



COTSWOLD
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Green Economic Growth Strategy

Consultation Draft October 2020 – Executive Summary



Executive Summary

The cabinet of Cotswold District Council is very clear: it wishes to lead on economic development, partnering our successful local businesses, and has a vision of a dynamic, vibrant and balanced economy in the Cotswolds, growing high value, highly-skilled, low environmental impact commerce in our District.

The Cotswolds, a wider area than just the Cotswold District, is well-known as a popular visitor destination and the visitor economy accounts for a significant proportion of the local economy - 7000 jobs or 18% of the total. However, the Cotswold District economy is about so much more than that. We have 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 to name a few.

The Council's role will be varied - at times we will be delivering projects or investing in them directly, in other situations we will be working with partners and on occasions our role will simply be to promote what others are doing. However, we are clear that we will be actors not audience. Having declared both a climate emergency and an ecological emergency, we will ensure these objectives run through everything we do.

Cotswold District is spread out geographically, covering an area of 450 square miles. Cirencester is by far the biggest settlement, with Moreton-in-Marsh seen as the centre for the north Cotswolds and other towns performing a linking function. The District has some key assets like the Cotswold Water Park, Cotswold Airport, Royal Agricultural University, RAF Fairford, the Fire Service College and the Campden BRI Food Innovation Centre. However, almost 90% of our businesses are microbusinesses with 9 or fewer employees - over 5500 of them. The District has a slightly older than average age profile and double the national average of people working from home. Median house prices are 13.5 times gross median earnings (ONS data) - the highest in the county - which can make it difficult for young people to get on the housing ladder and for some companies to recruit.

This Strategy has been written to align with the Gloucestershire Draft Local Industrial Strategy and the Council's own Corporate Strategy. It is also informed by the Cotswold District Local Plan, which was adopted in 2018 and is undergoing a review.

The District Council's efforts in recent months have been dominated by its response to the Coronavirus pandemic. £36.5 million of Government grant has been paid out to over 2000 businesses and 1200 have benefitted from business rate relief. The District Council worked to safely reopen its town centres and later to support the hospitality sector to reopen when lockdown restrictions were eased further. Cotswold Tourism supported businesses with free membership. Having moved through the pre-recovery and recovery phases, the District Council is now focused on transformation, set out in this strategy, to create resilience for future waves of uncertainty.

There are opportunities to grow the Agritech and Food & Drink sectors, building on the strengths the District has with the Royal Agricultural University and the Farm 491 Incubator in Cirencester and the Campden BRI Food Innovation Centre at Chipping Campden. The RAU's Triangle/University Gate site could be brought forward for this purpose.

Cyber is a leading growth sector for the County, with Cheltenham taking the lead but with the scale of the growth there are opportunities for other parts of the County including Cotswold District. There may be an opportunity for a cyber facility at the Fire Service College in Moreton and the wider digital sector can build on already existing roots, particularly in Cirencester.

The green revolution offers opportunities for the District including in delivering Zero and Low Carbon Homes, renewable energy, retrofitting energy efficiency measures to homes and sustainable transport.

Our Town Centres are changing and this evolution has been accelerated by the Coronavirus pandemic and lockdown. We will assist our towns to respond to this. We already have a project underway with tech company Maybe* to assist the resilience of businesses by improving their digital and social media presence. We will complete the Cirencester town centre masterplan, identifying opportunities for the Council to invest in regeneration. The masterplan will provide a template for other towns to use should they wish to do so.

The Visitor Economy also needs to evolve, to be more geographically spread out, to be an all-year-round destination, to convert day visits to overnight stays and to link better with local industry such as food & drink.

Improving infrastructure is vital too - both transport and digital. The A417 Missing Link is by far the biggest piece of transport infrastructure planned for the County in the coming years. Linking Gloucester to Cirencester, it has the potential to make the District an even more attractive place for business by removing the congestion that exists at certain times of the day. The investment of around £450 million also gives opportunities for local suppliers and contractors and for jobs and apprenticeships. It could also open up limited development opportunities along the route. There are a number of other smaller infrastructure projects identified in the District and the Council is commissioning a Sustainable Transport Strategy.

Significant progress has been made, with the help of the Fastershire project, to improve broadband connectivity in the District. Cotswold District now has 95.3% of homes with Superfast broadband and 40.1% with Ultrafast broadband, making it the best connected rural area in the country. Openreach have announced that Cirencester will be full fibre by 2025. 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 would wish to.

Mobile phone coverage too is largely good for most networks in most places, but there are 'not-spots' in some areas which we wish to see addressed and will engage with the mobile phone network operators to do so.

With unemployment looking set to rise significantly, and disproportionately amongst 16-24 year-olds, it is more vital than ever that we ensure the training and skills offer is easy to access and meets the needs of employers. We will work with partners to ensure the offer is joined up and coherent. The award of £4.48 million to Cirencester College for its new Applied Digital Skills Centre is particularly exciting.

The District Council will use its new Economic Development resource to ensure it is proactive in communicating with and supporting existing businesses and in attracting new businesses to the District, matching them up with available sites and premises.

Housing Growth too will play its part in the recovery, with sites like The Steadings starting to come forward, delivering much-needed housing for our younger families and new generation.

The District Council has also been clear that it wishes to see the local economy grow in a way that benefits people across the District. As a whole, the District is relatively prosperous but it also has some of its Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the bottom 10% of the Index of Multiple Index of Deprivation for the County. The Council will seek to address this by working with partners, particularly the voluntary sector, by including social value requirements in council contracts and working to close the 'digital divide' amongst our population.

We know we cannot achieve the objectives of this strategy on our own. We will need to work with key partners like Gloucestershire County Council, GFirst Local Enterprise Partnership, Town Councils, Chambers of Commerce, the voluntary sector and businesses large and small.

We will agree indicators to monitor the success of the strategy and the strength of the local economy. Some suggestions are set out at the end of this document and we will invite others as part of the consultation on the strategy.

Updates on progress against the strategy will be presented to the Council's Cabinet on a regular basis.