



COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL PRIORITIES REPORT
April 2023 - June 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.
- The Holiday Activity Food programme continues to be a success and GCC have suggested (not confirmed yet) that we have hit the highest percentage of FSM's children, than any other district
- The Changing Places Toilet Facilities are complete at Cotswold Farm Park. Abbey Grounds, Cirencester is almost complete. Birdland and Cotswold Country Park and Beach are in the planning and procurement stages and will be delivered early in 2024.
- The Council and Bromford Housing have entered into a Collaboration Agreement to deliver the Down Ampney housing development. There have been delays due to drainage concerns however now progressing with Planning application due to be submitted in September
- 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 have started on site with various preparatory works and are presenting to the next meeting of the Cotswold Economic Advisory Group in September.
- Welcome letter & newsletter emailed to new and returning Town & Parish councillors in June 2023. Virtual social media training booked for August with next face to face forums in September.
- Tender process for Cirencester Access and Movement Study closed 24th April.
- Shortlisting of Safer Streets Cotswolds proposals has been completed. The next stage will be to visit the shortlisted areas. After the visits and more local engagement, we will decide which areas will receive the improvements to make them safer.
- A new project plan for street signs, setting out number, location, cost and timescales is being prepared for the 2023/24 roll out.

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 'Clean and Green' 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. During Q1, there were 25 requests for litter picks from communities with litter picks taking place across the district with over 136 people involved. Quarter One saw the start of the anti-dog fouling campaign including distributing dog waste bag dispensers to parishes. Work has been continuing to prevent anti-social behaviour at the Water Park building relationships with the manager of Cotswold Beach and the police.

Phase Two elements of the Water Park Strategy include projects to make it easier for people to walk and cycle around the area, which disperses visitors more widely and enables people to be more physically active.

Funded projects include a new foot/cycle path Neigh Bridge that is largely complete but outstanding issues are still being pursued with GCC in liaison with the Cotswold Lakes Trust. Work is also underway to deliver 46 new cycle standings in Fairford, Lechlade and South Cerney. Contractor is working closely with local organisations and with Parish and Town Council representatives to agree suitable locations.

A new section of bridleway under Wildmoor Lane has been commissioned and will be delivered by GCC Rights of Way team following agreement from landowner to dedicate required land take.

The on-going objective to deliver a crossing on the Spine Road is still seen as a critical project and efforts are focused on maintaining the momentum gained on key steps already achieved. Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) have made a request for Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding which is currently being evaluated for compliance with CIL rules.

Work is also under way to agree a Memorandum of Understanding with Wiltshire Council regarding both Cotswold and Wiltshire Council's approach to local plan policy development which takes an holistic approach to the Water Park area.

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. Work is underway to install card readers at all of the charged public toilets. Two out of the 10 charged sites already have card readers with a future eight sites planned in the next few months.

The overarching aim of the improvement work in the Planning service is to provide a trusted, inclusive and transparent planning service. In that regard performance has improved markedly over the last year or so. Following the work already undertaken to the pre-application service, validation checklist, fee schedule, communication with applicants and the timeliness of the communication at key stages of the process the recent priority has been the reduction in backlogs in the enforcement function. This work is preparatory to implementing the new processes in that element of the service starting with improvements in the front end for registering enforcement issues and then a series of customer touch points and a customer journey to help keep customers informed. 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.

The further improvement works arising from the PAS report were agreed by Cabinet in June and will be added to the action plan with delivery scheduled to be completed late 2023/early 2024. The next main piece of work following completion of the PAS related elements will be improving the IT platform.

Respond to the climate crisis



The Context

Q1 2023/24 did not feature much development in national policy, but there were developments relating to national climate performance which are relevant to the Council's climate action ambitions.

Following on from the Committee of Climate Change's annual report in June, there are two items of particular relevance to the Council; a coherent public engagement strategy on climate action is long overdue and needed to empower and inform households and communities to make low-carbon choices and; planning policy needs radical reform to support Net Zero, including the overarching requirement that all planning decisions must be taken giving full regard to the imperative of Net Zero.

