



Leader's Update – June 2014

Vision for 2020

CDC - working in partnership with Cheltenham Borough Council and the District Councils at Forest of Dean and West Oxfordshire will soon review a proposal which is probably the most radical approach to joint working in local government in the country today. The CDC Cabinet will meet on 5 June to consider a report titled '[A 2020 Vision for Joint Working](#)' which sets out how the four councils aim to transform the way our services run in order to deliver more efficiency savings while protecting public services. We would retain our independence, determining *our own policies, priorities and decisions which will be supported by a small number of expert advisors who commission and monitor services, either from the private and voluntary sectors or from local authority-owned service delivery companies. This new model would see a reduction in operating costs and an increase in efficiencies.*

The move is expected to save in excess of £55m over 10 years, and will protect valued frontline services administered by four independent authorities with their own elected councillors representing local people. By reducing the administration and running costs of the councils we can spend a bigger proportion of our budget on delivering the frontline services that our communities need and value, while keeping the democratic decision making of each local council intact.

I will keep you posted on progress. If the CDC Cabinet approves this proposal on 5 June, it must still be given the go-ahead at Cabinet level at the other councils involved and we won't know the final outcome until 24 June.

Cotswold, Forest of Dean and West Oxfordshire District Councils and Cheltenham Borough Council already share a number of 'back office' functions, including Finance, Accounting, Human Resources and Payroll and this council also shares the waste provider Ubico Ltd with Cheltenham so we already have achieved some significant success and efficiencies through joint working, so much so that the partnership was recently awarded a £500,000 Transformation Grant by central government in April to mark our achievement and help us



strengthen our shared working arrangement. This funding will assist work on the new proposed arrangements.

Five Year Land Supply

The Council's Forward Planning Team recently calculated that the housing land supply across the district is well over the government's five years (plus 20% buffer) requirement. This means that our Planning Committee is now in a better position to resist inappropriate and unwelcome proposals for residential development.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires all local authorities to have at least a five year supply of housing land and this has caused problems across the country, especially in rural locations where developers have often delayed building houses on sites that have been granted planning permission. As a result, many districts – including Cotswold – have experienced shortfalls in land supply, meaning that a significant proportion of applications for housing developments, which were turned down by Planning Committees, have been allowed on appeal. This situation has been made even more onerous in Cotswold District by the Secretary of State's decision to impose an additional buffer of 20% on the five year land supply requirement.

Armed with these new land supply figures, we have convinced the planning inspector to resume a planning inquiry which has been reviewing proposals to build almost 150 new homes in the Cotswolds AONB near Oddington Road, Stow-on-the-Wold, as they have a significant bearing on the case. We have no date yet for the resumption of the inquiry but we do know that the Secretary of State himself will be responsible for determining the outcome rather than the planning inspector. It is clear that this housing development would not be welcome in Stow and we owe it to residents to fight their corner on this issue.

Planning Minister visits CDC

The good news about our five year land supply figures coincided with the visit of Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Planning, Nick Boles MP, to the Council's Trinity Road headquarters in late April to discuss local development concerns with me, Deputy Leader Cllr Nick Parsons, local MP Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, and several CDC officers.

The visit was arranged so that Mr Boles could gain first-hand knowledge about the potentially adverse effects of government planning policy across the district, and hear how we are responding to the challenge. He welcomed the news about our revised land supply calculations, and was also impressed to hear how we have been working proactively with local communities to develop Neighbourhood Plans in line with the Localism Act and our appointment of a Community Planning Officer to represent our communities in Section 106 negotiations. Working with local people in this way should result in the bringing forward of potential development sites which are more in keeping with the aspirations of local residents, and will also support their negotiations to obtain the best possible concessions from developers. This is all part of the extensive work which is being carried out prior to the submission of the Cotswold Local Plan for government approval next year – expected to be



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one of the first comprehensive local plans to reach this stage since the NPPF was issued. We are striving to strike a balance between housing demand and the need to maintain a good quality of life for residents, and we welcome as much support as we can get from the higher levels of government to provide us with guidance and reassurance to help achieve that aim.

