



Leader's update

December 2014

Since I last wrote to you there has been significant progress on several key issues and a few new ones have also come to the fore.

Council Tax

At a recent Cabinet meeting we agreed to recommend a 3% council tax cut for the 2015/16 financial year and the continuation of a freeze on prices for car parking, leisure and museum fees, and green waste collections. These proposals are currently subject to public consultation ahead of the Council voting on the proposals at our budget setting meeting early next year. To comment please go to the relevant link on our website -

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/survey-taken/?sm=%2bgzzoQ3kwFJtuFAY4wqIE6UCVj9n1wSv3goyLml98zrBF4uh8oMGBZ1yAmDxU9iFUjLKuP5bVdxh8t8REh%2fITq%3d%3d>

Local Plan

There has been a lot of debate in the media recently about the emerging Local Plan for Cotswold District, especially the proposed housing land allocations. The Local Plan is the key policy document which will guide decisions on the use of land in our district up to 2031 and it must comply with the government's National Planning Policy Framework which sets out guidelines on delivering sustainable development. In other words, we must meet the government's sustainability criteria while also taking account of the aspirations of local communities – twin aims which are very difficult to reconcile. This situation is not unique to the Cotswolds as many authorities across the country are facing the very same dilemma.

So far we have worked with local communities to develop strategic priorities for the district up to 2031 which focus on several issues including: homes and jobs required; future retail, leisure and other commercial development; infrastructure for transport, telecommunications, waste management, water supply, and flood risk management.; provision of health, community and cultural facilities; and climate change mitigation, conservation and enhancement of our natural and historic environment.

I'm sure you will agree that this is a significant challenge which has involved the collation and analysis of a lot of complex data and other evidence which now forms the basis for the current stage of the Cotswold Local Plan. This data takes into account feedback from all previous public consultation exercises, including a call for comments on housing requirements and distribution in 2013 (which generated over 2,000 comments) and also independently-facilitated training events in 2014 for parish and town councils who then worked with local communities to take forward site allocations. Additionally, we have been provided with community views gathered by independent consultants who held a planning weekend in June 2014 to help prepare a Master Plan Framework for a proposed strategic development site at Chesterton.

Many local residents have already expressed concerns about the estimated housing requirement of 7,600 homes up to 2031 – including a 3,000 strong petition about the allocation of about 2,350 units for the strategic site proposed in the Chesterton area, as well as complaints about the sizeable projections for other Cotswold market towns and large villages earmarked for development. I am not convinced about the projections either and I

fully understand why people are not happy - but at the end of the day we are required to comply with government guidelines focused on delivering what they judge to be sufficient housing and other development in sustainable communities. In fact, I am in no doubt that failure to comply with the housing requirement would result in our Local Plan being rejected by the Secretary of State, risking the prospect of even more unwanted and unplanned development across the district.

This latest stage of the Local Plan will be available for comments between 16 January and 27 February 2015, and we look forward to hearing what you have to say. More information is available in the new edition of Cotswold News which is being delivered to all households before Christmas. We will also be arranging for a special leaflet regarding the Chesterton strategic site to be sent to all homes in the Cirencester area (as an enclosure in Cirencester Scene magazine) in early January. Our aim, as always, is to work with the local community and produce the best possible responses to the challenges we have to meet in producing a viable strategic blueprint which satisfies Whitehall.

For more details, see the latest copy of Cotswold News which should have been delivered to your home recently.

Affordable Housing

The Cotswolds is a very desirable area to live and we must guard against people being driven away from their home villages by the high cost of housing, especially the younger generation. At CDC we are committed to providing local homes for local people and our record is good in comparison with many other local authorities.

Lack of affordable housing is a key local priority, and our aim is to provide an adequate supply of quality affordable and open market housing, of appropriate types and tenures, for local need. We will continue to work with housing providers across the District to ensure that a sensible number of new homes are built for this purpose. Here are some of the things we have done recently to move things in the right direction.

