



COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL PRIORITIES REPORT
October 2022 - December 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's Local Investment Plan, which sets out how the Council proposes to use the £1m UK Shared Prosperity Fund was approved by the Government in December 2022;
- Following the resolution of technical difficulties, all three phases of the cashless car parking project have been completed. 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;
- Improvement works started at Rissington Road car park, Bourton on the Water 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;
- Crowdfund Cotswold continues to attract wide interest across the District. Six projects applied to the Council's 'Autumn Round'. Three projects have already fundraised their target. The Council contributed £26,000 to projects with a further contribution of £10,000 from the Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) resilience fund to eligible projects;
- The Community Wellbeing team in partnership with 'World Jungle' delivered the Holiday Activity and Food programme (HAF) in the Christmas holidays. The offer involved activities from 13 different providers as well as a range of ticketed activities including climbing, cinema, laserquest, ice skating and a visit to Cotswold Wildlife Park;
- Work is progressing on the Changing Places Toilets project (£162,500 award from government). Each of the venues is at a different stage of delivery, with Cotswold Farm Park being the furthest advanced, having now placed the order with the supplier and the equipment should be installed early in the New Year;
- The Council has secured £137k from GCC for Round 3 of the government funded Household Support Fund for distribution in early 2023. Part of the funding will support families in need with supermarket vouchers as well as registered carers in partnership with Gloucestershire Carers Hub;
- The procurement process for the appointment of Leisure and Culture Management Contractors (2 lots) has commenced. The first stage Standard Selection Questionnaire (SSQ) responses have been completed and the successful bids received an invitation to submit initial tender in mid October 2022 with a return date of 6 January 2023. Five leisure contractors were invited to bid (one has withdrawn) and two for culture;
- 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;

- In November 2022, the Government awarded additional funding of £230,000 (together with West Oxfordshire) to further develop and promote digital engagement tools which will be used for further draft local plan consultations;
- The A417 Missing Link scheme was approved in November 2022; and Kier Highways has been appointed as the main contractor. The £460m project 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.

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

At its meeting in November 2022, Cabinet reviewed the Council's draft budget proposals for 2023-24 together with a refresh of the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) forecasts, and approved the proposals which formed the basis of public consultation between 8 November and 9 December 2022. A wide range of communication channels including Cotswold News, social media and engagement events with Cabinet Members and officers was used to share the key budget messages and highlight the consultation to as many residents, businesses and community organisations as possible.

The Council received 389 responses to the consultation which were summarised in a report for Cabinet in January 2023. The results will be used to inform the final budget proposals to be considered by Cabinet and Council in February 2023.

The Recovery Investment 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.

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. During Q3, there were 18 requests for litter picks from communities with litter picks taking place in Northleach, Stow-on-the-wold, Lower Swell and Bourton involving 12 members of the community and 75 children. In addition, a number of engagement activities were undertaken including meeting with the new Stow-on-the-Wold Bromford coach (for over 250 properties) to help tackle the persistent dog fouling issues in their areas; and with South Cerney Composting Group to talk about community composting and how their good work can be rolled out across the District to reduce carbon emissions and provide free, sustainable compost.

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 elements with many proposed activities focussed on 'Active and Sustainable Travel' improvements. 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 Two of the project is underway, and include:

- working with Gloucestershire County Council and Sustrans to assess the feasibility of a signalised crossing of the Spine Road. The aim is to increase 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. A pedestrian survey was undertaken in July 2022 and traffic counts and site visits took place in October 2022. Designs for the crossing are being prepared by Sustrans for approval by Gloucestershire County Council's capital programme management board in January 2023 and onward to GCC Cabinet in March 2023;
- the foot/cycleway into Neigh Bridge Country Park will be an off-road route for pedestrians and cyclists and provides a viable alternative to problematic car travel/parking. Consultation on the path in Autumn 2022 yielded wholly positive responses. Vegetation clearance is scheduled for March 2023, with construction commencing after Easter 2023;
- The Cotswold Water Park travel plan was completed in January 2023. It identifies and prioritises sustainable transport infrastructure improvements in the area which 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 to improve connections to Kemble station from Tetbury and Cirencester (including links to Cotswold Water Park) was completed in December 2022 and is currently being reviewed;
- Cycle stand installation locations have been identified in Fairford, Lechlade and South Cerney and passed to the contractor for further feasibility and installation in Spring 2023.