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's physical and carbon footprint. The business case and Council investment decision for solar PV and battery storage at Trinity Road and one other tenanted site is being brought to Cabinet and Council in July. If successful other viable business cases should come forward for other Council-owned premises. The recruitment of a sustainable transport specialist is underway, whose duties will focus on policy development for the Local Plan partial update, but who will also complete the 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), a partnership between Cotswold, Forest of Dean and West Oxfordshire District Councils, Publica and Ubico, has reducing carbon emissions as one of six main priority areas for shared innovation projects. The leisure and cultural services provider procurement which completed in Q4 2022 will see the new service provider taking over in Q2, and Council staff are working to ensure that low carbon energy systems (solar, heat pumps) installed under the Public Sector Decarbonisation Programme in March 2022 are ready to be taken over by the incoming service provider to ensure their optimal performance.

‘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. Consultants have been selected to deliver an updated evidence base and policies for renewable energy in the district, and procurement is being prepared for consultants to deliver an evidence base and policies for sustainable construction, a key plank of the updated LP. A district-wide carbon emissions ‘pathways’ study, which builds on similar work already undertaken for the Cotswold National Landscape, is due to report at the start of Q2. The study will establish how steeply emissions need to fall in each sector of the District’s economy in order to meet international and national net zero carbon commitments. In addition the updated Cotswold Design Code will be procured during Q2.

The electric vehicle charge point 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. It is now expected that the Rissington Road and Trinity Road car park charge points will be installed at the start of Q2, and funding secured from the DfT’s On-Street Residential Charging Scheme will enable 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 the national retrofit strategy, such as it is, remains the preserve of a non-statutory body (the Construction Leadership Council) and the national retrofit hub is in a very early stage of development.

The Stroud District Council-led county partnership developing retrofit support is now unlikely to result in a delivery vehicle, as had been originally intended. This changes the debate over how Cotswold District Council should proceed with retrofit support to residents.

The provision of support to residents for selecting and purchasing rooftop solar PV systems and related equipment is being taken to Cabinet and Council in July, and a communications and promotion campaign is in development.

‘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, and aiming to replicate the success of West Oxfordshire District Council’s ‘Green Light’ communications platform.

Provide socially rented homes



The Context

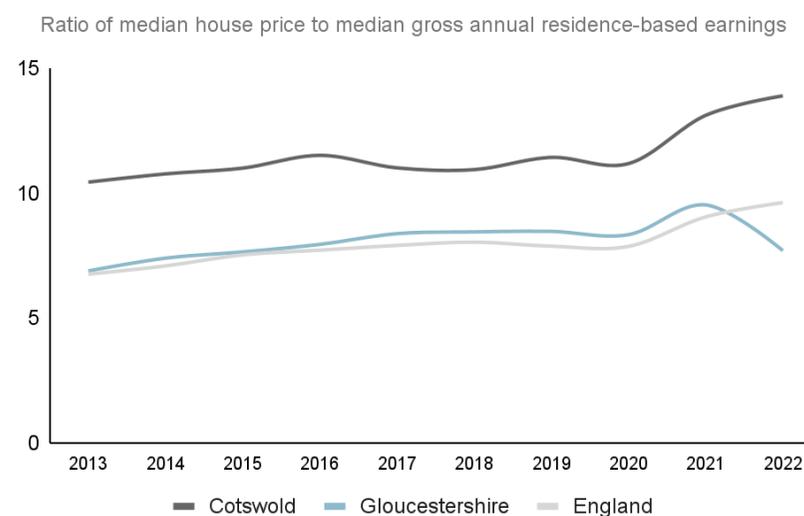
The high quality natural and built environment makes the District a desirable place to live. Cotswold District has a high number of properties owned outright (37.8%, vs 30.6% national average) reflecting the attractiveness of the District as a place to retire or to purchase a second home.

