, and provides useful insight and recommendations for action. Conclusions include, for example, the need for a stronger strategic approach, more resources, and better defined roles. Supporting domestic retrofit remains one of the key challenges for all councils.

In respect of support for residents for purchasing rooftop PV and battery storage, discussions continue with service providers that are able to channel good value solutions to householders. This area of activity remains a priority, since it is a good opportunity to leverage the Council's brand and reputation in order to increase householders' trust in solar PV solutions. This is necessary because there have been examples in the past of householders receiving poor value, and it is important for the low carbon transition to ensure householders have the confidence to invest directly in low carbon retrofit actions.

The most recent quarterly report for the Warm and Well programme, operated on behalf of the Council by Severn Wye Energy Agency, reports

some 8.4% of households in the District are in fuel poverty, although this figure will have risen dramatically with the sharp rise in energy costs. Severn Wye Energy Agency will be working with the Council to access the latest round of government funding to support fuel-poor households, the Home Upgrade Grant.

#### 'Engaging' actions

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

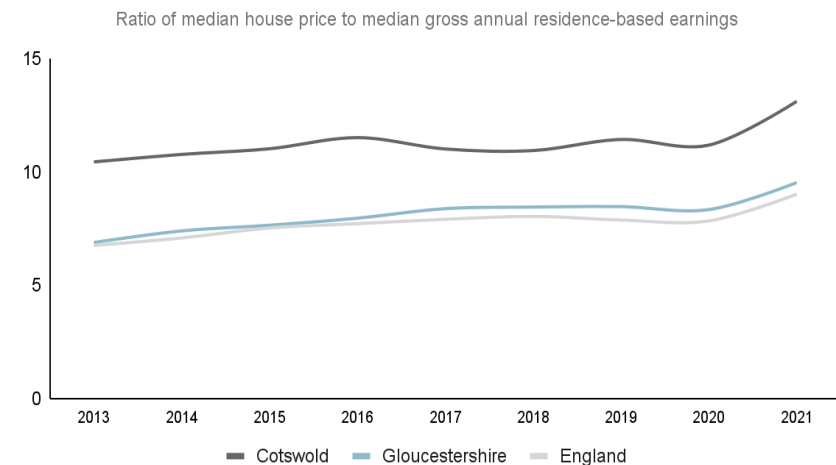
The high quality natural and built environment makes the District a desirable place to live. Cotswold District has a high number of properties owned outright (37.8%, vs 30.6% national average) reflecting the attractiveness of the District as a place to retire or to purchase a second home.

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 Kemble site has since been paused, and an alternative scheme on the derelict Broadleaze site at Down Ampney is being prepared for delivery first. The Council and Bromford are working in partnership to prepare a planning application for the Down Ampney site and a communication strategy has been developed to ensure appropriate engagement with all stakeholders including the Parish Council and local residents and people. A planned programme of consultation commenced on 10 October 2022 and will continue through this year. Architects have prepared initial scheme designs for this net carbon zero housing development, which will be further shaped by consultation with local people. Legal advice has been refined and the partnership and development will now be taken forward via a Collaboration Agreement. Cabinet agreed to enter into the Collaboration Agreement in November 2022 with Bromford Housing to deliver carbon zero affordable homes, based on the delivery, management and ownership terms set out in the Agreement. It is anticipated that a planning application will be submitted by December 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 Cotswold Club has been sold to the nearby Watermoor Point development in Cirencester and will form an integral part of the buyer's vision to create a key employment destination for the community of Cirencester and the Cotswolds.

Similarly, the Old station, Sheep street was also 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 November 2022. The report is currently being prepared and will include a range of options to consider.

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 started on site in Q2 and expect to complete during the summer 2023.

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 which was approved in October 2022.

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 was expected to commence in July 2022 but has been delayed due to issues with utilities. It is anticipated that construction on the units will begin in December 2022.

## 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 2011 – 2031 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 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 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 which ran from Friday 4th February to Sunday 20th March. Overall, the consultation was a great success with approximately 7500 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 was also presented to Cabinet at its meeting in July 2022 along with an update on the Local Plan project..

The consultation was carried out on Commonplace, the Council's new consultation system, funded by a Government scheme to promote digital engagement. This resulted in a significant shift in people including Town and Parish Councils choosing to submit comments online. 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 is 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. 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.
- a Design Code – a broad document covering all aspects of design within a Cotswold context including architectural, urban, landscape, ecological and sustainable design. A scoping of the project is expected to commence in October 2022 to understand the full project costs
- an Affordable Housing Strategy - a draft is being prepared and is expected to be presented to Cabinet at its meeting in December 2022.

