



COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

COUNCIL PRIORITIES REPORT
October 2023 - December 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.
- Crowdfund Cotswold continues to attract wide interest from across the District, with four projects selected during the sixth round. Among these, 'Moreton Cinemarsh' successfully reached its funding target shortly before Christmas. Projects in Bourton on the Water and Ampney Crucis have garnered over 90% of their funds, and another project in Kemble has achieved significant support. The Council has awarded a total of £24,000 towards these projects, which have a collective value of over £215,000.
- The Holiday Activity Food programme continues to be a success, with 703 children booking a total of 782 activities during the holiday season.
- The Changing Places Toilet Facilities are complete at Cotswold Farm Park, Abbey Grounds, Cirencester and Birdland, Bourton-on-the-Water. The design for Cotswold Country Park & Beach has now been approved and will be delivered early in 2024.
- The Digitalization of Planning Enforcement focuses on developing an ICT-enabled proactive approach to the service. New online forms for reporting suspected breaches of planning control have completed user testing and are scheduled for launch in February. These forms aim to improve case triage, expedite responses to high-priority reports, and enhance the overall customer experience by clearly outlining service standards and communication timelines.
- The Safer Streets Round 5 Funding of £50,000 has been allocated to Cirencester and Moreton in Marsh, with the majority of the funding to be administered and actions taken forward by the local Council.
- Rollout of phase two in the Cotswold Water Park Strategy for cycle stand installations, with 27 out of the 46 stands now deployed across water park locations within Fairford, Lechlade, and South Cerney.
- Installation of Solar PV on the roof at Trinity Road Council offices is on track, the installation is set to commence in the coming months.

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 the 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 while remaining true to the Council's commitments on climate change and a green economy.

Actions we are taking

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 at Neigh Bridge that is largely complete, with outstanding issues still being pursued with Gloucestershire County Council (GCC) in liaison with the Cotswold Lakes Trust. Work is ongoing to deliver 52 new cycle stands, with 27 already installed in locations in Lechlade, Fairford and South Cerney. Plans are in place for additional stands in those locations and more are being investigated.

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

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. After prior discussions between GCC and Cotswold District Council Officers to determine the next steps, including funding allocation options from the Contain Outbreak Management Fund (COMF) and Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) for supporting both the design and delivery phases, the next meeting is slated for February 2024.

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 a holistic approach to the Water Park area.

While the provision of toilets is not a statutory function, the Council provides 15 public conveniences across the District that support shoppers and tourism and prevent negative environmental health impacts from a 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 complete to install card readers at all of the charged public toilets.

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 and the Government has confirmed that it no longer is minded to consider designating the Council for poor performance. Following the work already undertaken on the pre-application service, validation checklist, fee schedule, communication with applicants and timeliness of communication at key stages of the process, the recent priority has been the reduction in backlogs in the enforcement function and designing and testing the new enforcement form. 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 underway and is expected to deliver a reduction in repeat customer contact and chasing, as well as a reduction in the number of non-breach cases from improved online reporting facilities and back office triage. Additionally, new online forms for reporting suspected breaches of planning control have undergone user testing and are set for launch in February. These forms are designed to enhance case triage, expedite responses to high-priority reports, and improve the overall customer experience by clearly outlining service standards and communication timelines.

The further improvement works arising from the PAS report were agreed upon by Cabinet in June and have been added to the action plan, with delivery largely on track. In light of the Council's decision to repatriate the DM function, some elements of the improvement programme have however, had to be abandoned or severely curtailed as they relied upon shared services and contracts. The next main piece of work that will go live is the new process associated with the impending requirements to deliver BNG alongside the determination of Planning Applications.

Respond to the climate crisis



The Context

In terms of national policy, the government's announcement to relax decarbonisation targets extended the deadline for ending the sale of new fossil-fueled cars from 2030 to 2035, and the date for concluding the installation of gas-fired boilers in new homes was pushed back from 2025 to 2035. Some observers note that these changes may not significantly alter the actions of housebuilders or car manufacturers, as they are already largely committed to these transitions. However, others express concern that these adjustments could impact the UK's timely achievement of its net-zero goals and its international standing as a climate leader.

