



COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL PRIORITIES REPORT
January 2023 - March 2023

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

- Cabinet approved funding for the Growth Hub in March 2023. The legal agreement requires them to focus on start-ups and provide an outreach service across the District and includes a target for the number of new businesses created.
- Rissington Road car park, Bourton on the Water, opened to the public in March 2023 following the improvement works. There are few small areas to finish off but all bays are accessible.
- Crowdfund Cotswold continues to attract wide interest from across the District. The last project from the autumn round, Fairford Skatepark, successfully hit its target in March. This is the largest project so far, with a campaign target of almost £100,000. The Spring round launched with an online workshop at the beginning of March.
- The Holiday Activity and Food programme ran activities again during the Easter Holidays and offered families Co-op food boxes in addition to the supermarket vouchers that they receive from GCC. Cotswold Connected Community and Food programme is already supporting a number of community food and learning initiatives for families that will take place in 2023 throughout the District.
- Work is progressing on the Changing Places Toilets project (£162,500 award from government). Cotswold Farm Park is now completed. Abbey Grounds, Cirencester has works underway. The remaining two (Birdland and Cotswold Country Park and Beach) are less well-advanced but will be delivered during the current financial year.
- The procurement process for Leisure and Culture Management Contractors is now complete and contracts are being finalised with preferred bidders.
- The Council and Bromford Housing have entered into a Collaboration Agreement to deliver the Down Ampney housing development. The second public consultation has been completed. Planning submission is expected in the coming weeks. The planned programme of consultation will continue through this year, and will help to shape the initial scheme designs for a net carbon zero housing development.
- 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. Kier has started on site with various preparatory works and is presenting to the next meeting of the Cotswold Economic Advisory Group in April.
- A Town and Parish Council Forum was held on 7 March as a hybrid event in the Council Chamber and on-line. Headline topics were the Council's budget and the Flood Warden scheme.

- Cabinet approved framework decarbonisation targets on 13 March 2023 for the Sustainable Transport Strategy. Work is now underway on the final (Phase 3) decarbonisation report. A Final Strategy Summary document will then be produced for general distribution in Q1
- Community Safety Partnership secured £50k of the Government's Safer Streets funding and launched a community consultation in March to ascertain which areas of the district residents may feel unsafe in and why.

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

Following a refresh and public consultation of the Council's draft budget proposals for 2023-24 last quarter, a summary of results was presented to Cabinet in January 2023. The results from this consultation were taken into consideration prior to agreement of the Revenue Budget, Capital Programme and MTFS agreed on the 15 February 2023.

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. During Q4, there were 93 requests for litter picks from communities with litter picks taking place across the district with over 230 people involved. Bourton-on-the-Water are eager to set up a community composting project and we are currently in the process of deciding a location. Other projects, still in the development, include planters around the district, community herb gardens and other civic pride projects.

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. Designs for the crossing were prepared by Sustrans in Jan 2023, but were not approved for delivery by Gloucestershire County Council's capital programme management board. Further research is being conducted with the aim of identifying a way forward;
- 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. Construction was completed 20-31 March 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. Short term preferred options centre on the provision of an hourly scheduled bus service between Cirencester, Kemble and Tetbury, but the study also identifies a viable opportunity to deliver a (possibly seasonal) service to the Water Park in the future;
- Cycle stand installation locations have been identified in Fairford, Lechlade and South Cerney. A contractor has been appointed and installation will commence in April/May 2023.

Improvements to the Rissington Road car park, Bourton on the Water to improve the customer experience and to ensure compliance with industry standards started on site in November 2022 and concluded by opening to the public on 29 March 2023. There are a few small areas of work to finish off but all bays are accessible.

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. At the cabinet meeting 6 February 2023 the decision was made to increase the 10 charged units to 40p to start 1 April as a result of current income only providing one third of the required budget to maintain the facilities. In addition, Cabinet delegated the decision to install cash and card payment facilities on a site-by-site basis to the Assistant Director for Resident Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services.

The overarching aim of the improvement work in the Planning service is to provide a trusted, inclusive and transparent planning service. The pre-application service has been launched following approval of the fee schedule. 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 backlog reduction phase of the project is currently underway. Once the backlog has been reduced, the 'back office' processes will be re-designed. The report on the enforcement project has been drafted for Cabinet and will be submitted in Q1 of 2023-24. 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

Q4 2022/23 saw much national policy activity. The Net Zero Review was published and of the 129 individual recommendations made, only one substantially relates to action by Local Authorities (streamlining planning and environmental permitting for new generation). The energy security strategy (Powering up Britain) published on 30 March was designed to remedy the failure of the previous net-zero strategy to meet the 2050 Net Zero target. Key elements include investments in floating offshore wind, green hydrogen, EV charging networks, export finance and sustainable aviation fuel, and initiatives including streamlining planning permission for solar and offshore (but not on-shore) wind, extending the boiler upgrade scheme, supporting heat pumps, and re-branding the ECO+ home insulation scheme.