Homes for Local People

When developers apply to build new homes in the district we strive to obtain a commitment that up to 50% of the new stock will be affordable for people with a local connection.

Our Local Plan consultation paper recognises that this is a major local priority, and our continuing aim is to provide an adequate supply of quality affordable and open market housing, of appropriate types and tenures for local need.

In related activity, there is still money available for first-time buyers from the Local Lend a Hand scheme which we are operating in partnership with Lloyds Bank. This enables residents to purchase a home of their own with a deposit of only 5%. Anyone interested in this scheme should apply to their local branch of Lloyds Bank.

We also recently extended the restrictions on the sale of former Council houses located within the district's Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to increase the awareness of local people about the availability of these properties and to allow them an increased period of eight weeks to make a priority purchase before a home can be offered for sale on the wider open market.

New CDC Chairman

Cllr Clive Bennett is the new Chairman of the Council and his Vice-Chairman is Cllr Mark Annett. They were both elected at the annual Council meeting on Tuesday 13 May. I am sure that Clive and Mark will do a great job based on their past performance. Clive is stepping up after serving for two years as a very able Vice-Chairman, and Mark is vacating his post as a well-respected Chair of the Licensing Committee to become Clive's right hand man.

The outgoing Chairman, Sir Edward Horsfall, has been a great ambassador for the Council over the last two years, a period which coincided with several memorable occasions, including the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, and the two Olympic torch events in the district. He has been a tireless fund raiser for his nominated charities – Gloucestershire Young Carers and the local branch of the Stroke Association – and also chaired Council meetings very effectively.

In the Cabinet, Cllr Barry Gibbs has stepped down and is being replaced by Cllr Chris Hancock as Cabinet Member with responsibility for Enterprise and Partnerships. Additionally, Cllr Julian Beale takes over from Cllr Annett as Chairman of the Licensing Committee. Cllr Robin Hughes and Cllr Jim Parsons were re-elected as Chairs of the Planning and Audit & Scrutiny Committees respectively.



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Over the years Barry has covered a wide range of issues as a Cabinet member, including waste, land drainage, housing, communities, and customer services. Whatever the portfolio, he has worked extremely diligently and has achieved some great outcomes. Perhaps his most impressive achievement was the smooth transition of our leisure and museum services to Everyone Active, which benefited immensely from his engaging personality and his commendable eye for detail.

Parking

We have introduced more flexible Sunday charging at the Brewery car park in Cirencester. Instead of a flat rate of £1.50 for the day, motorists now have the option of paying 50p for a half hour stay and £1.30 for up to an hour.

There has been a lot of attention focused recently on the surplus income we generate from parking and I must reiterate that we use all of this money to provide essential public services including, but not limited to, the provision of public toilets, environmental protection, tackling environmental crimes such as graffiti, litter clearance and land drainage. This is in line with the Council's budget strategy which aims to continue the provision of tangible, frontline services to taxpayers, despite significant cutbacks in the funding we receive from government. In other words, unless other funding streams could be identified, at least some of these essential services would have to be cut or cancelled altogether if we didn't generate a surplus from parking.

Having said that, parking prices in the Cotswolds compare favourably with some parts of Gloucestershire, such as Cheltenham and Gloucester, and I must remind you that we have frozen parking charges across the district until at least 2016. In fact, we have even reduced some tariffs, including the introduction last year of an all-day £2 fee at the Beeches car park in Cirencester. I learned the other day that sales of pay and display tickets in the district increased by nearly 42,000 during 2013-14 compared with the previous year, and this will help us to continue funding frontline services to the benefit of all residents.

Flood Relief

A reminder that there is still an opportunity for flood-affected households and businesses to obtain a Repair and Renew grant worth up to £5,000 for the installation of property protection measures that will reduce or minimise the risk of future flooding. Applications can be made at any time up to 31 December 2014 for households and up to 18 June for businesses – details are available on the CDC website www.cotswold.gov.uk

Ubico aims for £5m savings

Ubico Ltd, the waste collection company set up by CDC and Cheltenham Borough Councils in 2012, is performing extremely well. The Managing Director recently commented that the company was aiming to save just over £500,000 for the two partner authorities in 2012-13 but actually managed to reduce costs in that year by almost £1.3 million. They are now



confident that they will also exceed expectations for 2013-14 and are on target to save £5 million over five years.