Professor Piers Forster, Chair of the Climate Change Committee, emphasised, 'We remain concerned about the likelihood of achieving the UK's future targets, especially the substantial policy gap to the UK's 2030 goal. Around a fifth of the required emissions reductions to 2030 are covered by plans that we assess as insufficient. Recent policy announcements were not accompanied by estimates of their effect on future emissions, nor evidence to back the Government's assurance that the UK's targets will still be met. We urge the Government to adopt greater transparency in updating its analysis at the time of major announcements.'

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

The business case and Council investment decision for solar PV and battery storage at the Council's offices at Trinity Road, along with another tenanted site, were approved by Cabinet and Council in July. System design discussions are currently in progress with the appointed installer, and installation is anticipated to commence early in the New Year, pending planning approval. Additionally, the installation of electric vehicle charge points in the Trinity Road car park, accessible to the public, commenced in December 2023.

'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 the environment, the climate emergency, and digital services. While the bulk of waste collection vehicle replacements are scheduled for some years, attention is now turning to the potential for electrification of part of the waste collection fleet. The new leisure services operator is in place, and a new application for government

funds has been made, which, if successful, will enable the installation of further solar PV power on the Cirencester leisure centre, further reducing the cost of electricity for the site.

‘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 appointed to deliver an updated evidence base and policies for renewable energy in the district, and an evidence base and policies for sustainable construction, both key planks of the updated LP. Further installations of electric vehicle charge points in Council-owned car parks continue to run behind schedule. The charging points at Rissington Road and Trinity Road car parks commenced in December 2023.

‘District-wide enabling’ actions

Cotswold Home Solar was launched at the start of September and had strong initial interest. The communications team is working on ways to refresh and sustain a marketing campaign to make sure as many residents as possible can make use of the scheme. 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 increase in the Boiler Upgrade Scheme grant to £7.5k announced in September should encourage more households to fit low carbon heat pumps.

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

Provide socially rented homes

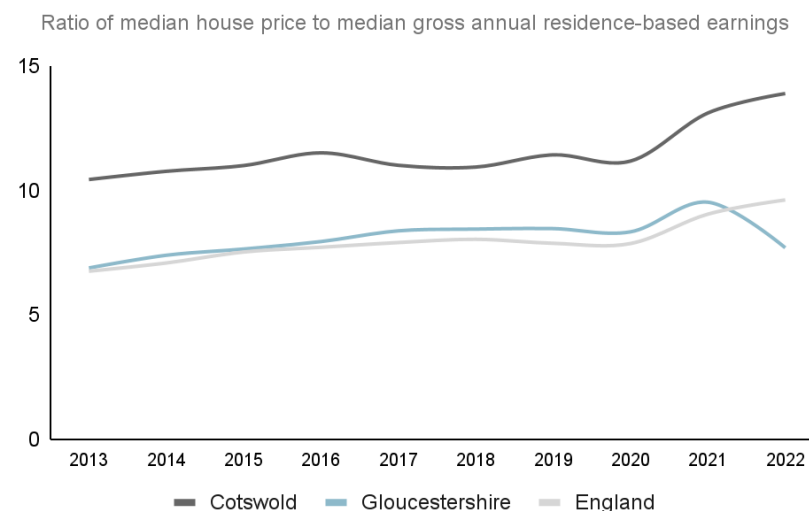


The Context

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. the 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 provide homes for those on lower incomes or in receipt of full Housing Benefits.

The relatively high house prices and increasingly high rents, coupled with the lower than average earnings from local jobs, mean 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 set out the delivery strategy for the Council to accelerate the 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 the 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. This is now being finalised.

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. Initial drainage designs were rejected by Bromford Housing Association as the drainage would not have been adoptable. Consequently, revised designs have been produced and agreed by the project team and lead Members and a Planning application is due to be submitted in early February.

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. The Council have been working with New Brewery Arts, who have prepared designs and costings to extend and renovate both buildings to provide Art studios, related offices and space that could be used for multiple community and small business purposes. Unfortunately, in December, New Brewery Arts concluded that the capital costs involved and the relatively limited grant funding that could be secured meant neither building is viable for renovation and conversion. Cabinet will therefore consider a report in February on options for retaining or disposing of both buildings. A structural survey revealed a gable end wall of the Old Station 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 was completed in July and a decision to proceed with works will be included in the February report.

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 the net carbon emissions of the development to zero. Developers started on site in Q2 2022-23; however, delays have been encountered due to the insolvency of the main contractor, leading to the site remaining inaccessible for several months before a replacement contractor could be legally engaged. The legal issues have since

been resolved, a new contractor has been engaged, and construction has recommenced. Although completions were initially expected during Q3, further delays have occurred, pushing them back to Q4 or early next financial year.

