



# COTSWOLD

## District Council

COUNCIL PRIORITIES REPORT

**July – September 2025**

# Our Purpose, visions, priorities and values

Cotswold District Council serves one of the UK's most iconic areas, home to 90,000 residents across more than 100 communities and parishes. We work to protect its unique character, support its economy, and improve lives.

## Our Purpose

We provide high-quality services that meet community needs—from planning and housing to climate action and wellbeing. As local government faces significant change, we remain focused on delivering with **purpose, integrity, and ambition**. This strategy sets out our vision to **2028**, when national plans for Local Government Reorganisation are expected to create a new unitary council, and includes an action plan to leave a lasting legacy.

## Our Vision

To leave a legacy of:

- Affordable, sustainable housing
- Resilient, connected communities
- A thriving local economy
- A protected natural environment
- Transparent, high-quality public services

## Our Values

Everything we do is built on trust, transparency, and listening to our communities. We:

- **Put communities first** – their priorities are our priorities
- **Work as one team** – for residents and businesses
- **Focus on efficiency and value** – ensuring good use of resources
- **Set up for success** – to deliver against our corporate priorities

## Our strategic priorities

Between now and 2028, the priorities we've set out to achieve this legacy are:

- Preparing for the future
- Delivering good services
- Responding to the climate emergency
- Delivering housing
- Supporting communities
- Supporting the economy



# Preparing for the Future

## The Context

Gloucestershire is set to move to a unitary structure in 2028, with Cotswold District Council services transferring to a successor authority. Our focus remains on ensuring a smooth transition while continuing to meet residents' needs. We are driving organisational change, developing our workforce, and progressing a new Local Plan. Engagement with town and parish councils and collaboration with partner authorities is underway to design future services and ensure decisions reflect local priorities.

## Actions we are taking

In 2025, the Council launched an ambitious transformation programme to modernise services, strengthen digital capabilities, and prepare for future governance changes. This programme reflects our commitment to delivering high-quality, accessible services that meet residents' evolving needs while safeguarding financial sustainability and operational resilience. Against a backdrop of increasing demand, technological advancement, and national policy shifts, our strategic approach aims to create a more agile, efficient, and customer-focused organisation.

The transformation programme is structured around a clear vision: improving outcomes for residents, enhancing organisational culture, and ensuring readiness for potential structural changes in local government. An initial Strategy Action Plan has been drafted and is undergoing a rigorous assessment and scoring process to develop a prioritised pipeline of initiatives based on speed of delivery, cost, and scalability. The plan includes proposals for service redesign, potential restructures, and greater integration of digital solutions. Digital transformation is a cornerstone of this strategy, with several AI initiatives included to accelerate digital adoption, improve service accessibility, and promote digital inclusion. Meetings are being scheduled with Lead Members and the Head of ICT to evaluate feasibility and identify the most cost-effective implementation routes through detailed cost-benefit analysis.

In parallel, the Council is actively engaged in the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) process. Proposals for both a single-unitary authority and a two-unitary authority model have been developed and were considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 17 November and Full Council on 26 November, with Cabinet making the final decision on which proposal to support. Planning for the next phase of the LGR programme is underway, using a new programme and portfolio management approach. A workshop held on 10 November finalised details following officer engagement sessions.

Discussions with Gloucestershire Leaders have also progressed, with agreement to consider three strategic options for devolution and establishing a strategic mayoral authority. These options will remain under consideration until the government confirms its decision on local government reorganisation.

The People and Culture Strategy has made significant progress. In September 2025, Cabinet approved the Year 1 Implementation Plan, workforce values, and a supporting Communications and Engagement Strategy. Internal communications remain a priority, with fortnightly updates on LGR proposals issued to all staff via the staff portal, which also hosts a dedicated LGR page. Regular all-staff briefings continue every six weeks, providing updates on LGR, organisational development, and recognition initiatives. Through Quarter 3, we will roll out new visuals and content to further embed the Council's values. In addition, Publica and the four shareholder councils have prioritised reviews of services currently delivered by Publica to ensure alignment with future governance arrangements.

Looking ahead, the Council is preparing to adopt a new Local Plan, which will provide a development framework for the Cotswold area post-2028. This plan will deliver affordable housing, employment opportunities, and infrastructure for current and future generations, while conserving and enhancing the district's nationally significant landscape.