I am delighted that they are having such great success. Not only did they enable us to introduce kerbside recycling of all rigid plastics in this district for the very first time, they have also generated considerable savings which have helped us to reduce our share of Council Tax bills.

Praise for our benefit fraud team

Judge Jamie Tabor QC has praised CDC and the Department for Work and Pensions for their excellent work in bringing a benefit fraudster to justice, and has encouraged them to continue with their work. This followed the appearance of a Moreton-in-Marsh resident at Gloucester Crown Court for sentencing in late April, having previously pleaded guilty to offences between 2006 and 2011 amounting to a total of £46,000 in fraudulent claims. She was awarded a nine-month jail sentence suspended for two years with supervision for 12 months, and ordered to carry out 200 hours of unpaid work. We will continue to seek further repayments from the fraudster until the slate is wiped clean and we encourage anyone to come forward and speak in confidence to our experts at the Council (call 01285 623000) if you suspect anyone may be obtaining benefits illegally.

Apprentices

I was very pleased to meet some of our apprentices at CDC a couple of weeks ago. I am convinced that hiring apprentices is a good way of providing employment and training opportunities for young people to help them on the path to a long-term career.

Our young colleagues at CDC are gaining job skills and work experience and also taking the opportunity to gain qualifications in specialist skills – a viable alternative to the college or university route. The Council is also seeing the huge benefits that these young people are bringing to our organisation and we are very pleased that three of our former apprentices are now fully employed by us and our two current apprentices have reached the final stages of their training. We are now looking to recruit more.

Unemployment figures reach a milestone

Unemployment figures for Cotswold district have dipped to below pre-recession levels. The latest available figures (April 2014) show that there are over 300 fewer people unemployed compared with the same period in 2012, and over 550 fewer than in April 2010. Additionally, the current unemployment rate of 1% is slightly less than it was in February 2006, before the crash in the banking sector and the subsequent global recession.

Throughout the hard times, I have been impressed by the economic resilience shown by people across the district, as shown by the relatively low unemployment figures and the small number of empty shops compared with many other areas.



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When we measure the Council's performance, one of the key indicators we take into account is the unemployment rate, so it is very pleasing to see this moving in the right direction. Over the last two years we have reduced CDC's share of Council Tax bills by 8% and we've also pledged to freeze prices for services such as parking, leisure and green waste collections until at least 2016. More recently, we announced a total of £1.4 m rate relief for many local traders over the next two years. I trust that this has helped people cope during a very difficult financial period, and we will continue to drive down costs to help those in work.

Armed Forces Day – 23 June

A brief reminder that on 23 June there will be flag raising ceremonies at our Trinity Road headquarters in Cirencester (10 am) and at our Moreton Area Centre (12 noon) to show our support for the work of the Army, Navy and RAF. Each ceremony will be attended by local representatives of the armed forces, and senior officials from the Council and – as usual – they will also be open to anyone who would like to attend. There is added poignancy this year as we commemorate 100 years since the start of the First World War and it would be very pleasing to see a large number of people turning up for each ceremony on 23rd.

Ambulance Response Times

I continue to be dismayed at the poor ambulance response times in the Cotswolds and particularly in the rural areas. You may have read recently that the South West Ambulance Trust has agreed to provide two new ambulances which will be based at Stroud and Staverton -obviously any increase in the capacity of the service in the county is welcome but this does not really address the lack of resources in our district, and specifically the northern parts. The Council will therefore continue to lobby for extra resources and, to this end, I have arranged a meeting with both the Chairman and Chief Executive of the Ambulance Trust at the end of June. In the meantime, please register your support for my personal campaign for three more ambulances for the Cotswolds - www.3MoreNow.org.uk

EU Elections

Finally here is a link to the figures for [those who voted in the Cotswold District](#) in the recent European elections. I was, of course, pleased to see Mrs Julie Girling returned as one of the MEPs for the South West region - Julie is a former leader of CDC and an Honorary Alderman.

Cllr Lynden Stowe, Leader Cotswold District Council