In March 2021, the Council allocated commuted sum 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. This scheme is slightly ahead of schedule currently, with the handover of all 15 homes due in April 2024. The scheme is on track in terms of the environmental sustainability standards and the developer is targeting an EPC A rating, which, if achieved, would be in excess of the agreed standard. Funding for the start on site stage has been paid to Cottsway by CDC in line with the grant agreement.

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.
- **Design Code** – a broad document covering all aspects of design within a Cotswold context including architectural, urban, landscape, ecological and sustainable design. Design consultants, LDA, were commissioned in October 2023 with the project due to complete in July 2024.
- **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 reported to the Portfolio Board.

The leisure management options appraisal, including the Corinium Museum, was completed to determine the most suitable delivery model, contract scope and contract terms for the Council's leisure facilities for when the previous contract expired on 31 July 2023. The procurement process to appoint a new external Leisure and Culture Management Contractor is complete and the new contract with Freedom Leisure commenced 1 August 2023. A report on the progress of Active Cotswold and contract mobilisation is due to be presented to Overview and Scrutiny on 30th January 2024.

Another project in the Leisure Strategy was the development of a Playing Pitch Strategy, which included an assessment of the District's current and future needs for playing pitches for football, rugby, hockey, tennis and polo. The strategy report was signed off by the National Governing Bodies of Sport and Sport England. The report is 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. The final report was received June 2023 and was adopted by Cabinet November 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. The Changing Places Toilet Facilities are complete at Cotswold Farm Park and Abbey Grounds, Cirencester and Birdland. Cotswold Country Park and Beach is in the planning and procurement stages and will be delivered early in 2024.

The sixth round of Crowdfund Cotswold closed on 13th September. Four projects were taken forward for decision in November. Of these, one, 'Moreton Cinemarsh', hit its funding target shortly before Christmas. Projects in Bourton on the Water and Ampney Crucis have raised over 90% of their funds, with a further project in Kemble attracting a high number of supporters but with some distance to travel to its funding target. The Council has awarded a total of £24,000 towards these projects, which have a collective value of over £215,000. The spring round will launch in February, but there's already some interest.

The Council, as part of the Cotswold Food Network, hosted two free Christmas events in Cirencester and Moreton in Marsh for all residents in the District to attend. This was an opportunity for people to come together and find out what support is available to them and information on help with the Cost of Living etc. from the CDC Community Wellbeing Team and various partner organisations, including the Foodbank and local charities. The events featured the provision of fresh food, hot beverages, baked goods, children's activities, and a free raffle. All items were sourced and donated by local businesses engaged by the team, with some businesses contributing staff for assistance. Attendees enjoyed the events with the leftover food donated to the local Food Pantry.

In collaboration with Feeding Gloucestershire, as part of the broader Food Network, the Council hosted a network meeting to discuss Community Growing Projects, attracting active participation. A spreadsheet capturing outcomes and details from the meeting was developed, with a second meeting undertaken on January 9th to discuss next steps and project evolution.

Following meetings initiated by the CDC Community Wellbeing team to explore Community Growing options, a free Grow Your Own (GYO) education course is planned at Roots & Seeds, Cirencester, starting in January for 10 weeks. The course, a joint effort with Cirencester College and Down to Earth Stroud, aims to empower participants with skills to grow their own food, addressing issues such as the Cost of Living, reducing isolation, and improving mental health. Roots & Seeds will provide a space for a Community Growing Scheme, run by volunteers, with plans to expand such community courses in the District.

During the Christmas Holidays, the Council, in collaboration with World Jungle, successfully implemented the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme for children on Free School Meals in the Cotswold district. Exceeding our target of 50%, 65% of children on Free School Meals participated in activities, with 703 children booking a total of 782 activities during the holiday season. While some activities were open to all school children in the district, 83% of the available slots were filled by children on Free School Meals. The HAF program prioritises inclusivity, with 51% of attending children having an EHCP in place and 28% belonging to the BAME community. Additionally, our providers reserved 65 places for children with special educational needs, offering extra support and a system to familiarise children with the venue and staff beforehand, contributing to a more comfortable and less anxious experience during the sessions.