All three phases of the cashless car parking project have been completed. 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. Following the implementation of Phase one and two, some technical issues relating to poor mobile phone signal strength in some car parks, as well as the volume of card transactions, were identified. Following the successful trial of offline card payments, with the aim of speeding up the payment process and reducing the number of times the payment systems became disabled, during the summer 2022, Phase 3 was able to recommence. In addition, the remaining car parks in Phase 1 and 2 (Abbey Grounds, Beeches, Leisure centre and Maugersbury Road) were converted to off-line payment.

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 so as to avoid the tourist season which could also 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 and contractors started on site in November 2022 and are on target to finish at the end of March 2023.

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 the fees schedule is awaiting sign off by the Cabinet Member for Development Management and Licensing, subject to budget approval. 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. Anecdotally, the improved communication appears to be yielding positive benefits with fewer complaints from applicants about not being kept informed of progress. Furthermore, a small team has started a trial to understand the impact of the way we communicate and the extent of

that communication on throughput. For example, what is the impact on throughput if the case officer undertakes all communication with stakeholders versus communication being undertaken by a case officer assistant.

An end to end redesign of the enforcement service is underway starting with improvements in the front end for registering enforcement issues. The next phase is to reduce the backlog of enforcement cases through prioritisation, and councillors will be asked to help define the criteria for prioritisation. Once the backlog has been reduced, the 'back office' processes will be re-designed. A report on the enforcement project is being drafted for Cabinet as part of the wider monitoring of the improvement programme. 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

During Q3 the UK government's Net Zero Review was being finalised by Chris Skidmore MP, and is now published. It has been broadly welcomed by those hoping to see faster movement towards net zero carbon goals. Key calls are for reform of the planning system, an infrastructure strategy, and a focus on green homes. It seems however to stop short of the call from bodies such as UK100 to put local government in the driving seat for local progress towards net zero carbon.

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, are consistently at the upper end of the ranges 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. The UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has been increasingly vocal in this regard, repeatedly calling out fossil fuel companies and berating national governments for insufficient commitment and action.

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. A contractor has been appointed and work is expected to commence in January 2023. In addition the procurement process is underway for an installer of solar PV and electricity storage at sites owned by the Council, including the Trinity Road office. This is being done in collaboration with other Publica Group councils, in order to maximise economies of scale, and no works will commence without a business case and approval by Council.

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, is being completed 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, aside from being the Council's single largest source of emissions, presents all councils with huge challenges and potential opportunities in environment, the 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, and reducing carbon emissions is one of the six main priority areas.

The Council is reviewing the current waste and recycling service over the next year to reduce costs and increase efficiencies. The current service was benchmarked on performance and cost compared to nearest neighbours and local authority areas with similar demographic profiles. Some modelling has been undertaken on the impact of changes such as reduced crew / removal of a vehicle on both carbon emissions and efficiency. However, these changes would be insufficient to secure large carbon savings. More substantial carbon savings will have to be realised over a longer timeframe, making use of emerging technologies such as electric RCVs which are not currently viable for Cotswold District's rural collection routes.

The leisure and cultural services provider procurement which began in Q3 included carbon and energy as one of the selection criteria. Leisure services providers are taking the issue increasingly seriously, given pressure from all councils (see Support Health and Wellbeing priority for an update on progress).

Following increases in the cost of council borrowing, the Recovery Investment Strategy has been rescinded. Any future council investment into renewable energy assets will have to be individually assessed on a case-by-case basis and will need to conform to updated rules on government borrowing. Nonetheless it is likely that roof-mounted solar PV investment 'behind the meter' on buildings owned by the Council will be viable. Further uncertainty over borrowing rules and 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. Sustainable transport consultants are drafting LP policies in line with the findings of the district-wide Sustainable Transport Strategy research, which have been reported to councillors already.

