



COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	CABINET 5th DECEMBER 2022
Report Number	AGENDA ITEM 8
Subject	GREEN ECONOMIC GROWTH STRATEGY - SIX MONTHLY UPDATE
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Cllr Tony Dale, Cabinet Member for Economy and Council Transformation Email: tony.dale@cotswold.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Paul James, Economic Development Lead Email: paul.james@cotswold.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To update Cabinet Members on the progress in delivering the Council's Green Economic Growth Strategy
Annexes	None.
Recommendation(s)	<i>That progress in delivering the Green Economic Growth Strategy is noted.</i>
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enable a vibrant economy• Responding to the climate crisis
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Cotswold Economic Advisory Group



I. BACKGROUND

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

2. PROGRESS UPDATES

- 2.1** The Strategy set out a number of different themes and progress against each of them is set out below.

Growing key sectors

- 2.2** The strategy identified, in common with Gloucestershire's Draft Local Industrial Strategy (available at <https://www.gfirstlep.com/industrial-strategy/>), agritech, cyber/digital and green technologies as key growth sectors for the District. In terms of agritech, we have continued to work closely with the Royal Agricultural University (RAU). The strategy set out our belief that the RAU's Triangle/University Gate site should be used, consistent with its allocation in the Local Plan, for purposes which build on the status and reputation of the RAU. The RAU's new senior management team and Governing Council share the Council's ambitions and have set about working towards delivering them at pace.
- 2.3** Their plans for an Innovation Village, including research and education facilities, incubator and grow-on space, live/work units, a hotel and conference centre are now gathering momentum. With the Council's help, the RAU has secured £100,000 from the Gloucestershire Economic Growth Joint Committee Strategic Economic Development Fund to enable project management support over the next two years to be put in place. An outline planning application for the site is anticipated in Spring 2023. To give an idea of scale, the development is estimated to have a Gross Development Value (GDV) of £100 million. The Cabinet Member and Council Officers are part of a project stakeholder group which meets regularly to oversee the project.



- 2.4** Cyber and digital continues to be a focus, particularly with the completion of the Cirencester College Applied Digital Skills Centre, which had its official opening at the end of May 2022. Members will recall that the Centre was built using £4.48 million of Getting Building Fund money secured via GFirst LEP. The Cabinet Member and Economic Development Lead visited Core To Cloud, a rapidly-growing cyber security business based in the centre of Cirencester, in November.
- 2.5** Members will be aware of ZeroAvia, who have moved to Cotswold Airport from Cranfield and are developing a hydrogen powertrain for aircraft. They have increased their headcount from 15 to nearly 100 since moving to Cotswold Airport and are continuing to expand. The Council is keen to accommodate as much of their growth as possible within the District and are in discussions with the company and the airport to determine how we can assist.

Town Centres

- 2.6** Town centres have been the focus of much activity over the last two years, with support given to businesses through various lockdowns and restrictions and efforts put in to attract visitors back to town centres once restrictions were lifted. Town centres within the District have fared well compared with many others, but many businesses face a difficult time with rising costs and suppressed demand due to the cost of living crisis, so we should not in any way be complacent.
- 2.7** A vacant unit count in town centres was undertaken in early October. Vacancy rates in most towns remain very low. Cirencester's vacancy rate fell to 4.8%, which compares with 11% in August 2021 and is much lower than the national average of 14%.

Visitor Economy

- 2.8** The last six months has seen many families taking 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 North American market with the aim of bringing high spend overseas visitors to the area. Work is continuing over this winter period to engage with key travel operators both UK and international to highlight the area's offer.



- 2.9** The visitor economy still faces challenging times with all businesses reporting large cost increases, particularly in wages and energy prices, and concerns of the impact of higher costs of living on consumer spending. Staffing shortages, particularly in catering staff and front of house continue meaning many hospitality businesses are reducing their offer and there is overall uncertainty of the future.
- 2.10** Cirencester, including the Water Park area, and the Fire Service College at Moreton-in-Marsh have recently been included within a proactive approach on the meetings and events sector by working with colleagues in Marketing Cheltenham, which it is hoped, will entice more business events to the region. This follows a successful Austin 7 centenary event at the Fire Service College and the demand for team building incentives for which the Cotswolds has a lot to offer.
- 2.11** A focus on sustainable travel options was part of a wellbeing event in Cirencester and this was to be continued within the promotion of the Tour of Britain, which unfortunately had to be cancelled. The new Bourton-on-the-Water walking routes are now launched and being promoted especially locally by the visitor information centre. Over recent months a lot of officer time has been allocated to reviewing Bourton coach parking after the private operator gave notice to close the coach parking element at the end of 2022. An extension has now been agreed for a further year to give time to consider alternatives.