An internal review of the first drafts of policies is expected to commence in October 2022. Looking further ahead, submission to Cabinet of the draft Local Plan for consultation is expected in May 2023.

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 are available on the Council's website. Further feasibility assessments will be carried out in 2022. These include two transport studies, which are due for completion in October 2022. The first of these evaluates potential locations for a transport interchange in the town centre. The second – a component of the Sustainable Transport Strategy (see below) - establishes a possible trajectory to zero carbon transport in Cirencester by 2045, helping to inform the vision of the town's future transport and movement needs, including future parking requirements. In April 2022, the Council commissioned consultants, Mace, 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. Two Members workshops were held in July 2022 and September 2022 to consider the preferred options for the draft Masterplan. The Masterplan project 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, was completed and shared with Members at a workshop on 4th July 2022. The second phase, exploring options to close that gap through reducing vehicle trips, shifting journeys to more sustainable modes and electrifying journeys is nearing completion in Sept/Oct 2022 and will be presented to Members shortly afterwards (tbc). The outcomes from that work are currently being used to inform the update to the Local Plan and in the preparation of other planning policies, such as the Cirencester Town Centre Masterplan. They are also aligning with similar studies and schemes being progressed by Gloucestershire County Council to ensure a unified and cooperative approach. 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 is due for completion in October 2022 and will help to inform improvements in service provision (including through development) and funding bids.

## Support health and well-being



### The Context

The Health and Wellbeing of our residents is generally good and above the England and County average in most measures. We are one of the safest districts with very low crime levels and are surrounded by beautiful countryside. However, we do face some challenges. Cotswold District has an ageing population; over the last 10 years, it has experienced greater growth across all 65+ age groups compared to England and Wales. Many of our older residents live alone, and coupled with the rurality of the District, loneliness and access to services are issues for the District.

We also need to take into account the wider determinants of health - social, economic and environmental factors such as unemployment, low income, poor housing, and lifestyles which have an impact on people's health and wellbeing. This means that we need to work with a wide range of partners, to pool resources and to apply a whole systems and asset-based approach to address challenges together.

### Actions we are taking

We want Cotswold District to be the best in the country for health and wellbeing, and promoting healthy lifestyles and providing opportunities for people of all ages to be active is key. A Leisure Strategy determined by local priorities and outcomes was developed with the aim of providing effective and sustainable physical activity and sport opportunities for local communities via investment in our stock of leisure facilities and other non-facility interventions. In March 2021, Cabinet authorised officers to work in partnership with other organisations on the feasibility of the projects in the Strategy. Specialist Leads for each of the three themes (Healthier District, Connected Community and Active Environment) have 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. Cirencester Leisure Centre's gym refurbishment commenced on 18 September 2022 with the facilities closing for two weeks, and re-opening to customers on 3 October 2022. This was followed by Bourton-on-the-Water Leisure Centre's gym refurbishment which commenced on 3 October, re-opening to customers on 15 October 2022. During the refurbishments, the gyms will be out of use and members will be encouraged to visit alternative sites. Cirencester Leisure Centre will be offering a temporary gym for those members who wish to use it.

The new fitness equipment is more energy efficient. The reduction in the power demand from the leisure centre's equipment will help 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 leisure management options appraisal including 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. The next stage is the commencement of a procurement process for the appointment of Leisure and Culture Management Contractors (separate lots) which was approved by the Council at its meeting in May 2022. The procurement process is being managed by Max Associates supported by the Council and its Legal team. The procurement details were reviewed at the procurement and commissioning board in July 2022 to determine the procurement route and the contract terms. The procurement will be a competitive tender procedure with negotiation for both lots with a contract term of 10 years with an option to extend for up to five years. The tender notice went out on 2 September including the first stage Standard Selection Questionnaire (SSQ). The evaluation process will take place in the first two weeks of October and the successful bids will receive an invitation to submit initial tender in mid October with a return date of 3 January 2023.

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 are undertaking the project, and have now completed both the winter sport assessment (during the first part of Q1) and the summer sport assessment in July and August 2022. Both assessments were informed by consultation (1-2-1, telephone and online) with Town and Parish Councils, educational establishments and sports clubs, and have been reviewed by sporting governing bodies with KKP and Council officers. Once the summer sport assessment report has been received, it will form a single final report with the winter sport assessment report to be signed off by the governing bodies for sport and Sport England. The project is on track for delivery by the end of December 2022. The report will be the evidence base for current, unmet and future demand for playing pitches and will be used to support developer contribution requests and external funding bids.

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 of the Changing Place toilets at 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. Each of the venues is at a different stage of delivery, with Cotswold Farm Park being the furthest advanced.