Consultancy support has been procured to deliver a district-wide carbon emissions 'pathways' study, which builds on similar work already undertaken for the Cotswold National Landscape. The study will establish how steeply emissions need to fall in each sector of the District's economy in order to meet international and national net zero carbon commitments. In addition work is starting on the updated Cotswold Design Code, which will incorporate more climate aspects, and a thorough examination is being undertaken of the amendments proposed by the Planning Inspector in respect of the cutting-edge Local

Plan partial update being pursued by Bath and North East Somerset Council, which shares many of the same climate objectives as Cotswold's own partial update exercise.

Nationally, as locally, electric vehicle charging infrastructure continues to lag EV purchases. There is a need to grow the number of local electric vehicle charge points (EVCPs) , and encourage the shift towards an electric future. The EVCP 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) and extreme pressures on all EVCP installers who are trying to keep pace with the rapid growth of the EVCP market. Progress with Rissington Road car park chargers is now advancing quickly.

'District-wide enabling' actions

Retrofitting homes to reduce costs, energy consumption and carbon emissions is an essential component of national emissions reduction, but remains a huge challenge. There is still no consistent government strategy, funding or policy basis, nor any clarity on the expected future role of local authorities. In order to move forward and innovate, 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. As part of this project, the partnership is working with London South Bank University (LSBU) which recently ran online interviews with householders to understand their experience of home energy. The research results will help the project partners to design a better home energy retrofit service.

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 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.

'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 motivated by the climate challenge, and researching user needs in order to provide real value.

In November 2022, Publica and the Councils took part in Carbon Literacy Action Day, the world's largest climate education training event, and ultimately increasing the number of climate champions across the organisation. Becoming Carbon Literate means taking actionable steps towards tackling the climate emergency.



Provide socially rented homes

The Context

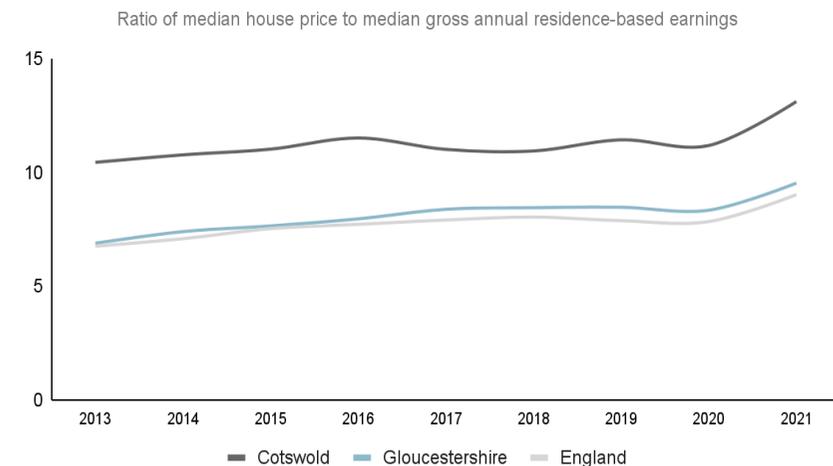
The high quality natural and built environment makes the District a desirable place to live. Cotswold District has a high number of properties owned outright (37.8%, vs 30.6% national average) reflecting the attractiveness of the District as a place to retire or to purchase a second home.

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 (2022 figure not yet available). At the end of June 2022, the median property price in Cotswold District was £394,300 compared to £260,000 in England. House prices are falling due to the cost of living crisis, while rents are increasing. 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 relatively high house prices and increasingly high rents, coupled with the lower than average earnings from local jobs, means housing affordability is a significant challenge for residents in the District and is being made worse by the cost of living crisis.

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 councillor 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). Due to challenges with the site including ecological challenges, the Kemble site was paused, and an alternative scheme on the derelict Broadleaze site at Down Ampney is being prepared for delivery first. Following a review of the Kemble site in the context of the cost of living crisis, the substantial subsidy that would be needed to deliver these homes and the ecological constraints, it was concluded that housing development on this site is not viable. In January 2023, Cabinet agreed to lease the land for use as allotments and community gardens.

