



# COTSWOLD

District Council

COUNCIL PRIORITIES REPORT

**January – March 2026**

# 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 reflects our commitment to delivering accessible, high-quality services while ensuring financial sustainability and organisational resilience. Against a backdrop of rising demand, technological change, and shifting national policy, our approach aims to create a more agile, efficient, and customer-focused organisation.

The programme is underpinned by a clear vision: improving outcomes for residents, enhancing organisational culture, and ensuring readiness for potential changes in local government. An initial Strategy Action Plan has been drafted and is being assessed to prioritise initiatives based on speed, cost, and scalability. The plan includes proposals for service redesign, restructures, and expanded use of digital solutions, and has been aligned with the ICT development programme. Digital transformation is central to this work, with several AI initiatives being scoped to improve accessibility and support digital inclusion. Some completed projects include Windows 11, Microsoft Copilot Chat rollout, Automatic Case detection will deliver workflow automation across the Council.

The Council is actively engaged in Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and amplified the Government's consultation, running from February to March 2026. The Portfolio and Programme team is being developed to drive through the implementation plan. The government has written to all local authorities setting out their expectations regarding devolution, and Gloucestershire Leaders have responded setting out their preferred option of establishing a Foundation Strategic Authority across Gloucestershire in advance of joining the West of England Combined Authority, in due course.

The People and Culture Strategy has made significant progress. Employee experience surveys were conducted through January and February, with 85% of staff feeling informed and connected. Throughout 2025/26, an average of 32 pieces of content were posted to the council's portal per month exceeding target, staff briefings were held with greater frequency and at least 100 attendees at each. Through the Future Gloucestershire / LGR Portfolio and Programme Office, fortnightly updates on LGR have been sent every other Wednesday. The roll out of the Council's new values continued, with display assets showing case studies. Publica and shareholder councils have also prioritised reviews of Publica-delivered services 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. Regulation 18 consultation has now been completed, and evidence remains on track for submission in December 2026.

# 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 and advanced a Local Plan update to deliver sustainable growth. 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, planning, and infrastructure services, aligning them with wider transformation and climate ambitions. A major focus is delivery of the updated Fleet Replacement Programme, approved by Cabinet in January. This includes replacing the ageing kerbside recycling and food waste fleets and taking early steps towards decarbonisation through the introduction of one electric vehicle and the use of Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil where its sustainability can be assured. Delivery of the Fleet Replacement Programme is progressing, with tenders now live for recycling, food waste and smaller vehicles, alongside trials to inform procurement and support the transition to low emission technologies.

Improving customer engagement remains a priority, with the in-cab system now rolled out on street cleansing services and integrated with internal Waste monitoring tools, enabling residents to report issues such as overflowing litter bins directly through a mapped system. Work is also continuing to review digital tools to support a faster issue resolution and further digitisation of operational data.

The Council is preparing for significant changes in national waste legislation. Current policy expectations are being used to model potential impacts on waste flows and inform the design and capacity of new recycling vehicles, including possible requirements for collecting additional materials such as flexible plastics under Simpler Recycling requirements.

In planning, the Council continues to implement recommendations from the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) peer review. In Q4 the Enterprise system for Development Management was implemented, New reporting mechanisms have been introduced to monitor stakeholder response times, pre-application fees have been reviewed ahead of the next financial year, and work is underway to refresh the pre-application service for April. These improvements support more efficient case management, enhanced enforcement, and opportunities to pilot AI tools to streamline correspondence and reporting.

Work is also progressing across parking services. The new Car Parking Strategy has been approved and has now moved into implementation and business-as-usual. Capital investment works across car parks are complete, with ongoing maintenance and cross-service collaboration to address operational issues. Charging mechanisms have been introduced at all Council-owned public toilets, except Northleach pending discussions on future ownership and management.

# Responding to the Climate Emergency



## The Context

The climate and ecological crises pose existential threats. A report published by Defra on the 20th January 2026 stated ecosystem degradation is occurring across all regions and every critical ecosystem is on a pathway to collapse (irreversible loss of function beyond repair). The report states the consequences of this ecosystem degradation include geopolitical instability, economic insecurity, conflict, migration and increased inter-state competition for resources. Cotswold District Council declared a climate and ecological 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.