We have launched a new discounted home ownership scheme in Moreton-in-Marsh. Brand new two and three bedroomed properties built by CALA Homes are now available exclusively to eligible applicants who live and work in Moreton-in-Marsh and the surrounding parishes of Batsford, Bourton on the Hill, Evenlode, Longborough, Sezincote and Todenham. The houses are at Moreton Park (Fire Service College site) and will cost £166,250 (two bedroom properties) and £180,250 (three bedrooms.) Eligible local purchasers, with a household income of less than £60,000, have a three-month 'exclusivity' window to purchase these homes at 70% of their value on the open market. The Council will retain a 30% stake in each discounted property and the owners will be able to purchase this from us should their financial circumstances improve. However, if they do not choose to do so and then move house, the owners will have to sell their property to a local purchaser for 70% of its open market value. If owners opt to purchase the remaining 30% stake in their homes, the Council will recycle that money into other affordable housing schemes in the district. It is a requirement that purchasers must occupy the houses as their principal home.

Meanwhile at Upper Rissington we are offering a 35% share in new three bedroomed homes at Victory Fields for £73,500 and at over at Fairford you can buy a 40% share in a similar home for less than £80,000 at the new Fairford Gate development. Additionally, in partnership with Cirencester Housing, we held a turf cutting ceremony in July to mark the start of construction work on a much needed new development of eleven homes for rent in Bibury. Local residents who wish to apply for a home in this new development should call Verney Jaynes on 01285 658377.

Aside from encouraging new affordable house building, we have joined forces with Lloyds Bank to help first-time buyers purchase a home with a deposit of 5%. The Council has set aside £1m for this Local Lend a hand scheme and there is still some money in the pot available from local branches of Lloyds. We also recently extended the restrictions on the sale of former Council houses located within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to increase the awareness of local people about the availability of these properties and to allow them more time to make a priority purchase before a home can be offered for sale on the wider open market. This has already led to more sales to local residents.

Social Housing

For the first time ever, residents in the Cotswolds can now see at a glance the number of people who have registered with the Council for social housing accommodation across the district. This information is now available on our website- www.cotswold.gov.uk/residents/housing/apply-for-rented-housing/ - and shows current demand for social housing in each parish according to need (in descending order of priority) and also whether those locations are first, second or third preferences for applicants. The publication of this data has been welcomed by the public as it provides clarity about the numbers of local people looking for social housing in every settlement across the district.

Boundary Review

You may have heard that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England has published its final recommendations for Cotswold District following extensive public consultation. They propose that residents should be represented by 34 Councillors in the future, ten fewer than the current arrangements, with 30 single-member wards and only two two-member wards (Lechlade/Fairford South & Kempford and Campden & Vale.) The proposed new arrangements must now be implemented by Parliament and should be in place before the next Council elections in May 2015. Full details of the recommendations, including several boundary changes, are on the Council's [website](#) . I would like to thank everyone who responded to the related public consultation carried out by the Boundary Commission – your views clearly influenced their final conclusions.

Vision for 2020

I announced a few months ago that the councils from Cotswold, Cheltenham, Forest of Dean and West Oxfordshire were considering proposals to build on the success of previous shared working arrangements and do more of the same in line with a report titled '[2020 Vision for Joint Working](#)'. The report sets out how the four councils aim to transform the way our services are run in order to deliver over £55 m worth of efficiency savings over 10 years - this should enable us to protect the vital services that we provide to the public. Since then the Cabinets at all four councils have agreed to proceed further on the basis that any new sharing arrangements would still enable us to retain our independence, and determine our *own policies, priorities and decisions*. Nothing has been agreed for certain at this stage but it is clear that all the partner councils see this as a means of maintaining services in spite of continuing cuts in government finance. The government clearly feels that our plan is sound and has so far provided £3.8 million worth of funding to help us make the changes required with the prospect of more to come. The partner councils have now agreed to set up an interim management team to progress this work early next year.

I was honoured to contribute to a debate about shared service delivery at the Local Government Association's national conference in July and there was huge interest in the 2020 Vision with many authorities keen to hear about our progress.

Ambulance response times

I am pleased to tell you that I and the local MP met both the Chairman and Chief Executive of the South West Ambulance Trust at the end of June and won their agreement to assign an extra crew to the Cotswolds to counter the poor response times across the district, particularly in the rural areas. South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust has agreed to station the extra 12-hour double crewed ambulance in the north of the district for a three month trial period to see whether it will help reduce response times. This follows figures showing that while the eight minute emergency response target was being met in 65% of cases across Gloucestershire, this dropped to an average of 46% in our district with even lower returns for areas in the north.