The Council and Bromford are continuing to work in partnership to deliver carbon zero affordable homes on the Down Ampney site and formally entered into a Collaboration Agreement in November 2022. 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 a second round of consultation to share the detailed designs, house types and layouts is expected to take place before the planning application is submitted. However, the planning application will be affected by the Habitat Regulations Assessment requirements as the site is within the Zone of Influence for North Meadow, Cricklade. This means the planning application cannot be determined until a Mitigation Strategy is in place which is being led by Swindon Borough Council. It is anticipated that a planning application will be submitted by February 2023, followed by the legal transfer of the land to Bromford Housing

The Old station, Sheep street was previously assessed for service provision such as homelessness accommodation and other housing options but the conversion was found to be unaffordable. In December 2022, Cabinet agreed to develop the Old Station and Memorial Cottages for cultural and community use, working with local organisations to produce detailed designs, obtain quotations for the renovations and seek external grant funding. If sufficient external funding can be secured a report will be brought back to Council for agreement to proceed. However, if insufficient funding can be secured to achieve a minimum break even position for the Council, then the Council will need to consider other options such as the sale of the property.

The Stockwells regeneration scheme is being delivered by Bromford Housing Association and 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, 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, and demolition works have commenced.

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. Due to issues with utilities, construction was delayed but is now expected to begin in February 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.

The Government is currently reforming the English planning system, through its Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill. This will radically alter how the Council will prepare future local plans. These reforms are subject to the Bill achieving Royal Assent which is expected in late 2024. The Government has explained that it will put in place arrangements to smooth the transition from the existing plan making process and the new process, therefore allowing the Council sufficient time to update its Local Plan before embarking on a full local plan update under the new planning system from 2025.

Actions we are taking

At a meeting of Full Council in June 2020, members unanimously resolved to partially update the Local Plan 2011-2031. 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 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.

The Local Development Scheme (LDS) is published on the Council's website, and sets out key stages in the local plan making process. This document will be updated later this year to set out milestones for 2023 and 2024. A Local Plan Programme Board, that has membership of all political parties, is monitoring the progress of the Local Plan partial update.

An early stage Local Plan was consulted on in 2022. Overall, the consultation was a great success with approximately 7,500 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 are helping to shape the emerging Local Plan, as well as ideas as to how to make the next consultation even better. A summary of the consultation responses was presented to Cabinet at its meeting in July 2022 along with an update on the Local Plan project.

The online 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, and generated responses from all sectors of the community but notably the Council was able to target the District's younger people which was a shortcoming of previous consultations. In November 2022, the government awarded additional funding of £230,000 (together with West Oxfordshire) to further develop and promote digital engagement tools.

Officers are continuing to update the evidence base and studies to support the partial update of the Council's Local Plan, including:

- 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 and will be presented later this year together with the draft Local Plan Partial Update;
- 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;
- 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.;
- Strategic Flood Risk Assessments - a key piece of evidence that helps to ensure proposed development is located away from areas that flood.
- Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA - which seeks to identify land that could be suitable for allocation in the updated Local Plan). The latest version was published in October 2021 and local communities have had the opportunity to comment on the document through the Local Plan consultation. An update is due to be published later this year.
- Carbon impact and evidence base - a joint project with West Oxfordshire will provide evidence to support zero carbon policies. Officers met prospective consultants in late 2022 to discuss the project brief, establish indicative costs and confirm capacity to deliver this project;
- Transport assessments in Cirencester (including Kemble Ultra Light Railway) – the Council's consultants, ITP, have shared a final draft for comment. Presentation to key stakeholders was held in November 2022. A project brief for Transport and Access Study, which will also examine parking needs, is currently being set up. The project is expected to be fully commissioned by Spring 2023;
- 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 early 2023 to ensure the project is focussed and deliverable;

- Housing Strategy - a draft has been prepared and was shared with relevant councillors and senior management in December 2022. The next stage is to present it to Cabinet in March 2023 and then hold a public consultation for local communities and organisations to review it;

An internal review of the first drafts of Local Plan policies commenced in October 2022. Looking further ahead, submission to Cabinet and Council of the draft Local Plan for the next stage of consultation is expected in Summer 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) Framework Masterplan.