# Delivering Good Services



## The Context

The Council is committed to providing high-quality services that offer value for money, tackle climate change, and meet community needs. We've strengthened accountability by bringing key services in-house, advanced a Local Plan update to deliver sustainable growth, and earned positive feedback from the LGA for our progress. Current priorities include modernising waste services, improving digital engagement, preparing for legislative changes, and implementing strategies for parking, financial resilience, and income generation. These actions ensure services remain responsive, sustainable, and future-ready.

## Actions we are taking

The council is driving forward a series of strategic projects to modernise waste, environmental, and infrastructure services, aligning them with its broader transformation and climate commitments. A major focus is the development of a fleet replacement programme, which not only addresses the ageing kerbside recycling fleet but also explores refurbishment options for other vehicles to reduce costs and environmental impact. This initiative is closely linked to the council's ambition to transition towards ultra-low emission and hybrid technologies, supporting its pledge to achieve net-zero carbon emissions and reduce transport-related emissions, which account for a significant proportion of the district's carbon footprint.

Customer engagement is another priority, with work underway to improve and digitise the way residents interact with waste and environmental services. Current systems, such as the Waste Wizard and collection day checker, are being reviewed to identify opportunities for continuous improvement. The aim is to deliver a more intuitive, accessible experience that provides real-time information and supports digital inclusion across the district.

The council is also preparing for significant changes in national waste legislation. Monitoring and analysis of policy developments are ongoing to ensure services remain flexible and capable of adapting to new requirements, such as the collection of additional materials like flexible plastics. These changes are strongly connected to the fleet strategy to ensure vehicles can accommodate future demands and maintain service resilience.

In planning, the council is implementing recommendations from the Planning Advisory Service peer review, which highlighted strengths in collaborative working and identified areas for improvement. The resulting action plan focuses on enhancing enforcement processes, reducing administrative burdens, and exploring the use of AI tools to improve efficiency in reporting and correspondence. These measures aim to create a more responsive and streamlined planning service that supports sustainable development and carbon-neutral growth.

Parking services are also undergoing transformation. A new parking strategy is being developed to reflect changing travel patterns, climate priorities, and future demand. This includes reviewing car park usage, improving accessibility, and expanding electric vehicle charging infrastructure. Investment in car parks has already delivered significant improvements, and ongoing collaboration between service areas will ensure these assets continue to meet community needs.

Looking ahead, the council is progressing a full update of its Local Plan to respond to increased housing targets and embed climate and biodiversity considerations at the heart of development policy. This update will provide a robust framework for delivering affordable housing, sustainable infrastructure, and carbon-neutral communities, while safeguarding the district's nationally significant landscape.



# Responding to the Climate Emergency

## The Context

The climate and ecological crises pose serious threats, especially to younger and future generations. Cotswold District Council declared a climate emergency in 2019 and adopted its Climate Emergency Strategy (2020–2030), setting ambitious targets: an 80% reduction in emissions by 2030 and net zero by 2045 without reliance on carbon offsetting. The Council has embedded climate considerations across all policies and decision-making and is committed to achieving 100% clean energy use across its operations by 2030.

## Actions we are taking

The Council has made significant progress in reducing operational carbon emissions, achieving a 41% reduction since 1990, from 4.7 million kg CO<sub>2</sub>e to 2.76 million kg CO<sub>2</sub>e by 2022–23. A Climate Board has been established to monitor and accelerate progress, using independent assessments like the Climate Action Scorecards to identify areas for improvement. Key initiatives include:

- Energy efficiency and renewable energy: A Renewable Energy Study (2025) provides evidence-based recommendations for deploying solar and wind energy and informs the Local Plan update to make it “Green to the Core.” This study also forms the foundation for Local Area Energy Planning, ensuring grid capacity and flexibility for future renewable integration.
- Solar and retrofit schemes: The Cotswold Home Solar scheme has helped 27 homes install solar panels, with 18 more in progress, delivering projected savings of nearly £450,000. A Gloucestershire-wide retrofit support service, launched in January 2025, offers tailored energy efficiency plans and vetted installers. Locally, a Retrofit Engagement Officer is running events and advice sessions, including the “Drive and Thrive” event held in March.
- EV infrastructure: The Council has installed 24 new EV chargers in car parks across Stow-on-the-Wold, Moreton-in-Marsh, Tetbury, and Cirencester, bringing the total to 49 Council-installed chargers out of 150 publicly accessible points in the district. This rollout supports residents without off-street parking and aligns with the ambition for an EV charger within a 10-minute walk wherever possible.
- Transport decarbonisation: A dedicated Transport Decarbonisation Study sets out pathways and interventions to reduce emissions from the district’s largest source of carbon, including active travel infrastructure and EV adoption.
- Local Plan update: Work is underway to embed climate and biodiversity considerations into the Local Plan, ensuring sustainable development, affordable housing, and carbon-neutral communities.

