



Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	CABINET 19th JUNE 2023
Subject	GREEN ECONOMIC GROWTH STRATEGY - SIX MONTHLY UPDATE
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Cllr Tony Dale, Cabinet Member for Economy and Council Transformation Email: <a href="mailto:tony.dale@cotswold.gov.uk">tony.dale@cotswold.gov.uk</a>
Accountable officer	Andy Barge, Assistant Director - Communities Email: <a href="mailto:andy.barge@publicagroup.uk">andy.barge@publicagroup.uk</a>
Report	Paul James, Economic Development Lead Email: <a href="mailto:paul.james@cotswold.gov.uk">paul.james@cotswold.gov.uk</a>
Summary/Purpose	To update Cabinet Members on the progress in delivering the Council's Green Economic Growth Strategy
Annexes	None.
Recommendation(s)	<i>1) That progress in delivering the Green Economic Growth Strategy is noted.</i> <i>2) That a review and refresh of the Strategy is undertaken in light of progress to date, the Administration's priorities following the elections in May 2023 and the emerging Gloucestershire Economic Strategy.</i> <i>3) That future updates on the Green Economic Growth Strategy are dealt with via Member briefings rather than a report to Cabinet, unless a formal decision is required.</i>
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Enable a vibrant economy</li><li>● Responding to the climate crisis</li></ul>
Key Decision	NO



Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Cotswold Economic Advisory Group

## **1. 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 fifth such update. It is recommended that future updates are dealt with via Member Briefings rather than Cabinet reports in order to free up space on future Cabinet agendas.
- 1.2** 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 launched the 'Innovation Village' project in January 2023.
- 2.3** The 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 progressing through the design phase. 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 expected to be lodged with the Council later in the year. To give an idea of scale, the development is estimated to have a Gross Development Value (GDV) of £100 million, making it one of the biggest developments in the District for some time. The Cabinet Member and Council Officers are part of a project stakeholder group which meets regularly to oversee the project.

- 2.4** Members will be aware of ZeroAvia, who moved to Cotswold Airport from Cranfield and are developing a hydrogen powertrain for aircraft. They have increased their headcount from 15 to 140 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. Indeed, the Council is working with the airport company and other stakeholders to promote the airport as a location for sustainable aviation businesses.

#### Town Centres

- 2.5** Town centres within the District continue to perform 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 it is important that the Council and its partners continue to devote effort to assisting towns to evolve in the post-Covid world.
- 2.6** A vacant unit count in town centres was undertaken in early April. Vacancy rates in most towns remain relatively low, but have edged up in some towns, which is not entirely surprising as this is generally the toughest time of the year for retailers. Cirencester's vacancy rate rose to 5.4% from 4.8% last October, which compares with 11% in August 2021 and is much lower than the national average of 13.8%. A number of the vacant units in the town are either now let, under offer or being refurbished, including the former House of Fraser site.

#### Visitor Economy

- 2.7** Much of Cotswolds Tourism's work in recent months has been centred on working towards Visit England accreditation for a new Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) alongside other strategic partners from across the wider region. This new approach for destination management will bring forward opportunities to access specialist Visit England business support, potential funding and longer term bring the regional tourism organisations into a closer working collaboration. Key themes will cover accessibility, sustainability, skills, data and business support as well as focussing on continuing to work together to promote overseas and business events.



- 2.8** As a response to findings in the Sustainable Tourism Survey, Cotswolds Tourism recently held its first local connections event. This was a ‘speed dating’ event to introduce local accommodation providers (hotels and self-catering) to a variety of small local service providers ranging from soap makers to tour guides, gin makers to electric bike hire. Feedback has been very positive with many of the businesses now looking to work together.
- 2.9** There have been two Cotswold innovation workshop meetings organised by Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership, bringing together Cotswolds Tourism, the Council’s Sustainable Transport Lead and a few businesses to scope short and longer term actions an expanded group could work on. This could link into the new LVEP sustainable transport action plan that will need to be developed from a tourism perspective.
- 2.10** Work continues to promote the area via media visits, digital engagement and highlighting new products to buyers and media. A recent Visit England media event, kindly supported by local business Larkswold supplying beeswax wraps and Cotswold Lavender giving free samples, showcased the region as an opportunity to focus on wellness and sustainable crafts.