(1) There are various town centre issues that need exploring to support the production of a masterplan, for example, 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 were carried out in 2022 including two transport studies which were completed in Autumn 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. Officers will continue to work on these assessments during 2023.

(2) 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. Councillor workshops were held in July and September 2022 to consider the preferred options for the draft Masterplan. Work continues on drafting the Framework Masterplan along with preparations for stakeholder engagement and communication later this year. 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, who is 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 stage of work on the Sustainable Transport Strategy has been concluded with the latest results presented to informal Cabinet in December 2022, and shared with other partners and stakeholders. The initial phase established future "do nothing" transport carbon forecasts for Cotswold District and quantified the difference between that forecast and the trajectory we need to meet to achieve our aim of net zero carbon emissions by 2045. The next phase explored options to close that gap, identifying high level targets for vehicle mileage reduction to 2045 and interventions to achieve this shift in both rural and more urban areas. In broad terms, the District needs to achieve:

- an overall per capita reduction in total trip mileage of 25%;
- reduction of around one third of car mode share of remaining mileage;
- tripling of both active travel and public transport mileage; and
- electrification of remaining vehicle trips.

The next stage of work focuses on identifying the optimum implementation of measures/interventions and includes a number of studies such as the District-wide access and movement study, transport attitudes and behaviours study and work-related transport study.

The outcomes from the developing Sustainable Transport Strategy are currently being used to inform the update to the Local Plan update 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.

Support health and well-being



The Context

The health and wellbeing of our residents is generally good and above the England and the county average in most measures. Cotswold District is one of the safest districts with very low crime levels and is surrounded by beautiful countryside. However, there are 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 older residents live alone, and coupled with the rurality of the District, loneliness and access to services are issues for the District.

The wider determinants of health also need to be taken into account - 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 the Council needs 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.

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 first stage Standard Selection Questionnaire (SSQ) responses were evaluated during early October 2022 and the successful bids received an invitation to submit initial tender in mid October with a return date of 6 January 2023. Five leisure contractors were invited to bid (one has withdrawn) and two for culture. Throughout December 2022, officers have been responding to clarification questions. Evaluation of the bid (a 50/50 split between price and quality and negotiation will continue throughout 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 and the summer sport assessment. 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. The National Governing Bodies have reviewed both assessment reports and signed them off. KKP is pulling together the final action plan which will accompany the report for sign off by Sport England. 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. Once signed off, a report will be prepared for Cabinet.

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 are scheduled to take place in 2022-23 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, having now placed the order with the supplier and the equipment should be installed early in the New Year.

Six projects launched their campaigns on Crowdfund Cotswold in September/October 2022. One project, Redesdale Hall Kitchen, has withdrawn, to allow the trustees to focus on more pressing priorities, and a further project has not got off the starting blocks, which may be considered proof of concept in terms of ensuring projects need local support to progress. The first project to hit its target was Bledington Play Area, which has raised just under £30,000 to invest in play equipment for young children. Cotswold Friends has successfully fundraised for a second time on Crowdfund Cotswold, this time for a £17,400 project to improve digital inclusion for older residents. Thames Head Energy has raised over £16,000 towards solar farm feasibility work, and at the end of Q3, Fairford Town Council had raised over 80% of its target of around £100,000 for a new skate park. The Council contributed £26,000 to these four projects with a further contribution of £10,000 from the GCC resilience fund (Thames Head Energy did not qualify for this fund).

The Council has been looking at ways to support residents with the cost of living crisis. A councillor working group as well as a task force have been set up and meet regularly. Dedicated webpages have been set up with signposting information about available support (<https://www.cotswold.gov.uk/council-tax-and-benefits/help-if-you-re-struggling-with-the-cost-of-living/>). The pages had around 1670 views by the end of Q3. The Community Wellbeing team distributed 'Worrying about money' leaflets containing financial advice digitally as well as hard copies to various local organisations.