House prices and rents are relatively high. At the end of September 2022, the median property price in Cotswold District was £400,000 compared to £275,000 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. A revised valuation of the land based on its redesignation to community gardens has been undertaken to facilitate a lease agreement.

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. It has previously been highlighted that the planning application would 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 could not be determined until a Mitigation Strategy was in place. Swindon Borough Council have now completed the mitigation strategy so applications in the affected area can now be processed. There have been some delays with the submission of the Planning Application as concerns regarding drainage were raised during the public consultation. It has taken some time to work through these issues. However a solution has now been identified and it is hoped Bromford will be submitting the planning application shortly.

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 and some funding has now been secured although there is currently a funding gap. New Brewery Arts have developed a couple of alternative designs for the renovation and conversion of the building and Listed Building Consent has been applied for. A structural survey revealed a gable end wall was unstable and therefore structural scaffolding has been installed to render the wall safe until building works can take place. Procurement of the wall repair works is due to commence in July.

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 2022-23 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 Autumn 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 Very Light 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 strategy will be published for public consultation in Autumn 2023. With the aim of adopting the strategy in early 2024.

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 at the end of 2023 / early 2024. In August 2023 the council published a review of its local plan housing requirement which concludes that housing needs have not changed significantly and therefore it can continue to demonstrate over five years supply of housing land.

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 and are reported to the Portfolio 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 to appoint a new external Leisure and Culture Management Contractor is now complete and work has commenced on the mobilisation of the new contract with Freedom Leisure for the new Contract to commence 1 August 2023.

Another project in the Leisure Strategy is the development of a Playing Pitch Strategy which will include an assessment of the District's current and future needs for playing pitches for football, rugby, hockey, tennis and polo. Consultants, KKP are undertaking the project, and have now completed both the winter sport assessment and the summer sport assessment. Both assessments were informed by consultation (1-2-1, telephone and online) with town and parish councils, educational establishments and sports clubs, and have been reviewed by sporting governing bodies with KKP and council officers. The National Governing Bodies have reviewed both assessment reports and signed them off. KKP is pulling together the final action plan which will accompany the report for sign off by Sport England. The report will be the evidence base for current, unmet and future demand for playing pitches and will be used to support developer contribution requests and external funding

bids. Once signed off, a report will be prepared for Cabinet. 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. Final report was received June 2023 and is anticipated to go to Cabinet in September 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..

The Spring funding round closed to applications on 26 April. There were relatively few projects which came forward this round, perhaps due to lower public awareness because of the Pre-Election Period, but we are aware of a number of projects being developed that are waiting on permissions such as planning, before they are able to come forward. At the time of writing, there are two projects campaigning for support on Crowdfund Cotswold. At the end of quarter 1, work started on promoting the Autumn Round, with a deadline of 13 September – much of this activity focuses on a project creator workshop due on 17 July.

The council has brought together a small working group to look at improved food equality, a 'good food economy' and the development of a possible Cotswold Food Network to jointly work towards these two outcomes. As part of that work we have supported Feeding Gloucestershire with their Cotswold District launch in June. The event has explored the Food Network and is summarised in this video. The working group will regroup to take all the feedback into account and to look at next steps. Cotswold District Council has committed £40k towards the proposed Food Network. This funding is part of the Cotswold Connected Community and Food Programme the Council launched in December 2022 (<https://www.cotswold.gov.uk/ConnectedCommunityProgramme/>)

The Active Cotswold programme has seen a lot of activity during the last months to improve physical activity levels and opportunities locally. After the 'Fit Kit' launch in February, 5 kits have been installed across the district:

- Bromford Housing at Chesterton, Cirencester
- Tetbury Friendship Café
- Dementia Café Stow (also used by the Stow Wellness Café)
- Bromford Housing at Bourton on the Water (also used by Cotswold Friends Wellness Café)
- Bromford Housing Morton in Marsh (Cotswold Friends Wellness Café and The Churn job club are also going to use this kit).