Car parking

You may recall that, earlier this year, we set aside £25,000 for incentives to attract more motorists to the Cotswolds during traditionally quiet trading periods. As a result, we have now decided to allow motorists to park for free in Council car parks on Mondays and Tuesday afternoons during January and February 2015. There is always a lull after the busy Christmas period, and I believe that this initiative – on a trial basis – should help to boost trade in our towns. This is yet another example of how we are trying to balance the need for parking income to pay for services with requests from motorists and traders to provide parking concessions on occasions. We are committed to ensuring that motorists using our car parks get a good deal. We have frozen parking charges since 2010 and our tariffs compare favourably with places like Cheltenham and Gloucester. We also recently introduced a half hour tariff in all our car parks where it was previously only available in a few of them. We are also introducing a number of changes with effect from Monday 12 January 2015:

- removal of overnight parking charges (between 6pm and 8am) at the Brewery Car Park, Cirencester;
- introduction of a new off peak 'plus' ticket - allowing parking for both off peak periods and all day on weekends in any car park - at a proposed charge of £50 per year;
- introduction of a £2 all day tariff at the car parks in Old Market Way, Moreton-in-Marsh and West Street, Tetbury (to complement the existing £2 all day offer at the Beeches Car Park, Cirencester.)
- at car parks where Sunday charges apply, a reduction in the charging period (currently 8 am to 6 pm) to the 10am to 4pm period, which better reflects retail activity;

I must also tell you that the Council will be providing free entry to its car parks to tie in with Christmas events at Bourton, Cirencester, Moreton, Stow, and Tetbury. Details are available on the home page of the [CDC website](#)

More strategically, the Cabinet has approved plans for improvements to car parks across the district over a three-year period, starting with the Forum Car Park in Cirencester. Users at the Forum car park will benefit from improved access for vehicles and pedestrians; better layout of spaces and increased number of disabled bays; and an extension of the maximum stay from 3 to 4 hours to encourage shoppers and assist blue badge holders. We've also given the go-ahead to procure and install 29 new solar-powered pay and display machines which will accept credit cards, and this work will get underway across the district soon.

Flood Protection

The Cabinet recently agreed to allocate £250,000 to the Moreton-in-Marsh flood alleviation scheme which will protect about 200 homes in the area. The scheme will be delivered in partnership with Gloucestershire County Council and Moreton Town Council and works could go ahead within the next few months, subject to necessary permissions being obtained and favourable weather conditions. It is gratifying to see how many communities have benefited from flood alleviation works over the last 12-15 months including schemes in Avening, Bledington, Daglingworth, Fairford, Lechlade, North Cerney, South Cerney and Weston sub-Edge.

When serious flooding impacted the district in 2007 some 20 settlements and over 1100 houses were badly affected. The County, District and several Town and Parish Councils have worked with other agencies such as the EA on a programme of alleviation schemes to reduce flood risk across the Cotswolds, including various works in Moreton, the biggest settlement to be affected. The Moreton flood relief project is the most significant in the Cotswolds so far and should hopefully safeguard the homes of many residents against the risk of future flooding.

Property sales

In mid-September the Council sold the vacant Chesterton Suite at auction to a local Baptist church for £500,000. The property was previously used as a social club, and was vacated by its tenants earlier this year after they failed to pay their rent. The Baptist church subsequently applied for a change of use of the building to serve as a church and community facility, and this was approved recently by the Planning Committee. Additionally, in early October we exchanged contracts for the sale of the former lorry park next to the Kingsmeadow roundabout in Cirencester. The purchaser - Whitbread - will develop the site to accommodate a Premier Inn and Beefeater restaurant. This prominent site - adjacent to the A419 and A429 - generated interest from a wide range of companies in the leisure, retail, commercial and residential sectors. Both sales will save money for local council tax payers and Cirencester will also soon have the added bonus of a new church premises for many community uses and a hotel/restaurant complex which will generate employment and encourage more visitors to the town.