The Council has funded a number of projects with the key aim of ensuring no-one goes hungry. The Long Table launched 'The Longest Table' project in November 2022. This project encouraged local communities to host 'community feasts' where people eat together and pay what they can, experiences are shared, connections are made and resilience is built. Ten community feasts were hosted during the Christmas period across the District. The Council also launched its 'Connected Community and Food programme' (£75K) to support local communities to set up community activities and food projects such as community pantries or fridges, community feasts and cooking courses; and pledged an additional £40k towards the development of a district-wide food network. The aim is to develop non-stigmatising and community-led food projects to not just help people who are struggling with the cost of living

but also to tackle food waste

<https://www.cotswold.gov.uk/communities-and-leisure/community-grants-and-funding/cotswold-connected-community-and-food-programme/>).

The Council has secured £137k from Gloucestershire County Council for Round 3 of the Government funded Household Support Fund. The fund will be distributed in early 2023. Part of the funding will support families in need with supermarket vouchers as well as registered carers in partnership with Gloucestershire Carers Hub. Most of the funding will be distributed to Citizens Advice to support eligible residents directly in a holistic way.

The Community Wellbeing team in partnership with World Jungle and Gloucestershire County Council delivered the government funded Holiday Activity and Food programme between 19 and 22 December 2022. This was the 5th HAF event, and the scheme is expected to continue to run until 2025. The offer involved activities from 13 different providers as well as a range of ticketed activities including climbing, cinema, laserquest, ice skating and a visit to Cotswold Wildlife Park. Families also received supermarket vouchers during the Christmas holidays to make sure that children did not go hungry.

Cotswold District - Holiday Activity and Food Programme

Winter HAF 2022



Feedback from Parents:

"Thank you so much, and you. It's a hard one this year but hopefully ice skating will take the children's minds of things"

"They can not wait to go and also ice skating on the 29th it's things I've never been able to afford so thank you for allowing them the chance to try all these new activities we really appreciate it."

"Its very much appreciated and our gratitude is endless, i can now breath a sigh of relief knowing we can afford everything we need and the kids can have a wonderful christmas after everything. Have a wonderful christmas and new year too. "

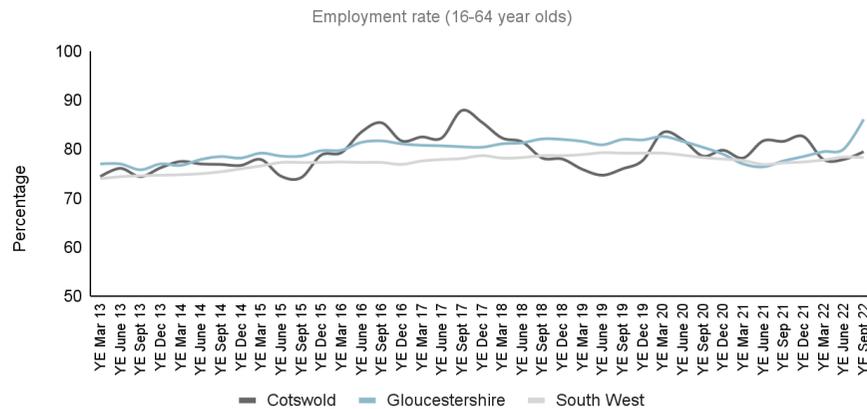


Enable a vibrant economy

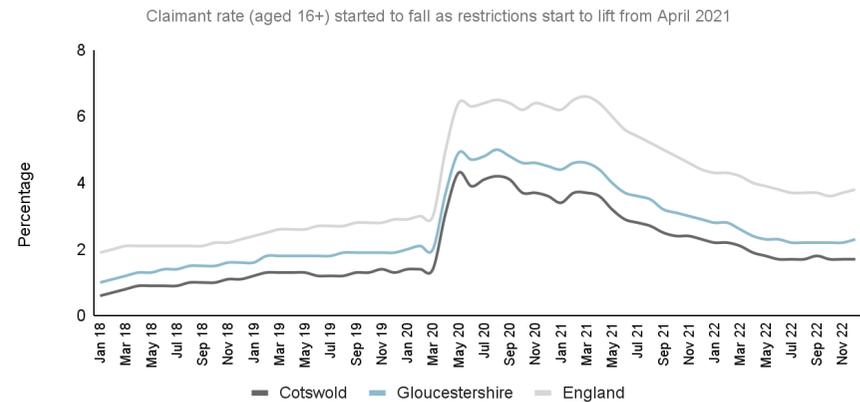


The Context

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 increased 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. This is likely to lead to unemployment rising gradually again for a time.