We have set up an informal Wellbeing Walk in Chesterton with the Bromford Housing group, where we arranged the route and took the group (6 people) for the first walk and they plan to continue this on their own. We are joining the 'Ramblers Wellbeing Walk Scheme' (<https://www.ramblers.org.uk/go-walking/ramblers-wellbeing-walks.aspx>) in partnership with West Oxfordshire District Council. Our officer Kate will train volunteers to become walk leaders across the district with the first training date to take place in the summer at Sherbourne Estate. We have also created a workout card and demonstrated a resistance band workout at a number of existing groups across the districts like the Barton Senior Citizen Group, Working 4 Wellbeing Lechlade,

Parkinsons UK in Cirencester, Dementia café in Stow and Friendship Café in Tetbury. YOU CAN MOVE- is a new outdoor movement class to support people to become more active, which will start in September in Fairford.

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. After the public consultation in March where we encouraged communities to help us identify areas in the district that feel unpleasant, unsafe and may attract anti-social behaviour, we have shortlisted possible projects. These could be alleyways, under paths, parks and others. Over the summer months, the shortlisted areas will be visited and the local community will be engaged to develop a plan for the improvements. We aim to complete this process by October 2024 and for works to commence in November. The CSP is also in the process of bidding for further funding from the Safer Streets Round 5.

In partnership with World Jungle, we have delivered another successful Holiday Activity and Food programme (HAF). The infographic below shows the impact the programme has had. We are making great progress to increase our engagement with schools, in partnership with Bloodhound Education who are our Community Connectors for the programme. We have also reached out to more partner organisations that are supporting families, to promote the HAF project to their clients.

Cotswold District - Holiday Activity and Food Programme

Spring HAF 2023



Feedback from Children & Parents:

"I wish I could come 1000 times (Jaxi),"
 "Building a Den was amazing (Max, 7),"
 "I loved Max the dog he made me less anxious (Gracie 7),"
 "I loved learning about the trees and fuel - especially fire starting (Art 8)"

"Just getting to be with my friends, I was actually too old to attend but due to no shows I got to attend and although I am 13 I enjoyed doing the crafts"

"Thank you so much for these tickets, we went last week and it was really great. The centre was brilliant and we saw lots of beautiful birds."

"Thank you so much I really appreciate all you do. I've got 5 here with disabilities so can't do a lot but appreciate the vouchers and food boxes. The children love making the meals, we have great fun making those."