Applications for support for individuals aged over 55 in Tetbury and the surrounding villages persist, facilitated by the Steepleton Section 106 Care contribution funding. Recent applications have been received from entities such as Tetbury Goods Shed, Tetbury Men in Sheds and the Friendship Café, among others. Funding is released upon the sale of each 25% of homes within the Steepleton development, and the next instalment is expected imminently.

Following a Community and Statutory Services meeting in Chipping Campden last year, we identified two key areas requiring improvement and support within the Chipping Campden area. Firstly, addressing the needs of young people concerning drug and alcohol use, coupled with a deficiency in youth provision. Secondly, enhancing mental health support across all age groups. Given the challenges faced by statutory services in providing these services due to the rural nature of the district and funding constraints, the CDC is collaborating with local Police and Drug and Alcohol Services. Together, we are actively engaging with the community by walking the streets in the area to establish better connections and gain a deeper understanding of local issues. Additionally, efforts are underway to explore funding options for a counsellor specialising in trauma-based therapy, a service currently lacking in the Cotswold district, particularly in our more rural towns and villages.

Enable a vibrant economy

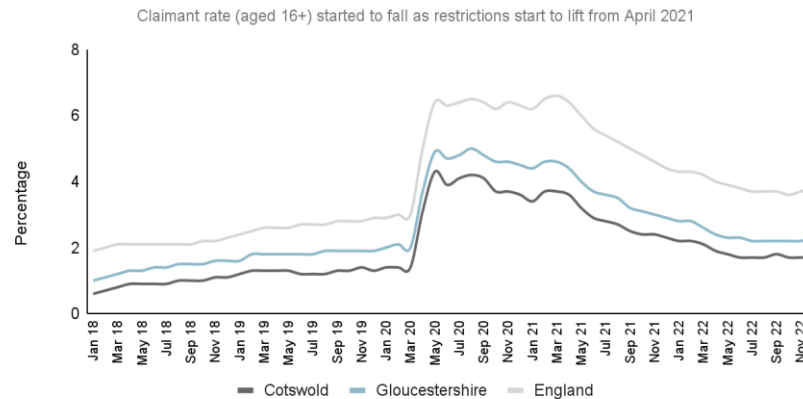


The Context

The District supports an economically active population of around 47,100 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. It has fallen back significantly to 1.7% - the lowest in the county, but still slightly above the pre-pandemic level. The national and global economies have faced 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. Although energy and fuel costs, and the overall inflation rate, have dropped back, they are still significantly higher than prior to the invasion and food inflation continues to run at a high level.



Source: ONS, Annual Population Survey



Source: ONS, Crown Copyright Reserved (Nomis)

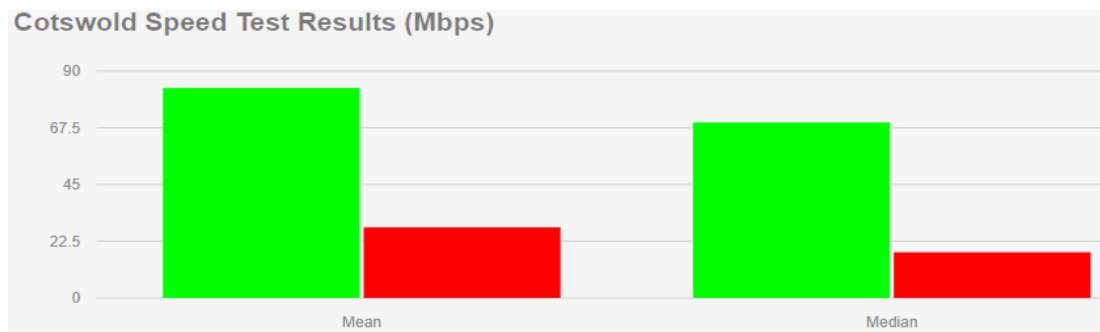
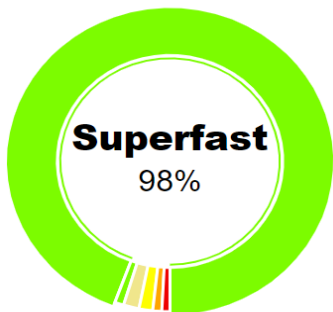
Businesses within the visitor economy, particularly within hospitality, continue to face a particularly challenging scenario: increases in wage costs – not only to recruit and retain staff amid continuing labour shortages, but also with the increase in the minimum wage; significant, continuing increases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

Provisional figures at a national level, show overseas visitor numbers for 2023 were up 30% on 2022 but still 7% down on 2019 levels. At a local level our annual economic impact study (South West Research Company Ltd – published December 2023) showed that visitor related spend in Cotswold District in 2022 totalled £342million with 576,000 staying visitor trips and 5.5million day visits. Estimated FTE employment was 4,417 - 13% of all employment.

