

Gloucestershire Economic Strategy

To provide an update on the emerging Gloucestershire Economic Strategy so members of the Environment and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committees can be informed [“scrutinise”].

Gloucestershire needs a new county-wide economic strategy to address the existing gap. It will provide a strategic overview of the county’s economy and develop a set of county-wide priorities and delivery actions.

The aim is to have the strategy substantially completed by December 2023 and seek formal adoption in early 2024.

There is a governance structure, and engagement has been taking place.

Figure 1 – High-level summary of feedback received through the Stage 2 public engagement process on the emerging Economic Strategy



At the time of writing this report it is proposed that the strategy is focussed on four key propositions intended to support the long-term vision for the county which focusses on creating improved employment opportunities within the context of achieving the county's climate change commitments. These include:

1. Sustainable Growth which supports a strategic approach to planning and delivery of new housing and employment sites to ensure that new growth proposals are sufficient enough in scale to support carbon net-zero targets while ensuring that all supporting infrastructure is financially viable, so it is delivered in the right place and at the right time.
2. Inward Investment which builds on supporting Gloucestershire's reputation as a welcoming and supportive environment for businesses from the UK and abroad to invest, fostering innovation, creating jobs and promoting prosperity across the county.
3. Skills and Employment which seeks to ensure that every resident has the opportunity to grow their skills and make the most of job opportunities in a diverse and flourishing economy.
4. Business Support which provides an offer to enable businesses of all sizes and types to innovate, create jobs, and positively contribute to the transition to a low carbon economy.

I asked about the farming aspect and noted that the majority of the land area of Gloucestershire is rural. Agriculture is the UK's largest 'manufacturing' sector, larger than automotive and aerospace combined. Gloucestershire Agrifood supply chain employs over 50,000 people, 14.9% of the workforce, and generated a GVA of £1.39 billion in 2017, or c.9% of the local economy, both higher shares of the economy than seen nationally. Further, transformations in farming lead to net zero farm systems, more sustainability, biodiversity and ecology gains, and better health outcomes. The project leader agreed that this should be a priority but that expertise was lacking. Others agreed with this requirement.

Public Transport Network Review

Discussion: allocation of BSIP+ funding for the provision of improved bus services throughout Gloucestershire during 2023/4 and 2024/5; and to authorise Officers to procure these service improvements in line with this report.

The Department for Transport (DfT) has provided a grant of £2,209,623 in 2023/24 with a further £2,209,623 to come in 2024/25, with 50% of year 1 and 100% of year 2 funding subject to the Enhanced Partnership being in place. The terms for this grant require the funding to be spent within 12 months of receipt, with all funding to be spent by April 2025, and any underspend to be returned to the DfT.

Part of this grant will be used to avoid a potential overspend, due to inflationary pressure and re-procurement costs, in the base public transport budget (forecast at £344k in 23/24, and £207k in 24/25), thus securing public transport services which might otherwise be lost through a network review process.

The remaining £1,865m of year 1 BSIP+ funding will be used to procure the services proposed in Appendix 1. The budget is forecast to be sufficient to cover these recommendations.

Without this intervention from the DfT, it was likely that an exercise to scale back the public transport network would have been needed, as inflationary pressures would have meant service reductions to maintain a balanced budget. However, this is no longer necessary.

Amongst various detailed matters it is noted that there are areas with the lowest level of conventional timetabled bus services which makes them suitable for expansion of the Robin demand-responsive transport service. This means we will have demand-responsive transport services in 100% of our rural districts. This will target areas around south Cotswolds (Cirencester et al).