#### Infrastructure

- 2.11** By far the biggest infrastructure project within the District is the A417 Missing Link. Preparatory work has started on site, with construction due to begin later in the year. 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. Kier is presenting to the September meeting of the Cotswold Economic Advisory Group.
- 2.12** Broadband coverage in the District continues to edge up, with Superfast coverage (>30mbps) now at 97.8% and Gigabit ready/full fibre now at 57%. Gloucestershire County Council are working to address the issue of households who do not have access to broadband greater than 30mbps, by increasing the Fastershire Community Broadband maximum grant from £5000 to £7000 per household and launching the Gloucestershire Digital Household Grant Scheme, based on 4G technology, for those unable to apply for the Fastershire Community Broadband Grant.

#### Skills and Training

- 2.13** The new T-Level building at Cirencester College is now complete and an official opening took place . The College is now looking at further expanding the T-Level provision with additional student facilities on site and the Council has supported funding bids submitted by the College. The Council’s Local Investment Plan for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund includes funding in Year Three (2024/25) for support for people furthest from the labour market and for green skills.



#### Key sites and inward investment

- 2.14** In addition to the RAU Innovation Village 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, particularly around sustainable aviation. 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 and at the time of writing is awaiting determination.
- 2.15** Officers have also been in regular contact 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 over 90% occupancy and providing an attractive business environment for more than 60 companies. A recent innovation is a brand-new co-working suite equipped with 40 large desks, specifically tailored for the needs of micro and hybrid businesses. The owners have also introduced an innovative and flexible co-warehousing solution, offering businesses a private, secure space within the warehouse, ranging from 1,000 to 10,000 square feet. Businesses also benefit from shared mechanical handling equipment and an on-site qualified forklift driver. Watermoor Point has been granted planning permission to install an additional 310 PV solar panels in addition to its existing 50kWh array, demonstrating its commitment to sustainability.

#### Business Engagement and Support

- 2.16** The Cabinet Member for Economy and Transformation and the Economic Development Lead continue to visit businesses in the District. This programme has been interrupted by restrictions in place during the pre-election period but arrangements are being put in place to restart it now the election period is over.
- 2.17** Members will be aware that Cabinet in March agreed to allocate funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) to support the Growth Hub, based on the RAU Campus in Cirencester. One enhancement to the offer as a result of the UKSPF funding is that the Growth Hub will be able to operate an outreach service to support businesses throughout the District.

#### 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. The facility at Cotswold Farm Park has been completed and Abbey Grounds is currently on site and will be the next one to open as part of a wider refurbishment of the public toilet provision in the park. It is anticipated that Birdland and Cotswold Country Park and Beach will both be completed in the current financial year.

**2.19** Members will recall that the Council was allocated £1 million over three years under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). The Council's 'Local Investment Plan' was approved in December 2022 and various projects are either completed or underway as a result of this funding.

**2.20** In addition, in September 2022 it was announced that the Council had been allocated an additional £764,292 over two years under the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF), which is a capital-only fund. A report went to Cabinet in November and the Council submitted an addendum to its Local Investment Plan later in that month. The Council's submission was approved in April 2023. The REPF proposal allocates a large proportion of the funding for grants to businesses to support them with diversification, innovation and net zero infrastructure. A report on the Council's approach to the REPF appears elsewhere on the agenda.

#### Review of the Strategy

**2.21** As the strategy has now been running for two and a half years of its four year lifetime, now seems like an appropriate time to review it in light of the progress to date and the Administration's priorities over the next four years. A new Economic Strategy for Gloucestershire is currently being worked on by the County Council and GFirst LEP. The Council's Economic Development Lead sits on the task group for the Countywide strategy. The Economic Development Lead will undertake the review of the Council's Green Economic Growth Strategy in consultation with the Cabinet Member and other stakeholders such as the Cotswold Economic Advisory Group and will report back to Cabinet with the outcome of the review in due course.

### **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 with some exciting projects underway or being planned within the District. A review of the Green Economic Strategy is proposed given that it is two and a half years through its four year lifetime.

### **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)