Downward trend in unemployment

I mentioned in my last update that unemployment figures for Cotswold district had dipped below pre-recession levels for the first time. The latest figures (for November) show an even better picture – across the district there were only 328 people claiming job seekers allowance, equating to 0.7% of the working population. This is the lowest number and percentage since December 2004. Back at the start of this year 572 people were claiming benefit, representing 1.1% of the working population, so the upturn in the local economy is clear to see, and I was delighted to hear that the sale of the former CDC-owned lorry park to Whitbread (see above) will create approximately 50 more new jobs, around half of which will be offered to those who have been long-term unemployed. Looking ahead, more jobs are in the pipeline following the Council's approval of plans to expand the Cirencester headquarters of the St James Place wealth management company, and the Brewery Court scheme, creating a cinema complex, shops and student accommodation.

The Council's freeze on parking leisure, and green waste costs – and the £1.4 million rate relief for businesses over the next two years – has hopefully helped firms plan ahead with more confidence in the knowledge that we are working hard to avoid any increases in overheads.

Leisure

At an Audit & Scrutiny Committee meeting, members were provided with a review of the leisure centres at Bourton, Cirencester and Chipping Campden plus the Corinium Museum since responsibility for running them was transferred to SLM/Everyone Active about 14 months ago under a 10 year contract. The Committee learned that the transfer has already saved the Council almost £283,000 (which exceeds our savings target) and that visits to the leisure facilities have increased from just over 524,000 before the handover to over 654,500 since. Conversely, there has been a slight decrease in visitor numbers to the Corinium during the same period; the pre-SLM visitor totals were almost 42,900 and the post-SLM totals were about 42,250. SLM's key focus for the future is to increase usage of the museum by schools, local people and visitors to the town. For the leisure centres, they will be developing programmes and activities to engage with the least active people in the community. At all venues they will be ensuring that the facilities are accessible to those with particular special needs. Plans to boost visitor numbers at the Museum focus on an exciting new £1 million project which plans to introduce a Community Discovery project which envisages the complete redesign of the Prehistory, Iron Age and early Roman galleries, enabling the Museum to interpret and display exceptional new finds which are not currently on show. The improvements would also enable the Museum to expand its formal learning programme, especially for primary school students. The Council has agreed to provide financial backing worth £50,000 to support the scheme.

By the way, the latest edition of Cotswold News contains vouchers entitling residents to a free gym session and a free family swim session at any of the SLM Leisure centres and a free child entry for every full paying adult at the Corinium Museum. Offers are valid until the end of March 2015.

Safer communities

Officers from the Council, working with 11 other statutory and voluntary sector organisations, have led a successful bid for £50,0000 worth of grant funding from Gloucestershire's Police and Crime Commissioner to improve safety and wellbeing in the Cotswolds.

This builds on the findings of recent research into loneliness commissioned by the Council, and the Commissioner's funding will support two new older people's groups in Cirencester, run by The Churn Project: one will be for people who are getting used to living alone for the first time, and the other will draw people together on Sundays which, according to the research, is the loneliest day of the week. Cotswold Volunteers and Cotswold Volunteers North will also use some of the funding to work with other community transport providers to better coordinate and seek longer-term funding for convenient, accessible and affordable transport options. This is expected to help reduce loneliness and isolation.

Younger people in the Cotswolds will benefit from the grant too. There is match funding for Cirencester Town Council's Big Music Project – which provides young people with accredited training and skills development – and for extending the District Council's already successful Get Active! project to the northern parts of the Cotswolds. Get Active! reaches out to young people who don't normally take part in sport and provides them with the opportunity to have fun and become more active.

The Churn Project will also make cyber-safety sessions available for parents of pre-school and primary school children in Cirencester. Additionally, dog-owners will be able to get their pets micro-chipped for free and will receive information and advice on responsible dog ownership at special events being held by Cotswold District Council, in advance of new legislation coming into force in 2016.