Infrastructure

- 2.12** By far the biggest infrastructure project within the District is the A417 Missing Link. The Planning Inspectorate issued a recommendation report to the Secretary of State on 16th August 2022. Kier Highways have been appointed as the main contractor and the Secretary of State has now approved the Inspector's recommendation. Work is expected to start on site early in 2023. Officers are continuing to liaise with National Highways (formerly Highways England) and Kier to ensure the opportunities for local contractors, labour and suppliers are maximised. This includes discussions about a potential dry stone walling academy to increase the number of skilled wallers in the area as the scheme includes a significant amount of new dry stone walling.
- 2.13** Cabinet received a report on the progress of rollout of high quality broadband across the District in January 2022 and authorised Officers to work with Fastershire to devise a scheme to make effective use of the £500,000 allocated in the Capital Programme for investment in broadband across the District. Recently the County Council advised Officers



that it was not able to make use of the District Council's allocation. Openreach and Gigaclear continue to roll out broadband improvements on a commercial basis in the District. The latest figure for Gigabit ready broadband is 52.8% (against 48.6% in June 2022) and 97.5% for superfast (up from 97.3% in June 2022). Superfast is defined as download speeds greater than 30 mbps.

Skills and Training

- 2.14** In addition to the Applied Digital Skills Centre, the new T-Level building at Cirencester College is now well-advanced. The College is now looking at further expanding the T-Level provision with additional student facilities on site and the Council is supporting funding bids they are submitting.

Key sites and inward investment

- 2.15** In addition to the RAU University Gate site, Officers are working with the owners of a number of other key employment sites in the District to bring them forward. This includes the Fire Service College at Moreton-in-Marsh where there is an existing employment land allocation, and Cotswold Airport, where there is strong demand for new hangars for aviation-related uses. The Council remains in close contact with Bathurst Developments regarding the employment elements of The Steadings. A reserved matters application for the first phase of employment land has been received.
- 2.16** Officers have also been liaising with the new owners of the former Mitsubishi site at Watermoor, Cirencester which has now been rebranded as Watermoor Point. The site is proving very successful, with 80% of the available office space now let and the warehouse being used for business and personal storage.

Business Engagement

- 2.17** The Cabinet Member for Economy and Transformation and the Economic Development Lead have visited a number of businesses in the District since the last update report, including:
- Core to Cloud, Cirencester - A fast-growing cyber security business based at 'The Castle' in Cecily Hill.
 - Wildlife World, Tetbury - Another growing business who design and manufacture wildlife friendly products for the garden, exporting to Europe and are now expanding sales in the US.



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- Enso Energy, Cirencester - A solar farm developer who have recently relocated their offices and 20 staff from Dursley to Cirencester Business Park. They also have plans to expand the business and take on new staff.

In addition, a successful 'Listening To Business' online event was held in conjunction with Business West and GFirst LEP on Friday 18th November, with a panel including the Cabinet Member. Business West and GFirst plan to hold this event for each of the Gloucestershire districts, but chose to pilot it in Cotswold first.

Government Funding

- 2.18** The Council successfully bid to the Government's 'Changing Places' fund and was awarded £162,500 to provide Changing Places toilet facilities for the severely disabled at four locations in the District - the Abbey Grounds in Cirencester, Cotswold Country Park and Beach near South Cerney, Birdland at Bourton-on-the-Water and Cotswold Farm Park at Guiting Power. It is anticipated that all four facilities will be delivered in the current financial year and will help transform the perception of the Cotswolds as an accessible destination. Currently the only Changing Places facility in the District is believed to be at Westonbirt Arboretum. Cotswold Farm Park is the most advanced, with installation anticipated over the next few months, with the others to follow shortly afterwards.
- 2.19** Members will recall that the Council was indicatively allocated £1 million over three years under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). The Council's 'Local Investment Plan' was submitted at the end of July and, at the time of writing, a decision on its approval was expected imminently. The UKSPF Local Investment Plan includes significant funding to support business, including through support for the Cirencester Growth Hub.
- 2.20** In addition, in September 2022 it was announced that the Council had been indicatively allocated an additional £764,292 over two years under the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF), which is a capital-only fund. A report came to Cabinet in November and the Council submitted an addendum to its Local Investment Plan later in that month. A decision is expected early in the New Year. The REPF proposal allocates a large proportion of the funding for grants to businesses to support them with diversification, innovation and net zero infrastructure.



3. CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1 The last six months have continued to be a very active time in respect of the Council's economic development function. The Cotswold economy continues to be fundamentally strong but with the cost of living crisis and a forecast recession, there is no doubt that some tough times lie ahead. That said, there are also some exciting projects within the District and it is better placed to weather the storm than many parts of the country.

4. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

6. RISK ASSESSMENT

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

7. EQUALITIES IMPACT

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

8. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

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

9. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

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

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 10.1 None.

(END)