A notable publication (March) was the Climate Change Committee's 2023 Report to Parliament on progress in adapting to climate change, which finds very limited implementation of adaptation measures to prepare for climate risks across 13 indicators (from community preparedness to transport to nature and water supply). The report also highlights impacts from extreme weather events, and calls for the next National Adaptation Programme period to be far more ambitious.

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

Changes now underway at Trinity Road will increase space efficiency reducing the Council's office footprint, and reduce associated energy costs and carbon emissions. Procurement of an installer of solar PV and battery storage at Trinity Road and one other tenanted site has recently been completed, with a business case and Council investment decision being brought forward in June.

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. 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 efficiency 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).

'Place Shaping' actions

Work is underway to build the necessary evidence base for draft climate policies for the Local Plan (LP) partial update, taking account of feedback from the Regulation 18 public consultation, as well as the results of recent examinations of other authorities' Local Plans which contain ambitious climate policies. 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.

A district-wide carbon emissions 'pathways' study, which builds on similar work already undertaken for the Cotswold National Landscape, is underway and initial results have been reviewed. 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, and will report during Q1. In addition work is starting on the updated Cotswold Design Code, which will incorporate more climate aspects.

Nationally, as locally, the provision of 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. Nonetheless the Rissington Road car park chargers will be installed in late May/early June, and funding from the DfT's On-Street Residential Charging Scheme has been received for both the Rissington Road and Trinity Road carparks, which will be available to local residents without off-street parking to charge overnight and outside of office hours.

'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. The announcements of the energy security strategy (Powering up Britain) include some measures that support home energy retrofit, but there is still no consistent national strategy or funding facility to support owner occupiers, and there remains no clarity on the expected future role of local authorities. In order to make progress, a Gloucestershire-wide Local Authority partnership, led by Stroud District Council, 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. The partnership has been successful in a bid to UK innovation funding for an additional role that will help coordinate district-level action.

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.

'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.



Provide socially rented homes

The Context

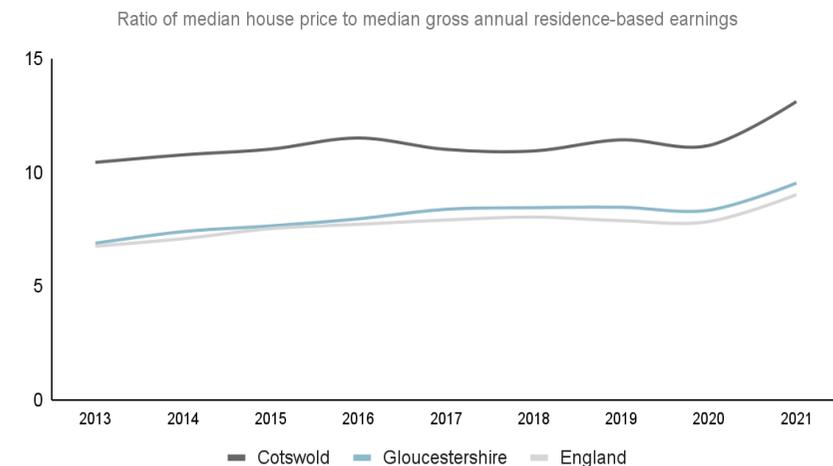
The high quality natural and built environment makes the District a desirable place to live. Cotswold District has a high number of properties owned outright (37.8%, vs 30.6% national average) reflecting the attractiveness of the District as a place to retire or to purchase a second home.

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 establish 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 took place in March ahead of a planning application being 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 hoped that this will be concluded in the next couple of months.

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't 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 Council is currently working with local organisations who are applying for external grant funding to support the delivery of this renovation and conversion.

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 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.



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 in Summer 2023 which will set out the next milestones and will indicate when the next formal public consultation will be held. 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.

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 VeryLight Railway) – the Council's consultants, ITP, have produced a final draft, findings of which were presented to the funding body (GEGJC) in March 2023. A project brief for Transport and Access Study for Cirencester, which will also examine parking needs, is currently being set up. The project is expected to be fully commissioned in April 2023 for delivery by the end of August;
- Design Code – a broad document covering all aspects of design within a Cotswold context including architectural, urban, landscape, ecological and sustainable design. This project is expected to be commissioned in Spring 2023;

- 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.