## Actions we are taking

The Council has made strong progress in cutting 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 in 2022–23 (latest data). Key initiatives include:

- EV infrastructure: 24 new EV chargers have been installed across Stow-on-the-Wold, Moreton-in-Marsh, Tetbury, and Cirencester, bringing the total to 49 Council-installed chargers out of 150 public chargers in the district. This supports residents without off-street parking and aligns with the ambition for an EV charger within a 10-minute walk wherever possible.
- Embedding climate action: The second Climate Board meeting took place in March with sustained focus on the Assets and Waste & Environment service areas which together account for 79% of the Council's carbon emissions. Final report, actions and next steps were presented at the June Climate Leadership Group meeting.
- Waste fleet decarbonisation: The district's diesel waste fleet will be replaced with 30 lorries running on hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) and one electric vehicle—part of a £7.8m investment supporting long-term decarbonisation.
- Solar and retrofit schemes: The Cotswold Home Solar scheme has enabled 53 installations, with 26 more in progress. Planning is underway for CDC's retrofit and electric vehicle flagship event, Drive and Thrive, to be delivered in Cirencester in June 2026. Draft planning policies promoting renewable energy deployment are progressing through the Local Plan process, informed by the 2025 Renewable Energy Study to ensure the plan is "Green to the Core."
- Climate resilience: A Climate Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (CRVA) has been published, providing evidence on current and future climate risks across Gloucestershire and highlighting best practice and next steps for adaptation. Planning for priority follow-up actions is underway.
- Community engagement: Carbon literacy training, behaviour-change campaigns, and funding opportunities such as Crowdfund Cotswolds continue to support local climate action. Partnerships with housing providers, including Bromford, are helping strengthen climate resilience in affordable homes.



# 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 protecting the Cotswolds' unique landscape remains one of the Council's most significant challenges. National policy now requires planning for 18,650 new homes by 2043, more than double previous requirements, despite over 80% of the district being designated National Landscape, severely restricting where development can occur. In response, the Council is rapidly updating its Local Plan. Regulation 18 consultation is now complete, and nearly 200 sites were submitted through the Call for Sites process. Strategic options under consideration include a new settlement near Driffield, extensions to several towns and villages, and smaller-scale developments distributed across the district. All work remains on track for submission of the updated Plan by December 2026.

Alongside meeting housing targets, the Council remains committed to delivering genuinely affordable homes. High land values and property prices, often more than 16 times average rural incomes, continue to create barriers, but partnership working with housing associations and parish councils is ongoing, and the rural exception site pipeline continues to grow. Recent schemes, such as the Avening development opened by HRH The Princess Royal, demonstrate how high-quality, energy-efficient homes can be delivered in rural settings using technologies such as air-source heat pumps and solar panels while maintaining traditional Cotswold character.

The Council's Housing Strategy focuses on meeting diverse housing needs, expanding affordable housing supply, and creating sustainable, climate-resilient homes. Final shortlisted site allocations is completed and technical evidence review is ongoing.

Preventing homelessness remains a core priority. The half year review of the Preventing Homelessness strategy is underway, with most actions on target or ahead of target. The partnership is working to deliver affordable housing and full review of the strategy against the MHCLG's National Plan to End being undertaken. The Council already prevents more than 200 households a year from becoming homeless through early intervention, landlord negotiation, and targeted support. Rough sleeping remains extremely low in the district due to proactive outreach and rapid response arrangements. Ongoing monitoring ensures actions stay on track and resources remain focused where they are most needed.

Looking ahead, the Council will continue to balance housing delivery with environmental stewardship. Draft development management policies aim to make the updated Local Plan "Green to the Core," embedding biodiversity enhancements, green infrastructure, and carbon-neutral design principles. Evidence from the 2025 Renewable Energy Study and other climate resilience work is helping ensure new development supports thriving communities without compromising the Cotswolds' nationally significant landscape.

# Supporting Communities



## The Context

Cotswold District enjoys many strengths, including positive health outcomes, low crime rates, and an attractive natural environment. Nevertheless significant challenges persist, especially for older residents in rural communities who may experience loneliness and poor access to essential services. Wider factors such as unemployment, limited income, substandard housing, and unhealthy lifestyle patterns also affect wellbeing. Responding effectively requires partners to work together through a whole-systems, asset-based approach to community development.