Community engagement remains central to the Council’s approach, with carbon literacy training, campaigns promoting behaviour change, and initiatives like Crowdfund Cotswolds to support local climate projects. Partnerships with housing providers such as Bromford are strengthening climate resilience in affordable housing.



# Delivering Housing

## The Context

Cotswold faces a severe housing affordability crisis, with property prices far exceeding local incomes and a shortage of genuinely affordable homes. Many residents, especially younger people, are forced to leave the area, threatening community resilience. The council is committed to delivering good-quality, affordable housing—prioritising social rent and homes for young people, families, and veterans. New homes will be energy-efficient and carbon-neutral to reduce costs and support sustainability. Tackling homelessness and ensuring long-term housing solutions are central to our strategy because secure housing underpins health, wellbeing, and strong communities.

## Actions we are taking

Meeting sharply increased government housing targets while preserving the Cotswolds' unique character and environment is one of the council's most significant challenges. National policy now requires the district to plan for more than 18,000 new homes by 2043—over double previous targets—despite 80% of the area being designated as National Landscape, which severely limits development options. In response, the council is undertaking a rapid update of its Local Plan, exploring strategic options such as a new settlement near Driffield, extensions to existing towns and villages, and smaller developments distributed across the district. Public consultation is underway to ensure that decisions reflect local priorities and community input.

Alongside meeting these targets, the council remains committed to delivering genuinely affordable housing. Land scarcity and high property prices—often more than 16 times average rural incomes—make this a complex task, but innovative solutions are being pursued. A pipeline of rural exception sites is being developed, supported by strong partnerships with housing associations and parish councils. Recent schemes, such as the Avening development opened by HRH The Princess Royal, demonstrate how high-quality, environmentally sustainable homes can be delivered in rural settings. These homes incorporate features like air-source heat pumps, solar panels, and traditional Cotswold design, ensuring they complement village character while reducing energy costs for residents.

The council's Housing Strategy sets out clear priorities: planning for everyone's housing needs, increasing affordable housing supply, and creating sustainable, climate-resilient homes. This includes addressing poor-quality housing and supporting community-led housing initiatives. The strategy recognises that there is no single solution; instead, a combination of measures—large-scale developments, rural schemes, and incremental improvements—will collectively deliver meaningful change.

Preventing homelessness is another cornerstone of the council's approach. The Preventing Homelessness Strategy 2025–2030 focuses on early intervention, partnership working, and tailored support for vulnerable residents. The council already prevents over 200 households a year from becoming homeless through proactive measures such as negotiating with landlords, providing emergency accommodation, and offering financial assistance. Rough sleeping remains extremely low in the district thanks to assertive outreach and rapid response protocols. Quarterly reviews of H-CLIC data help monitor trends and inform strategic actions, ensuring resources are targeted effectively.

Looking ahead, the council will continue to balance housing delivery with environmental stewardship. Biodiversity enhancements, green infrastructure, and carbon-neutral design principles are being embedded into planning policies. The updated Local Plan will not only allocate sites for housing but also set a framework for sustainable growth, ensuring that new development supports thriving communities without compromising the Cotswolds' nationally significant landscape.



# Supporting Communities

## The Context

Cotswold District benefits from strong health outcomes, low crime, and natural beauty. However, challenges remain, particularly for an ageing population in rural areas facing loneliness and limited access to services. Broader issues such as unemployment, low income, poor housing, and lifestyle choices also impact wellbeing. Addressing these requires a collaborative, whole-systems approach using asset-based community development.

## Actions We Are Taking

Cotswold District Council is working to position the district as a national leader in health and wellbeing, promoting active lifestyles and inclusive community initiatives. The Leisure Strategy, shaped around local priorities, guides investment in facilities and non-facility interventions, overseen by the Active Cotswolds Programme Board across three themes: Healthier District, Connected Community, and Active Environment. The leisure contract continues to exceed targets, with cultural engagement boosted by events like the Woolly Mammoth exhibition and Project Orpheus.

The Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme has been renewed for three years, providing activities and meals through providers such as World Jungle. Summer HAF 2025 received positive feedback, and planning is underway for future delivery. World Jungle also supports youth-focused events like the Cotswold Youth Mobile Festival, promoting creativity and wellbeing.

To complement HAF, the Council secured £50,000 for 14 Strengthening Local Communities events. Ten events have already engaged over 600 residents with free activities and partner support. Upcoming events in Northleach (Oct 28) and Avening (Oct 30) will feature Halloween themes, with final events in Mickleton and Kemble scheduled for February.