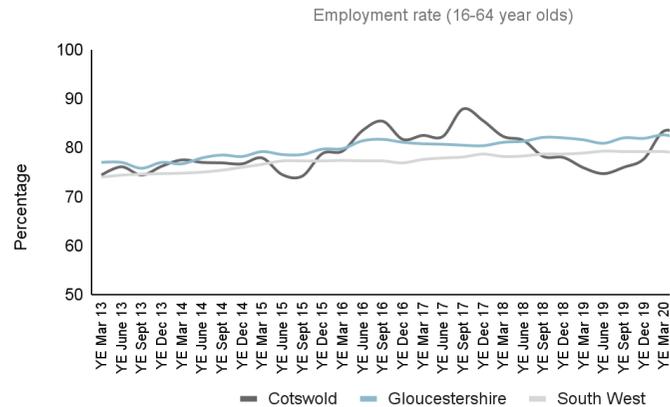


Enable a vibrant economy

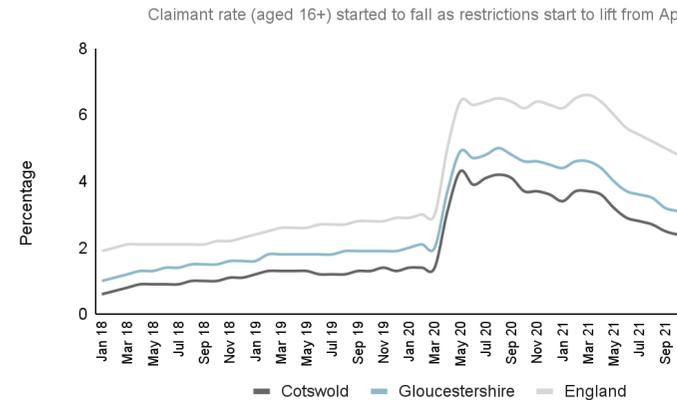


The Context

The District supports an economically active population of around 47,700 and has strengths in finance and business services, ICT including science and technology 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 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 has fallen back significantly to 1.6% - the lowest in the county, but still slightly above the pre-pandemic level. The national and global economies have faced the Russian invasion of Ukraine and sharply rising prices, particularly for energy and fuel, which is impacting on disposable income and living standards. Although dropped back, they are still significantly higher than prior to the invasion and food inflation continues to run at very high levels.



Source: ONS, Annual Population Survey



Source: ONS, Crown Copyright Reserved (Nomis)

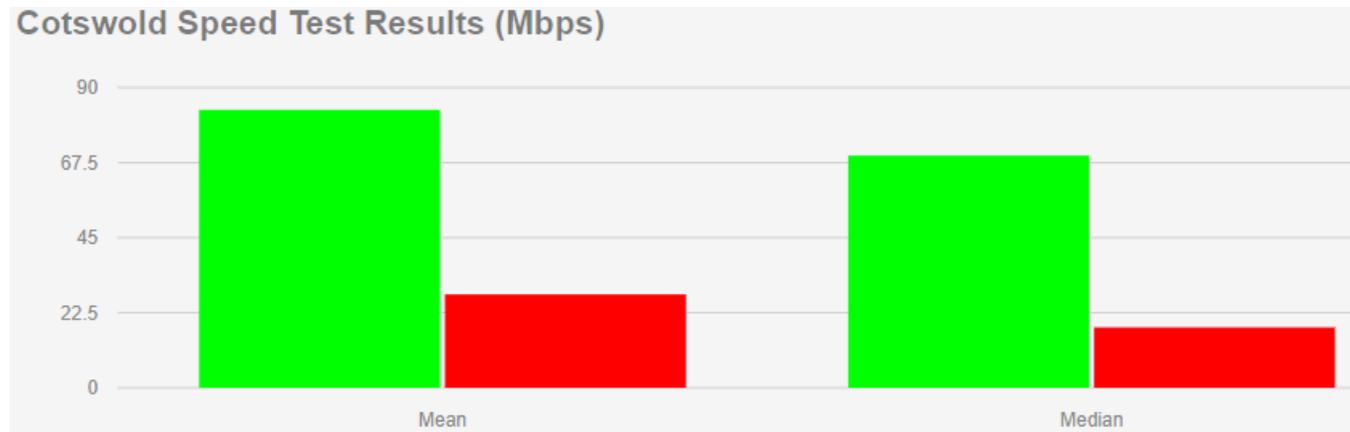
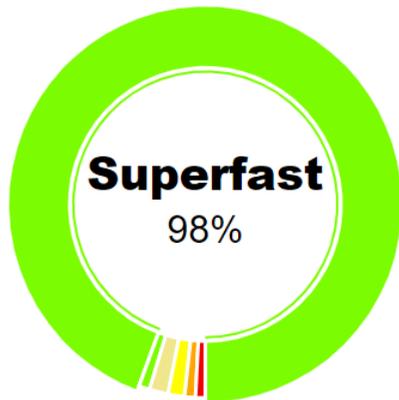
Businesses within the visitor economy, particularly within hospitality, continue to face a particularly challenging scenario: huge increases in wage costs – not only to recruit and retain staff amid continuing labour shortages, but also with the increase in the minimum wage; significant, continuing increases in costs,

particularly for food and drink purchases; and all against the backdrop of a major squeeze on customer spending. The rising cost of living has impacted consumer behaviour and spending with shorter staying trips, less day trips and an increased interest in cheaper or free options for things to do.