These framework targets were approved by Cabinet in March 2023 and will now be used to direct the next stage of work focusing on identifying the optimum implementation of measures/interventions to deliver these targets. This is likely to include 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 – including the new Local Transport Plan, expected next year - 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 procurement process for Leisure and Culture Management Contractors is now complete and contracts have been signed with Freedom Leisure

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. All National Governing Bodies of the relevant sports have signed off the report, just awaiting feedback from Sport England, A steering group is due to meet at the end of March 2023.

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. Cotswold Farm Park has been completed, the three other venues will not now be completed until the 2023/24 financial year.

In quarter 4, the last of the Autumn round projects, Fairford Skatepark, reached its funding target, having raised almost £100k. This is the biggest project on the platform so far. On 1 March, the Council launched the Spring funding round, through an online workshop hosted by Spacehive, accompanied by a press release and ongoing awareness raising through the Council's social media feeds.

The Council's 'Connected Community and Food programme' (£75K) has supported seven applications so far to support local communities to set up community activities and food projects such as community pantries or fridges, community feasts and cooking courses. Successful projects include a new Community pantry in Cirencester, a series of 'Getting Connected Digital Technology Course for Older People' in Bourton on the Water and Family Engineering events.

[\(https://www.cotswold.gov.uk/communities-and-leisure/community-grants-and-funding/cotswold-connected-community-and-food-programme/\)](https://www.cotswold.gov.uk/communities-and-leisure/community-grants-and-funding/cotswold-connected-community-and-food-programme/).

As part of the 'Active Cotswold' programme, the Council has launched the 'Community Fit Kit'. The Community Fit Kit is a basic start-up exercise kit and includes yoga mats, kettlebells and resistance bands and a 'how to' demonstration card along with a chair workout plan for those less mobile. There is also information available about healthy eating and nutrition for those who are looking to improve their lifestyle as a whole. The sports equipment was sourced from local sports shop, D&J Sports, in Cirencester at a discounted cost for the Council. Basic first aid information is also provided with the kit. It is primarily aimed at beginners, people going through rehabilitation or people who are returning to exercise after being less active and are looking to move more. However, the equipment will be available to all customers who have access to the community room. The Community Fit Kit is currently located in one Bromford community room but the Council has a number of Fit Kits available for distribution.

The Council, on behalf of the Cotswold Community Safety Partnership (CSP) has secured £50k from the Home Office's Safer Streets Fund administered by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, which includes interventions aimed at tackling neighbourhood crime, anti-social behaviour and Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG), improving the safety of public spaces for all. This was secured by members from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gloucestershire, totalling over two million pounds for the county. In March, the Council launched and completed a public

consultation where we encouraged communities to help us identify areas in the district that feel unpleasant, unsafe and may attract anti-social behaviour. These could be alleyways, under paths, parks and others. We had a good number of responses and received over 30 proposals. The Cotswold CSP will shortlist the proposals and engage with the shortlisted areas to make a final decision on the areas that will benefit from the funding to transform them into more pleasant, looked after and safe spaces. The final decision is expected by the end of May 2023.

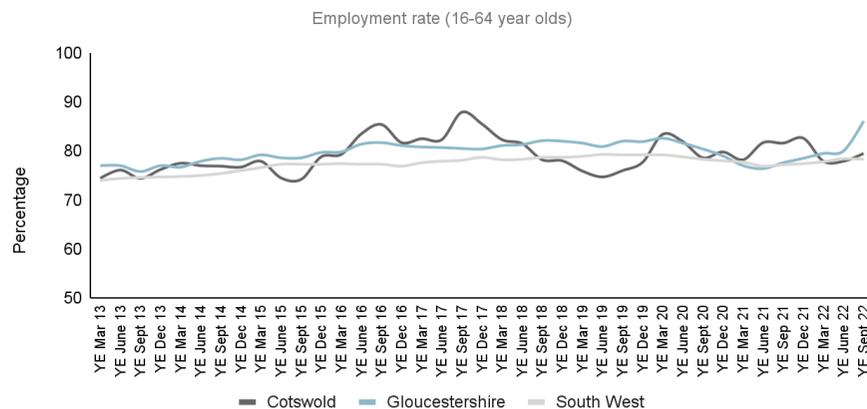
The Council has started to refurbish the alleyway between Argos and Salvation Army in Cirencester, connecting Waterloo and Dyer Street. We are working in partnership with HM Prison and Probation Service and the Community Payback Team that has almost finished the first part of the project by cleaning and painting the alley walls. The walls will also receive an anti-graffiti coating. The second phase of the project will see new lighting as well as floor art installed and two large plant pots at the back of the Salvation Army building, with the kind help of the South Cerney 'Men in Sheds' and 'Phoenix Gardeners'. We are also working with police to look at possible CCTV installation. We are aiming to finish all works by the end of May 2023.