Source: ONS, Annual Population Survey



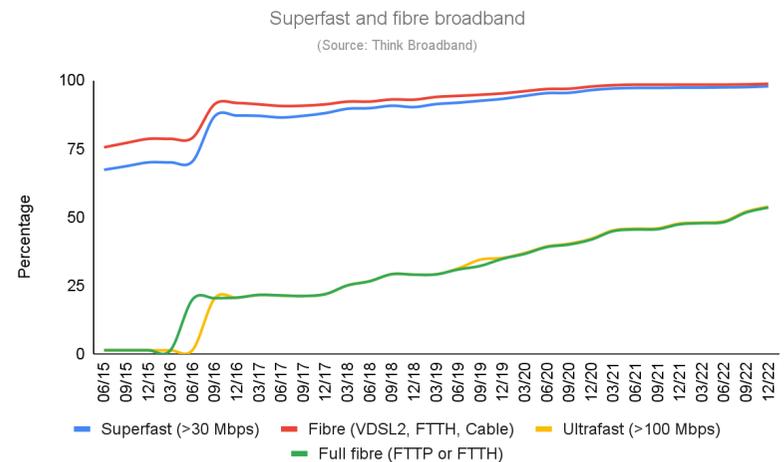
Source: ONS, Crown Copyright Reserved (Nomis)

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 proportion of jobs in tourism was 13% of the total local job market, up from 8% in 2020. Similarly, visitor spend, at £276m 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 visitor numbers. 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. Visit England is projecting that overseas visitor numbers will approach 2019 levels during 2023.

Domestic visitor attractions in 2022 saw a small drop in visitor numbers since the last year (as families continued to holiday in the UK). 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 has been working in Cirencester and has 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, but work in Bourton-on-the-Water is due to start in 2023. Gigaclear has also been onsite in Cirencester and Northleach and has plans to undertake work in 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 County Council has recently taken a decision to increase the level of the Fastershire Community Broadband Grant to make it more attractive to the infrastructure providers and is also introducing the Gloucestershire Digital Household Scheme to use 4G technology to deliver connectivity in remote locations where fibre is not practical or is prohibitively expensive. A Fastershire Business Grant of up to £20,000 is also being introduced. 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 Visitor Economy from Cotswolds Tourism as well as discussing the implications of the Chancellor's Autumn Statement, which had taken place on the same day as the Group's meeting.

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 £157k of the £162k allocation. The projects and spend was subject to a random audit request and was given a clean bill of health. 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, was approved by the government in early December 2022. 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. An addendum to the Local Investment Plan was submitted to the government at the end of November 2022 and it is hoped that it will be approved before the end of January 2023. The proposed approach has been to allocate funding for business grants, for active travel and for community projects, including assisting village halls with sustainability-related improvements. An application process will be opened and details issued to councillors once approval for the plan has been received from government.

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% and in October 2022 to just under 5%. The smaller towns within the District generally have 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 opened in October 2022.

A Local Connections project is underway. It is 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.

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 Cotswolds Tourism 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 now dropped from over 27% to under 17%, while promoted 'Real Cotswolds' towns now account for 38% of web traffic.

The Tourism team with partners secured £5,000 funding from the Department of International Trade to identify businesses who want to access high spend overseas market and help prepare them to do so.

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 in Spring 2023. A public launch of the project has been scheduled for 20 January 2023.
- the new owners of the former Mitsubishi site in Cirencester, now renamed Watermoor Point. The office element is now 80% 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 15 to 97 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 the scheme was approved in November 2022. Kier Highways has been appointed main contractor. The project, which at around £460m, 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 effort has been focused on delivering opportunities for environmental improvements as well as economic benefits. There will be opportunities for local suppliers, contractors and skills. For example, the Council has been in discussions with Kier and the Cotswolds National Landscape regarding a Drystone Walling Academy to help train people to build the 10km of drystone walling included in the scheme.