## Actions We Are Taking

Cotswold District Council is continuing to build its role as a leading voice for health and wellbeing, encouraging active lifestyles and inclusive community action. The Leisure Strategy, developed around local needs, directs investment in facilities and non-facility programmes, with oversight from the Active Cotswolds Programme Board across three themes: Healthier District, Connected Community, and Active Environment. The leisure contract continues to outperform key targets, including gym membership, participation rates, and Learn to Swim enrolments, with support from partners such as The Churn Project and The Long Table. Freedom Leisure carried out internal audits between January – March 2026, with findings reviewed and action plans implemented where required. Within Culture, Corinium Museum enhanced its collection through the loan of the Withington Mosaic fragments from the British Museum, marked by a well-attended community celebration event. At Corinium Museum, a successful crossover trial initiative “A gentle Movement class” was delivered over eight weeks, jointly funded by Active Cotswold and Freedom Leisure.

The Easter HAF programme was delivered successfully, attracting strong engagement from providers, while the final Strengthening Local Communities events were completed, with 14 events involving nearly 1,000 residents and improving access to services in rural areas. Looking forward, key priorities include testing advice services in a school setting, enhancing early intervention through housing partnerships, deepening collaboration through the Cotswold Food Network, and broadening access to cultural opportunities through local partnerships.

Effective partnership working remains fundamental, with support from the NHS, Citizens Advice, Severn Wye, Foodbanks, and Carers Hub in responding to cost-of-living pressures, health inequalities, and social isolation. Officers also play an active role through the Integrated Locality Partnership and GCC’s One Plan Cotswolds group to help children and vulnerable households.

The Cotswold Food Network is continuing to drive food sustainability through resources such as the Food Procurement Guide, Allotments Mini Guide, and Cookery Classes Guide. Outreach tools, including the Low-Income Family Tracker and the updated Worrying About Money leaflet, are helping to reach and support low-income households. Work is also progressing to explore a Venison Supply Project for local food charities.

Crowdfund Cotswold continues to champion community-led initiatives, having supported more than £1 million in local projects. Recent bids have included community sheds, skateparks, and murals, such as The Churn Project’s Community Shed. A further cohort of Unsung Heroes were feted at Council in March.

On Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), the Council has engaged with towns and parishes conducting a webinar for Gloucestershire’s town and parish councils, as the government consulted on the three options.

Finally, the Council continues to work with the Community Safety Partnership to improve road safety and reduce antisocial behaviour. A community speedwatch film will be released shortly, 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 from the Growth Hub has expanded to towns like Moreton-in-Marsh, and the most recent round of UKSPF and REPF funding has supported initiatives including mentoring for young people, creative co-working spaces, and town centre improvements. Nine projects received over £120,000 from the UKSPF in 2025/26, including £25,000 for Cirencester Chamber of Commerce to support young people to prepare to enter the workforce. 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 funding fully allocated and the vast majority of projects completed including energy efficiency measures, solar panels, and community facility improvements. Both funding streams have now come to an end.

A bid by the CotswoldsPlus Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP) to the County's Strategic Economic Development Fund (SEDF) for the financial years 2026-27 and 2027-28 was successful. On robust visitor economy data, the grant agreement and funding offer was signed off at the end of the quarter, allowing the recruitment of an admin role to support on the project, and the commencement of a procurement exercise.

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

- RAU Innovation Village – £140M scheme, outline planning application approved by Planning and Licensing Committee in May 2026.
- ZeroAvia and Vertical Aerospace at Cotswold Airport – advancing sustainable aviation.
- A417 Missing Link – £460M infrastructure project improving connectivity due to complete in Spring 2027.

The Growth Hub network for Gloucestershire also secured funding from the County Strategic Economic Development Fund for 2026-27, which enables the service to continue, including in Cotswold District, but is at a lesser level than the combined UKSPF funding through the districts.

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 now be driven forward by the newly appointed Leisure and Culture Support Officer, who started on 20 January 2026, enabling this work to be effectively facilitated and coordinated across programmes.