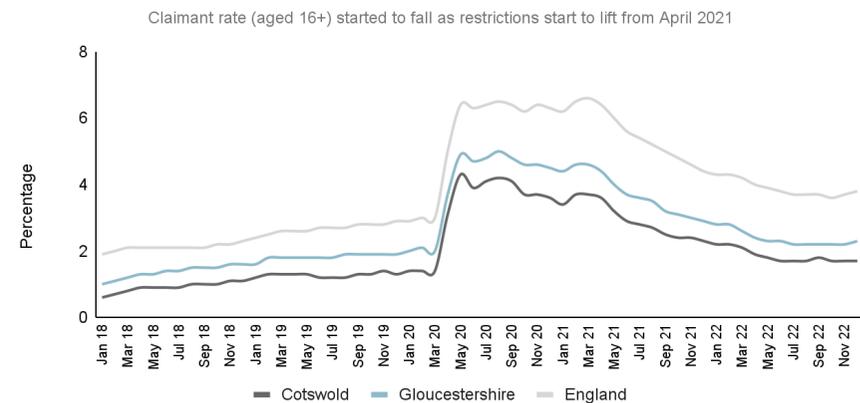
Enable a vibrant economy

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. Around 90% 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 during the pandemic, but has fallen back significantly to 1.7% and it has been at this level for the last few months, slightly above the pre-pandemic level. 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 may lead to unemployment rising 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 – 7,000 jobs or 18% of the total local job market in 2019. However the local visitor economy continues to face significant challenges as it seeks to recover

post-pandemic: staff retention and recruitment, coupled with significant increases in wage costs; steep rises in other major cost areas, particularly energy and food & drink products; while at the same time the cost of living crisis is having an impact on consumer spending power and driving demand for value for money. Another lingering side effect from the pandemic is customer reluctance to book much ahead: lead in times for accommodation providers have shortened significantly and this has complicated business planning and projections.

Overall though demand has remained fairly strong and there is considerable optimism in some areas: corporate hospitality and overseas visitors in particular. Overall overseas visitor numbers are not expected to return to pre-pandemic levels until the end of 2024 but the North American market, which is particularly important for the Cotswolds, is at the forefront of the revival.

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 are on site at Moreton-in-Marsh and were due to connect 700 premises by the end of 2022 and 1700 by September 2023. Fairford, Tetbury, Bourton-on-the-Water, South Cerney and Stow-on-the-Wold are due to be delivered in 2023. 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 superfast (>30mbps) has increased slightly and ultrafast (>100mbps)/full fibre has moved up quite quickly 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 from Chris Crookall-Fallon on how businesses can play their part in tackling climate change and reviewed the economic health dashboard for the District.

In 2022, 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 a feasibility study for the Old Station building in Cirencester. Officers have been working to get the 2022-23 projects underway. A further £764,292 was 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 was approved in early April. 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 the 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 latest count at the end of March 2023 showed the vacancy rate edging up to just above 5%, with a number of the remaining units either under offer or undergoing refurbishment. 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. In some of the smaller towns, a loss of retail space to residential is of more concern as it can affect the town's 'critical mass' and therefore its ability to attract visitors.

Much of Cotswolds Tourism's work this quarter 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.

As a response to findings in our Sustainable Tourism Survey we recently held our 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.

There have been two Cotswold innovation workshop meetings organised by Gloucestershire Community Rail Partnership held this quarter, bringing together Cotswolds Tourism, Cotswold DC sustainable transport officer 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.

Cotswolds Tourism team have been supporting Bourton Visitor information centre set up a trial coach booking service to help monitor demand for coach parking spaces and gather data while a potential long term solution is found for when the private coach parking ends in December.

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.

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 at some point during 2023. A public launch of the project took place on 20 January 2023 and attracted considerable media attention.
- the new owners of the former Mitsubishi site in Cirencester, now renamed Watermoor Point. The office element is now over 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 and is awaiting determination.

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.

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 by the Secretary of State 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. Kier have started on site with various preparatory works and are presenting to the next meeting of the Cotswold Economic Advisory Group in April.