In July 2022, Crowdfund Cotswold won the Community Involvement category at the Local Government Chronicle Awards, which was a welcome reflection on the positive relationship with projects that the programme has helped foster. Six projects applied to the Council's 'Spring Round' completed their campaigns, with a total value of over £123,000, towards which the Council has contributed £38,750. Activity covered play provision, sports/exercise premises, an arts centre and the kitting out of a Cirencester team for the Severn Area Rescue Association, so a very varied range of projects. The deadline for the Autumn round was 14 September 2022, so at the time of writing some projects are undergoing verification, but there has been wide interest from across the District, including the largest project seen to date, a new skate park for Fairford.

The Council is actively engaging with its communities in an asset based community development way of working to promote more resilient, well-connected and active communities. The Community Wellbeing Team, amongst other activities, started to support a group of residents in Moreton-in-Marsh aiming to

establish a community hub. The 'One Moreton' group is going from strength to strength, gaining more members and is now working towards an awareness event on 26 October 2022.

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' delivered the Holiday Activity and Food programme (HAF) in the summer holidays. The provision lasted for four weeks in August 2022 and provided a wide range of activities and food boxes mainly for children on free school meals. Over 800 participants took part in 1200 sessions which included 79 children with special needs. Seventy-two per cent of the children who participated receive free school meals. The scheme continues to receive very positive feedback, for example: 'Thank you so much for all of the great activities available on the HAF scheme this summer. Both of my children 12 and 6 have been to multiple days and had a fabulous time, made new friends and learnt incredible life skills' and 'I have no idea how I would have survived the summer holidays without Forest School'. The team is currently planning the Christmas HAF provision and is working on a volunteers strategy and programme with the aim of involving communities more proactively in the programme for a more sustainable provision in the longer term. The programme is funded until 2025.

The Council is looking at ways to support residents with the cost of living crisis. The work includes setting up a Member working group, an audit of support that the Council provides including the Household Support Fund and the launch of 'The Longest Table' detailed below, a dedicated website with support information, distribution of leaflets, communications campaign as well as mapping of external support initiatives.

In partnership with Citizens Advice, the Council has distributed £130,000 from the Household Support Fund to support people in need with costs associated with energy, food and wider essentials. The funding period was April 2022 to September 2022 and we are expecting to secure funding at a similar level for the period of October 2022 to March 2023.

The Council has partnered with 'Feeding Change' and is launching a new initiative in Autumn called 'The Longest Table'. This pilot project encourages local communities to host 'community feasts' where people eat together and pay what they can so no one goes hungry, experiences are shared, connections are made and resilience is built. This initiative is funded through the 'Strengthening Local Communities' programme to tackle health inequalities and improve health and wellbeing using an asset based community development approach.

The Cotswold Community Safety Partnership (CCSP), which is coordinated and chaired by the Council, reviewed its priorities and action plan. The infographics provide information about the CCSP and its achievements over the last 12 months.





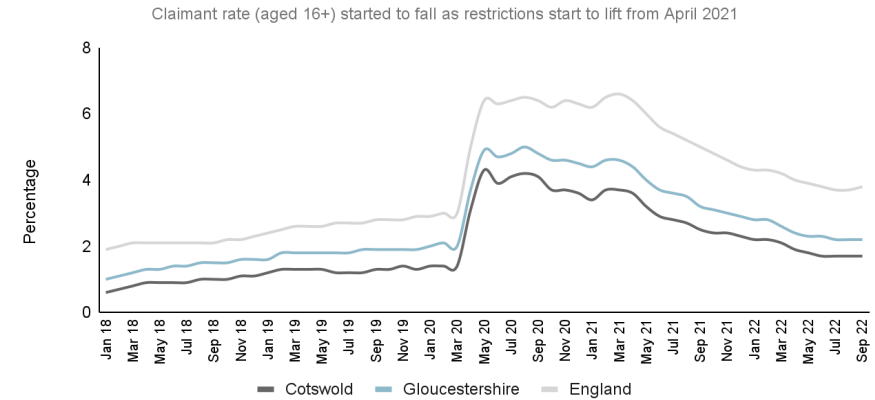
## Enable a vibrant economy

### 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 it has fallen back significantly in recent months to 1.7%. The national and global economies face further uncertainty as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and sharply rising prices, particularly for energy and fuel, which is impacting on 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 local job market in 2019. The local visitor economy has taken a huge hit over the last two years and while it is recovering strongly, it has not yet returned to pre-Covid levels. In 2021, the number of jobs in tourism was 13% of the total local job market, up from 8% in 2020. Similarly, visitor spend, at £273m in 2021 was up 56% on 2020 but still 17% lower than 2019. Many families took the opportunity to holiday overseas in 2022; the loss to the domestic market was offset by rising but relatively low overseas visitors. Some overseas markets have not returned yet especially Asian markets, while the key North American market is showing signs of recovery. The latest business survey indicated that a lack of overseas visitors was a concern for businesses. During September 2022, the Tourism team undertook targeted marketing of the Cotswolds to the Japanese market and the North American market with the aim of bringing high spend overseas visitors to the area.