Partnership working remains central, with collaboration from the NHS, Citizens Advice, Severn Wye, Foodbanks, and Carers Hub on issues such as cost of living, health, and social isolation. Officers also work through the Integrated Locality Partnership and GCC's One Plan Cotswolds group to improve outcomes for children and vulnerable households.

The Cotswold Food Network (CFN) drives food sustainability through initiatives like the Food Procurement Guide, Allotments Mini Guide, and Cookery Classes Guide. Outreach includes the Low-Income Family Tracker and a revised "Worrying About Money?" leaflet (4,000 copies distributed). A Venison Supply Project is being scoped to support food charities and manage deer overpopulation.

Youth engagement remains a priority, with support for Northleach Teen Space, digital skills courses, and summer programmes. The Unsung Heroes awards introduced a Young Heroes category in July, with the next round due in November.

The Council promotes community-led initiatives through Crowdfund Cotswold, which has supported over £1 million in local projects. The autumn round attracted projects such as community sheds, skateparks, and murals, including the Churn Project's Community Shed tackling isolation.

Work is ongoing with town and parish councils to prepare for Local Government Reorganisation, while the Local Plan Review responds to housing targets now set at 1,036 homes per year. A Preferred Options Consultation runs from 5 November to 18 December 2025, seeking feedback on development and infrastructure needs.

Finally, the Council works with the Community Safety Partnership to improve road safety and reduce antisocial behaviour. A community speedwatch film is due for release, and the district supported Operation Shield, a summer town-centre safety initiative.



# Supporting the Economy

## The Context

The Cotswold economy is diverse, with businesses of all sizes across multiple sectors. While tourism remains a major employer, the district's economic potential goes far beyond visitor activity. Our focus is on creating a resilient, balanced economy by supporting innovation, enhancing digital capability, and promoting green growth. Through targeted investment and partnership working, we aim to nurture high-value, low-impact sectors such as agritech, cyber, medical technology, and environmental innovation—providing better opportunities for local people and businesses.

## Actions we are taking

The Green Economic Growth Strategy 2025–29 guides economic development activity and is overseen by the Cotswold Economic Advisory Group, which includes key partners such as St James's Place, Cirencester College, and the Royal Agricultural University (RAU). The refreshed strategy focuses on creating high-value, low-impact jobs, supporting sustainable growth, and promoting skills development, including apprenticeships and T-Levels.

Through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), the Council has delivered projects such as business support via the Growth Hub, heritage restorations, and the rebranding of the Cotswold Water Park area as the Cotswold Lakes. Outreach has expanded to towns like Moreton-in-Marsh, and recent rounds have funded initiatives including mentoring for young people, creative co-working spaces, and town centre improvements. Nine projects received over £120,000 in 2025, including £25,000 for Cirencester Chamber of Commerce to support early careers. Additional funding from the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) has supported rural business grants, village hall upgrades, and active travel schemes. Projects funded from 2022–25 are complete, with 2025–26 allocations now underway, including energy efficiency measures, solar panels, and community facility improvements.

Town centres remain a priority. Cirencester's vacancy rate has fallen to 4.8% with refurbished units and new social enterprises such as The Old Department Store occupying former retail spaces. Smaller towns maintain low vacancy rates, though conversions to residential use and loss of critical mass remain concerns. A UKSPF-funded consultant is investigating higher vacancy areas like Lechlade, Moreton-in-Marsh and Tetbury to develop action plans.

The Council is working with partners to grow sectors such as agritech, cyber, and medical tech. Key projects include:

- RAU Innovation Village – £140M scheme, planning application submitted.
- ZeroAvia at Cotswold Airport – advancing hydrogen-electric aviation.
- Fire Service College – expanding as a Centre for National Resilience.
- A417 Missing Link – £460M infrastructure project improving connectivity.

The Growth Hub, funded through UKSPF, continues to provide expert business support and has launched the Cotswold Catalyst incubator programme for high-potential start-ups. This six-month initiative offers tailored workshops, co-working space, and access to thought leaders, helping businesses scale and thrive. Cirencester Growth Hub remains the best-performing hub in Gloucestershire.

Cultural development is supported through the Creative Cotswolds Action Plan, approved in July 2025, which aims to strengthen the district's cultural sector. Delivery will be driven by a new Leisure and Culture Support Officer, with recruitment scheduled for Q3 2025-2026 and the post expected to be filled shortly.