The number of job postings remains high, reflecting continuing challenges 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. 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 has also introduced 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. This reflects the ongoing work by the infrastructure providers and the fact that commercial activity is concentrated on providing a full fibre service to the ‘easier to reach’ areas whereas the last 2% who do not yet have superfast broadband fall firmly within the ‘difficult to reach’ category, which the County Council schemes are seeking to address.



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 Club, the Federation of Small Businesses and GFirst LEP. Most recently, the Group met with students from Cirencester College to understand their outlook on work and the challenges and opportunities they are facing.

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, new offices at The Growth Hub/Farm491 and a feasibility study for the Old Station building in Cirencester. Cabinet in March 2023 agreed to allocate up to £135,000 a year for 2023-24 and 2024-25 to the Growth Hub in Cirencester to provide business support. One positive benefit of this funding is that the Growth Hub has been able to expand its outreach programme across the District, particularly in the north in areas like Moreton-in-Marsh and Chipping Campden. The Business Navigator for the outreach programme will use the Council's Moreton Area Office as their base when working in the area. The first business event in the north of the District, a marketing workshop, will be held on 20th February. An application process has been run for the remaining 2023-24 and 2024-25 funding and a report is going to Cabinet in January seeking approval for the 2024-25 projects, including contributions to the former House of Fraser in Cirencester and a net zero housing exemplar scheme in Down Ampney.

A further £764,292 was allocated to the Council from the Rural England Prosperity Fund over the 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 2023. The approach has been to allocate funding for business grants, for active travel and for community projects, including assisting village halls with sustainability-related improvements. The Council has procured a delivery partner for the business grants (ALP Synergy Ltd) and the village hall grants (Gloucestershire Rural Community Council) jointly with the Forest of Dean District Council. The business grant applications have closed and have been considered by the Grants Panel. A number have been approved and others are awaiting further information before a final decision is made. Applications for the grants for village halls, active travel and community and heritage buildings have closed and are in the process of being considered.

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 September 2023 showed the vacancy rate at 5.7%, with a number of the remaining units either under offer or undergoing refurbishment. The longest-standing vacant building, the former House of Fraser on the Market Place, has now been let to the Grace Network although is not yet occupied. The smaller towns within the District generally have lower vacancy rates, although the vacancies in Tetbury and Moreton-in-Marsh have increased slightly. Neither 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 and we will continue to monitor closely. 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.

The provision for coach parking in Bourton on the Water has now ended. Unfortunately, no viable alternative solution had yet been found, although local stakeholders are continuing efforts to find a workable solution.

Cotswolds Plus, one of just 22 nationally accredited Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs) is now well established. Led by Cotswolds Tourism, the Cotswold Plus LVEP partners include Marketing Cheltenham, Visit Gloucester, Visit Gloucestershire, Visit DeanWye and the Cotswold National Landscape. The LVEP is working to provide a unified voice for the regional visitor economy, to ensure better co-ordination of regional activity and to help align local and regional priorities with national strategic goals.

The LVEP has eight agreed workstreams: sustainability (transport and active travel); sustainability (business practices and bio-diversity); accessibility and inclusion; skills and training; research and data; business support; travel trade; and business events. Each workstream has an associated action plan clearly outlining work areas where the LVEP will lead activity, areas where the LVEP will look to influence and areas where the LVEP will monitor relevant activities being undertaken by other organisations. A number of co-ordinated bids have been submitted to partner councils for UKSPF/REF funding to enable some of this activity to take place.

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, although this is likely to evolve as the project progresses. 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 in place for some time. It is anticipated that a planning application for the site will be submitted at some point in Spring 2024. A public launch of the project took place on 20 January 2023 and attracted considerable media attention. The council continues to liaise actively with the university on this project.

- The former Mitsubishi site in Cirencester, is now renamed Watermoor Point and is home to a number of businesses. 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 relocated from Cranfield to Cotswold Airport in 2021, 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 the council is 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 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 has now been completed and 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 2023, 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 presented to a recent meeting of the Cotswold Economic Advisory Group. National Highways is looking to restart the A417 Business Forum, which will give local businesses the opportunity to be engaged with the project.