Despite the reappearance of many high spending overseas visitors, particularly from the United States, overseas visitor numbers are still expected to be 8% down on pre-pandemic levels this year. The Asian markets, particularly China, are proving slow to recover.

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.



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 Peter Carr of Gloucestershire County Council on employment and skills and Adam Vines of the Cirencester Chamber of Commerce on the Together Gloucestershire ethical procurement initiative.

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 largely been completed, including 'Clean and Green' initiatives and a feasibility study for the Old Station building in Cirencester. Cabinet in March agreed to allocate up to £135,000 to the Growth Hub in Cirencester to provide business support. One positive benefit of this funding is that the Growth Hub will be able to expand its outreach programme across the District, particularly in the north in areas like Moreton-in-Marsh and Chipping Campden. Decisions will be taken on the remaining 2023-24 projects to be funded shortly and an open call will be run for 2024-25 projects, which represents the majority of the funding.

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. A report is going to Cabinet in July setting out the proposed approach and the application process will be opened as soon as possible after that.

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

Cotswolds Tourism have been successful in attaining Visit England accreditation for a new Local Visitor Economy Partnership (LVEP), Cotswolds Plus. Led by Cotswolds Tourism the LVEP sees all the local destination organisations (Marketing Cheltenham, Visit Gloucester, Visit Gloucestershire, Visit DeanWye) and the Cotswolds National Landscape working together to support and improve the local visitor economy.

Cotswolds Plus will not be consumer facing but will work 'behind the scenes' to shape and deliver national strategy and activities, as well as to bring a coordinated, strategic approach on key issues such as sustainability, business support and research. LVEP status ensures increased support, training, and collaboration with Visit England and Visit Britain in core areas such as accessibility, business support and engagement with travel trade operators and event planners. Any future Visit England funding streams will also be channelled through the LVEPs.

One of Cotswolds Tourism's ongoing priorities is supporting visitor economy businesses to improve their online presence in general but in particular to encourage them to become more widely bookable online. We have run several workshops focussed on the new Visit England campaign with the National Lottery and Visit Britain shop which requires businesses to use the Tourism Exchange Great Britain (TXGB) system. These efforts were recognised at the Visit England Awards for Excellence where Cotswolds Tourism received an award for its efforts in driving online bookings through the TXGB platform.

We have submitted a small bid to the GWR community fund focussed on promoting sustainable travel around Moreton in Marsh. We will know by the end of August if this bid has been successful and, if so, will work closely with the town council and local businesses.

The tourism team continue to work with the Council, Bourton Parish and Bourton Business Network to seek solutions for Bourton coach parking, as well as keeping tour operators informed of developments.

There continues to be a steady flow of travel trade, press, media and filming requests with one recent media visit to Cirencester & the Cotswold Water Park focussed on accessibility.

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, the Business Manager for Localities 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 before the end of 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 90% let. The owners have also introduced an innovative and flexible co-warehousing solution, offering businesses a private, secure space within the warehouse, ranging from 1,000 to 10,000 square feet. Businesses also benefit from shared mechanical handling equipment and an on-site qualified forklift driver. Watermoor Point has been granted planning permission to install an additional 310 PV solar panels in addition to its existing 50kWh array, demonstrating its commitment to sustainability.
- 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 150 onsite, with the plans to continue to grow significantly. The Council and GFirst will continue to support ZeroAvia in its continued growth. Other sustainable aviation businesses, such as Vertical Aerospace and S&C Thermofluids, are already based at Cotswold Airport and we are working with the airport's owners and others to promote it as a hub for such innovative businesses.
- Bathurst Developments in relation to the first phase of employment land at The Steadings development. They have appointed a developer partner. A reserved matters planning application has been submitted for this phase and is awaiting resubmission to reflect the comments made by the Council's planning officers.

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 was also 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. The College has most recently been awarded £3.5 million, in June, to create a Student Wellbeing Hub.

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