Domestic visitor attractions are reporting numbers have fallen since last year. All businesses are reporting large cost increases, particularly in wages and energy prices, and concerns of the impact of higher costs of living on consumer spending.

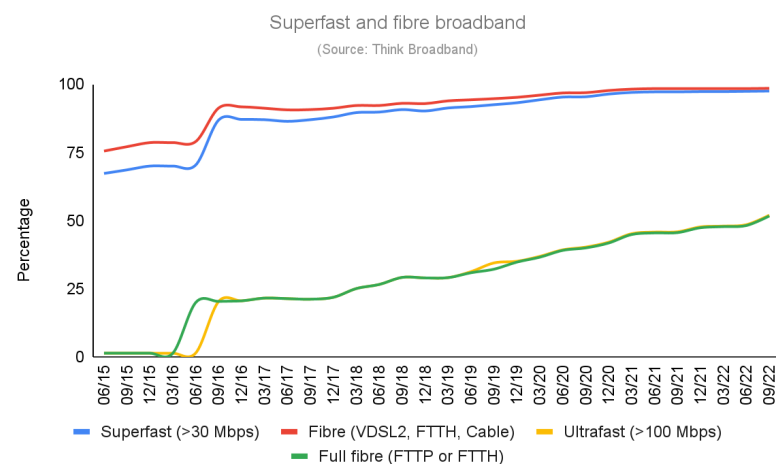
The number of job postings remains high, reflecting difficulties in recruitment. There are many companies at the cutting edge of innovation and the opportunity to grow key sectors like agritech, cyber and digital, medical equipment and environmental technologies.

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).

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), Cotswold Airport, Fairford and Lechlade Business Group, the Federation of Small Businesses and GFirst LEP. Most recently, the Group received a presentation on the County Council's transport plans for the area as well as discussing potential use of the recently announced Rural England 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. The Council has successfully recovered all of its spending relating to this fund from the Government, using around £157,000 of the £162,000 allocation. Earlier this year, the Council was awarded £1 million over three years from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for the period 2022-23 to 2024-25. The Council's Local Investment Plan, which sets out how the Council proposes to use the money, has been submitted to the Government and is awaiting approval. The Fund has three themes – Community and Place, Supporting Local Business and, in year three, People and Skills. Year one projects have been decided, following a call for Expressions of Interest and include 'Clean and Green' projects and the feasibility study for the Old Station building in Cirencester. A further £764,292 was indicatively allocated to the Council from the Rural England Prosperity Fund for financial years 2023-24 and 2024-25. This is a capital-only fund to support rural businesses to diversify with new products and services and to provide new community infrastructure.

Town Centres are important from both an economic and civic pride perspective. The number of vacant town centre retail units is a measure of a town centre's health and how the Council is meeting its objective of helping town centres to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic. A survey undertaken in August 2021 showed Cirencester had a town centre vacancy rate of 11%, three percentage points below the national average. The vacancy rate improved further in April 2022 to just under 6%. The next count is due in early October 2022. 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 and the potential impact of the cost of living crisis.

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. A Sustainable Tourism Action Plan has been developed and the team will be working with partners such as GWR, Visit Gloucestershire and Cotswold National Landscape.

Working in partnership with Cotswold National Landscape, two circular walks in Bourton on the Water have been developed with the aim of dispersing visitors and easing congestion in the town centre. The walks are aimed at local residents and visitors, with one of them fully accessible to wheelchairs and prams; and are due to open in October 2022.

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.

Work continues to promote opportunities for engagement with businesses, promote networking, and improve communication. A closed facebook group for businesses has been created and already has 120 members. It is open to all businesses.

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). Of the 15 towns being monitored, Bourton's share has dropped from over 27% to under 19%. Real Cotswolds towns now account for 36.8% of traffic. Chipping campden has been added to the Real Cotswold towns with the aim of encouraging more domestic visitors.

The Council is working with partners to bring sites forward which will support the Council's ambition to grow high value, highly skilled, low environmental impact businesses in key areas including agritech, digital/cyber, medical equipment and environmental technologies, and to enhance the opportunities available for local people, particularly young people so that they have the skills they need to secure employment in the District. 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. The project management resource has now been put in place. It is anticipated that a planning application for the site will be submitted 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. A 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. A reserved matters planning application has been 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.

An Innovation Lab at Chipping Campden library opened on 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.

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.