Recycling

During one week in the summer residents of Cotswold District presented a record amount of organic waste for collection. The Council's waste service provider, Ubico Ltd, reported that the weekly total of green waste they had collected weighed almost 463 tonnes – over 40 tonnes more than the previous highest total. This increase goes hand in hand with the rise in the take-up of our weekly paid-for green waste service. Half of the households in the district now subscribe to the service and the more organic waste we collect the more we are able to send for processing to be converted into compost for farms and gardens. The compost is available for purchase from all Household Recycling Facilities in Gloucestershire – including at Fosse Cross.

While this is very encouraging, we have noted that recycling totals have seen a slight decline overall – figures for 2013-14 showed that just under 60% of all waste. This means that – thanks to you – we are still the best performing council in the county, but the falling totals are a concern, and we are working hard with the Gloucestershire Joint Waste team to develop some new initiatives which will encourage the recycling habit. One of the most striking is a new green community competition which we are launching on 24 November, encouraging groups of people to come together and develop innovative ways to combat waste. Our waste provider Ubico has generously provided £2,000 worth of prize money which will be used to develop the best ideas that come forward.

We are also introducing two new slogans on waste vehicles soon to encourage recycling. They are very simple statements: one congratulates residents on saving the Council about £1.7 million on landfill tax costs every year; the other highlights that we still pay £1.25 million to bury waste, even though a lot of it is recyclable. The most noteworthy initiative to emerge so far is the gRRReen community competition. In line with the 'three R's' (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle), communities are being urged to find new ways to combat waste being sent to landfill. The three best performers will qualify for funding worth a total of £2,000 to finance further improvements. The competition runs until 20 February 2015 and it is not too late to enter – it is open to groups of people of all ages who want to pool ideas and develop initiatives to reduce waste - and also show how their improvements can be sustained. Representatives of any community group can apply by emailing waste@cotswold.gov.uk, phoning 01285 623123, or writing to gRRReen awards competition, Cotswold District Council, Trinity Rd, Cirencester, GL71PX - they will receive an application form and information sheet. On the same theme, keep your eyes open for the following two new slogans on the side of our waste vehicles to encourage the recycling habit:

Don't WASTE your money! The waste in this lorry is all going to landfill. Every year Cotswold District residents pay £1.25 MILLION to bury waste. Don't throw your money away. Recycle more!

Thanks a £MILLION Recycling and composting by Cotswold District residents saves almost £1.7 million on landfill tax costs every year. Thanks for recycling.

Commemorating World War One

A belated thanks to all parishes that took part in the nationwide Lights Out event on 4 August, marking the hour when the country went to war in 1914. In keeping with the national campaign, one light was left burning at the Council offices at Cirencester and Moreton from 10 pm to 11 pm. On the same theme, I am pleased to tell you that Councillors have been working hard to allocate their shares of one-off funding we provided to help finance WW1 commemorations. So far, grants worth a combined total of over £12,000 have been made to a wide variety of activities including: free commemorative books and mugs for

schoolchildren; cleaning and repair of war memorials; a new play about the war; several special church services and a candlelit vigil; printing and mounting of photographs and other display information for exhibitions; publication of information in the form of books and leaflets; memorial benches; memorial plaques; musical activities; commemorative planting; and a notice board.

Review of the Year 2013-14

Each year the Council produces a [review of the year](#) and I am pleased to see that the 2013-14 version has now been published on our CDC website. It's well worth a read as it provides an good summary of our major achievements during that period as we strive to become the most efficient local authority in the country.

Two recent motions in Council

When the Council met on 16 December we agreed the following motions unanimously:

'This Council notes the poor or non-existent mobile phone coverage in many parts of the Cotswold district. It notes that good coverage can help avoid isolation, improve personal security and is good for the local economy. As a result, it requests the Council's Chief Executive Officer to write to the mobile phone companies calling for better coverage and a detailed plan of how it will be improved, with timescales.'

'This Council thanks and congratulates the five Gloucestershire MPs, Gloucestershire County Council, all local councillors, the Local Enterprise Partnership and the thousands of people who signed the petition which helped secure Government funding for the stretch of the A417 around the Air Balloon (the 'Missing Link'), and urges the Government to press ahead as quickly as possible with the work.'

Finally.....

I would like to wish you all a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year.



Cllr Lynden Stowe
Leader, Cotswold District Council